

**Taxidermy in Dutch Natural History Collections;  
Explored through Manuals, Museums and Material 1813-1940**

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**Moed de Vries (6315178)**

**Supervisor: Dr. Fenneke Sysling**

**Second reader: Dr. David Baneke**

**[m.h.devries3@students.uu.nl](mailto:m.h.devries3@students.uu.nl)**

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	5
<i>What we Talk about when we Talk about Taxidermy</i> .....	5
<i>Compact History of Taxidermy</i> .....	6
<i>Compact History of Taxidermy and History of Science</i> .....	9
<i>Manuals</i> .....	11
<i>Museums</i> .....	13
<i>Material</i> .....	17
Chapter 1: Taxidermy in Manuals.....	22
<i>The written conception of the Animal-object</i> .....	22
<i>The works of Slabber, Hubrecht and Temminck</i> .....	24
<i>Conclusions</i> .....	34
Chapter 2: Taxidermy in Museums.....	36
<i>Institutes and Styles of Knowing Nature</i> .....	36
<i>19<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Museums</i> .....	38
<i>Conclusions</i> .....	44
Chapter 3: Taxidermy through its Material.....	46
<i>Stories by the Animal-object</i> .....	46
<i>Taxidermy objects in Dutch collections</i> .....	48
<i>Mafuka</i> .....	48
<i>The Steyl ‘diorama’</i> .....	52
<i>Trophies and/or Specimens</i> .....	58
<i>Conclusions</i> .....	63
Final Remarks.....	65
Further Research.....	67
Primary Sources.....	68
Literature.....	69

## **Abstract**

In this thesis a triptych view of the meaning taxidermy practice and objects hold in Dutch natural history collections (1813-1940) is given by approaching taxidermy from three angles; manuals, museums and its material. Taxidermy in the Netherlands has not been analyzed thoroughly before, and this thesis aims to provide an answer to that. In the first place, taxidermy's complexities are found in writings, institutes and individual objects. It does become clear that taxidermy as a craft becomes inseparable with the science of zoology over the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dutch manuals are analyzed to explore the author's intent, the intellectual context of taxidermy and its colonial connection and they provide signs of taxidermy professionalizing. Furthermore, taxidermy can be used as a powerful tool for portraying an institute's perception of nature. The history of several Dutch museums' collections is held against their ideology and so their style of knowing nature is assessed. Finally, three specific objects/displays are closely 'read', to explore the meaning of taxidermy localized. The narratives that individual objects tell provide interesting insights about the people that made, collected and displayed them that adds depth to their status as biological specimen. Throughout the research the subject is related to articles on representing animals that clarify the role of that part of taxidermy in the theoretical context.

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## Introduction

‘And the line between what is fake and what is real suddenly became very fine. I also had the rather unnerving suspicion that this technique could permanently transform original into copy.’<sup>1</sup>

### *What We Talk About When We Talk About Taxidermy*

When talking about taxidermy we talk about nature, culture, art, craftsmanship, science, animals, humans, death, life, immortality and the act of killing. Taxidermy is an elusive subject; it attracts because it is not understood. What the object one is looking at in a great gallery of a national history museum *is*, is inherently equivocal. Anyone asked ‘what is that?’ when pointing to a taxidermy elephant, will answer intuitively; ‘that is an elephant’. Biologically they would be wrong, the taxidermied animal is not an actual animal. It is an object that represents the animal whose material it consists of, but with the death of the animal nothing will ever *be* that animal again. Of course, a taxidermy elephant looks almost exactly like an elephant, in fact its very existence depends on its verisimilitude. The meaning of the taxidermy object is contained in the way it was made, who made it, why it was made and in what way. It is also held by its surroundings; the institutions that acquired it, where it is placed and in what ‘style’ of knowing nature it is placed. Lastly, its meaning is held, naturally, in itself. The object’s narrative is formed by its ‘journey’, its materiality and the people that touched it, both literally and figuratively.

This research will focus on the taxidermy object in Dutch natural history collections. It aims to explore the fabrication of the animal-object, its place in the natural history collections and how its status as knowledge-holding and -representing object is established. It also explores how the natural is represented by the object, through exploration of the craft of taxidermy and analysis of the positioning of the object. This research aims to unravel the many knowledge-layers and paradoxes the taxidermy natural history object consists of. It will travel from hand to eye in the approach of the taxidermy-object, that is, from its conception to its display. This travel will start at the instructions of the craft of taxidermy, through the intellectual and physical environments of the institutes that exhibited taxidermy and end at the animal-object localized. The main question that will be considered is ‘how is the meaning of the taxidermy animal-object in Dutch natural history collections shaped from 1813-1940?’. This will be answered through three chapters, corresponding to three categories for exploring taxidermy.

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2007 novel ‘Flights’ by Olga Tokarczuk, 2017 translation by Jennifer Croft, 407-408.

The first chapter is that on written text on taxidermy in the Netherlands; manuals. These manuals hold instructions on the making of taxidermy, and often detail much more information, for example the finding and storing of specimen, but also the way the author approaches 'the animal' and motives for collecting. The second chapter will be on the environment of the taxidermy objects; the physical natural history museum. These institutes place, collect or acquire the taxidermy object in a certain way, with a certain ideology. They all use the animal-object to be a part of nature, but it is not one and the same nature that is assumed by all. Institutes from different background, different times or places see and use nature differently, these 'styles of knowing nature' influence the meaning and identity of the taxidermy object. Finally, the third chapter will explore individual objects or displays, their individual histories and contained meaning. Looking at localized objects will give a unique perspective on the ambiguity of taxidermy objects. Filled with paradoxes and complexity, the object-narratives add a valuable layer to the meaning of a taxidermy-object in Dutch natural history collections. Together these chapters will give a multi-facetted view on the meaning of taxidermy in the Netherlands, the approach from the three angles together provide a completer picture than has thus far been sketched for Dutch taxidermy.

Throughout the research only taxidermy in natural history collections will be considered, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and exhibited in public museums. That means that they have a level of public access and mainly show animal-objects in displays. The period researched is 1813-1940 so that the research is after the French era, after the premodern period and before decolonization and World War Two, so animals from overseas countries are considered 'exotic' as are the countries they are from. Furthermore, after World War Two, taxidermy 'went spectacularly out of fashion', and was found unsuited for educational purposes in European museums<sup>2</sup>. There is a considerable body of literature on taxidermy, its 'matter and meaning' and history, but barely anything has been written on Dutch taxidermy<sup>3</sup>. The period is also relevant for linguistic reasons; from this time practically all publications written for the Netherlands are in Dutch. Finally, over the course of this research taxidermy is, unless indicated otherwise, considered to be 'The art of preparing, stuffing, and mounting the skins of animals with lifelike effect<sup>4</sup>', so study-skins especially, but also household decorations, furs, etcetera are not considered taxidermy.

Before going more in-depth on the relevant theories for exploring identity and meaning of taxidermy in the consecutive chapter-areas (manuals, museums and material), a short overview of the history of taxidermy and its role in the history of science will be given below, so the research can be appreciated appropriately and in historical context.

### *A Compact History of Taxidermy*

With the word 'taxidermy' meaning literally arrangement of skin (from the Greek 'taxis', to arrange, and 'derma', skin), its interpretation can be quite broad. Prehistoric skin-processing for protection

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<sup>2</sup> Morris, *History of Taxidermy*, 353, on going out of fashion and Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 78-79 on use of taxidermy in European Museums.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Poliquin, R. (2012). *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Vol. 1). Penn State Press, Alberti, S. J. (Ed.). (2011). *The afterlives of animals: a museum menagerie*. University of Virginia Press or Morris, Patrick A. *A history of taxidermy: art, science and bad taste*. MPM Pub., 2010. The term 'matter and meaning' is borrowed from Poliquin, *the matter and meaning of museum taxidermy*.

<sup>4</sup> Definition by the Oxford English Dictionary, retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/taxidermy> on 02-07-2019.

against cold, ancient Egyptian mummification, and parchment production could all be seen as skin-arrangement. However, for naturalistic purposes taxidermy is interpreted as attempting a life-like (re-)presentation of the animal. In addition to the definition mentioned above, authors on taxidermy emphasize that three elements are necessary when talking about taxidermy (that are included in the definition); 1. That the skin of the animal is preserved, 2. That there is some 'stuffing' inserted, 3. The animal is mounted, posed, in a lifelike form<sup>5</sup>.

Humans have been able to prepare skins for practical use since long before any instructions for taxidermy were recorded. The first published instruction that come close to modern taxidermy stem from 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany, where Emperor Friedrich II recorded ways to prepare crane-wings as lures for the purpose of training falcons for the sport of falconry.<sup>6</sup> Three hundred years later, taxidermy instructions from Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) and other authors of renaissance natural history publications followed, and by now we can speak of 'real' taxidermy, that is: whole animals that are being prepared to look lifelike. However, these instructions were not the main message in the publications by these famous authors. The books were usually devoted to hunting or natural history<sup>7</sup>. Another important factor to consider here is that these 17<sup>th</sup> century techniques do not suffice in preserving the specimen for an extended period of time; they did not adequately protect against insects or other forms of decay and from the many curiosity cabinets of the early modern period close to none taxidermy objects survived<sup>8</sup>. Oliver Davie, a 19<sup>th</sup> century author of 'Methods in the Art of Taxidermy', mentions that 'the Hollanders' allegedly made the first attempts towards the stuffing birds, with the species they brought home from the East-Indian colonies in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. Although they don't provide concrete evidence, Davie and his contemporary, Browne, both conclude that the art of taxidermy can't be more than 300 years old, and serious attempts began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Before the 1700s very few preservation instructions existed in printed form, besides from those in the appendices of early modern natural history encyclopedias. With the great rise in expeditions and journeys to distant regions of the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, preparation guidelines became increasingly necessary and sought after. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a body of literature on taxidermy practices was established. Among the earliest publications on taxidermy are treatises by James Petiver (1665–1718) in 1698, René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (1638-1757) in 1748, and Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in 1753<sup>10</sup>. In these 18<sup>th</sup> century pioneering works, emphasis lies on getting exotic specimen to Europe intact. So that the writers of these treatises, or users of the treatises, can use them in their naturalists' practices and include them in their collections or scientific work.

Since these works some great advances in taxidermy were made, including (but not limited to) the use of arsenical soap in the preservation of skin, the use of alcoholic solutions to preserve specimen in glass bottles with stoppers and the use of wire of solid frames for the presentation of the animal

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, *A History of Taxidermy*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Schulze-Hagen et al., *Avian Taxidermy in Europe*, 459.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, 461.

<sup>8</sup> In his extensive work on the history of taxidermy, Pat Morris lists several exceptions to this rule, for more information on the eldest surviving pieces of taxidermy see Morris, *A History of Taxidermy*, 14-24.

<sup>9</sup> Davie, *Methods of Taxidermy*, ii. This is repeated in Montagu Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Modelling*. Earlier Taxidermy manuals make no mention of this history.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 473.

in a natural habitat or natural pose<sup>11</sup>. After these early treatises, many manuals or other instruction-books appeared on the subject of taxidermy. Famous ones included those authored by Montagu Browne<sup>12</sup>, who in turn relied on Thomas Brown<sup>13</sup>. Paul Farber has written on the development on the technique, as he elaborates on the various naturalists who succeed each other in terms of progress in taxidermy. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many great collections of zoological specimens were plagued by pests, flesh-eating insects that caused serious decay of these collections<sup>14</sup>. The technique so developed moved from the most common practices around 1750 of removing a specimen's skin and stuffing with a soft substance, towards its alternative of transporting the skin in strong brandy, another option of embalming the bird. Its final move was an alternative on embalming, skinning and drying in an oven to more advanced techniques<sup>15</sup>. This was quite necessary, since the techniques mentioned above still had considerable flaws, and risks of decay. The advancements constituted of a focus from transportation to maintaining a collection<sup>16</sup>, and the use of a variety of varnishes and potions to protect the specimen from pests. The exact composition of these compounds was a matter of great debate among 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalists, but was finally resolved around 1830 as consensus arose that arsenical soap was the best preservative against insect attacks on the skin<sup>17</sup>. Farber concludes that since then, naturalists no longer considered taxidermy a problem, but instead considered it a technique.

With the technique established, a difference between 'regular' taxidermy and museum taxidermy should be noted. Louis Dufresne coined the term 'taxidermie' in 1803-1804, and with this a clear separation from 'stuffing' animals was made<sup>18</sup>. Stuffed animals have been described as part of a different discourse than 'taxidermy', but it will be argued that in the Netherlands this differentiation was not so clear cut. The 'lifelike essence of natural history taxidermy' can be considered as part of the language of the natural history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas stuffing was considered to be a craft in service of hunters and collectors. Realism was 'the essential aesthetic representational force' of museum taxidermy<sup>19</sup>. The preserved animals in Renaissance Wunderkammers are all decayed today, and judging by the prints of these collections, they were a lot less realistic than 19<sup>th</sup> century (and later) taxidermy<sup>20</sup>. The history of the technique, summarized above, resulted in naturally realistic taxidermy that was suitable to serve taxonomic purposes. The fact that these specimens survived for a considerable time also provided the space for their 'afterlives', the lives the animal as an object would live and which provide rich discourses<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Pequignot, *History of Taxidermy*.

<sup>12</sup> Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *The Taxidermist's Manual*.

<sup>14</sup> There even exists a beetle called 'Anthrenus Museum', named after its presence in museum because it feeds on hair and skin primarily. Interestingly, in present day taxidermy flesh-eating beetles are utilized to clean skeletons of flesh and make them suited for further taxidermic mounting, Asma, *Animals and Heads*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Farber, *development of taxidermy*, 552-553.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, 555.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 561.

<sup>18</sup> Dufresne, *Nouveau Dictionnaire d'Histoire Naturelle*.

<sup>19</sup> Aloj, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 52-53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 58-59. For examples of prints see for example the frontispieces of Francesco Calzolari's (1522-1609) museum or Ole Worm's museum (1588-1654).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 'afterlives' used as suggested by Alberti, *The afterlives of animals: a museum menagerie* (2011).



### *A Compact History of Taxidermy in History of Science*

Taxidermy has played a crucial role in the establishing of taxonomical (zoological) knowledge, and has been of special importance where the to-be-classified species did not naturally occur in Europe<sup>22</sup>. The development of the technique of taxidermy is concisely described by Farber in his article on the role of taxidermy in ornithology<sup>23</sup>. He locates the development of this technique primarily in France. As we've discussed above the transport preservation of specimen was a necessary condition to transport exotic specimen from their natural habitat to the naturalists' institutions, and so to build collections of natural history that would provide and sustain knowledge. In the creation of knowledge taxidermy had an important consequence to the scientific field of ornithology.

Farber describes its significance in threefold, he applies it on the field of ornithology, but it can be argued that in the same senses the role of taxidermy on natural knowledge can be described. After all, not only birds needed preparation to be studies; mammals, reptiles and amphibians did too. First of all, satisfactory taxidermy enabled large, and more importantly, stable, collections of ornithological specimens. These collections where, more often than not, the sites of ornithological research and here pioneering work in manner of classification of bird species was done. An interesting side note to the classification trend that developed with the increase of collections, is the attention paid to geographical distribution of species, and comparative ornithology was in this way of importance in formulating theories of natural evolution. As Farber puts it, 'given a large stable collection, it was possible to examine specimens with an eye toward geographic variation and begin to search for regularities of geographical distribution', taxidermy indirectly influenced major scientific theories<sup>24</sup>.

A second significance of the satisfactory taxidermy of the first half of the nineteenth century is that it changed the style of ornithological writing; 'Increasingly ornithologists, who had the benefit of immense collections to work with, turned their attention to detailed studies of particular groups of birds. The writing of monographs requires the meticulous comparison of thousands of specimens often from distant areas. Unless these specimens can be maintained in a satisfactory state, the task becomes overwhelming. It is inconceivable that the monographs that proliferated during the last century could have been written without the aid of stable and sizable collections<sup>25</sup>.' These monographs were important to objectivity, as they often contained illustrations that would be used as comparison for other scientists. Many monographs contained now famous illustration, like those of John James Audubon<sup>26</sup>. With the rise of more affordable imaging techniques like lithography, illustrations like these were used in scientific journals. Taxidermy influenced this because these illustrations could not be made relying just on freshly killed or living animals, the art of taxidermy was essential<sup>27</sup>. Again, it is easily conceived how this significance of taxidermy was similar in zoology. Lastly, the efficient methods of taxidermy had an influence on the development of the type-specimen in ornithology. The need to standardize methods to order 'the ever-growing empirical

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<sup>22</sup> Farber, *development of taxidermy*, 562.

<sup>23</sup> Farber, *development of taxidermy*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 564.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the relation of Audubon's illustration and objectivity see Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 79. For his illustration see John James Audubon's *Birds of America* 1843.

<sup>27</sup> Farber, *Development of Taxidermy*, 565.

base of information' the ornithological collections provided, led to the notion of the type-specimen, the specimen that would be used as a 'measure' for other specimens assumed to be of that species, to assess whether they belong that species or not.

In ornithology the notion of the type-specimen became the ultimate arbitrator in determining a species over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, quite comparable with those type-specimen found in botany<sup>28</sup>. But as Farber notes, it is important that the very notion of a type-specimen requests the existence of a stable, readily accessible collection<sup>29</sup>. Of course, in order to appoint a type-specimen great taxonomical and natural knowledge was needed, this corresponds to the 'seeing the typical' that Daston and Galison discuss in their monumental work on the history of scientific objectivity<sup>30</sup>. The appointed type also became a measure by which other knowledge was tested, providing a sort of objectivity<sup>31</sup>. A natural object is classified by another natural object. The judgments concerning similarities are still made by human eyes, but comparing one natural object to another is still closer to nature than comparing one natural object with an illustration of a type-specimen. Truth-to-nature, the type of objectivity that aims to extract a scientific truth from observing nature, thus becomes literal; natural specimens were judged by their natural type-specimen.

Another significant consideration taxidermy places onto the history of science is that of the craft-science separation or duality. This is exemplary for the ambiguous position of taxidermy in the history of science. Taxidermy, a craft with clear signs of 'truth-to-nature' objectivity, as the taxidermist needs knowledge of a specimen's behaviour, to give it a natural attitude<sup>32</sup>, is also a precondition for the creation of naturally realistic illustrations. The taxidermist is so suited in between the illustrator, Daston and Galison's draftsmen, and the naturalist. In the nineteenth-century, when mechanical-objectivity was on the rise with the technique of photography, an author of a taxidermy manual argued that 'one thing is abundantly plain: that taxidermists and also curators are of 'no account' unless they realize form and lines of beauty, and have a good anatomical grounding and considerable aptitude. Colour, of course, is of high importance, but colour-sense is of no avail without sense of form, and this ignorance of the first principle in art is painfully evidenced every day.<sup>33</sup>' This seems paradoxical considering the taboo that subjectivity was among scientists, as Verity Darke argues in her paper on the nineteenth-century body-object<sup>34</sup>: 'But as Daston and Galison have argued, 'the public personas of artist and scientist polarized' after the 1860s, with artists encouraged to express their subjectivity while 'scientists were admonished to restrain theirs'.

Taxidermy manuals like Browne's *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy* problematize the abovementioned distinction between craft and science, objectivity and subjectivity, scientificness and artisanship. Specifically, since the constructed, interpreted, artistic works that are taxidermy-objects were heavily relied on by scientists<sup>35</sup>. This awkward dependency is further emphasized in the manual's title; *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy*. As Darke states 'The manifestation of authorial

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<sup>28</sup> Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Farber, *Development of Taxidermy*, 565.

<sup>30</sup> Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>32</sup> Farber, *development of taxidermy*, 555.

<sup>33</sup> Browne, *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Darke, *Nineteenth-century Body-Object*, 14-15

<sup>35</sup> Darke, *Nineteenth-century Body-Object*, 14.

intent in both taxidermy text and taxidermy object suggests the role of the taxidermist in mediating the information we can draw from the animal body, fracturing any single gaze on nature and framing our interpretation of physical and narrative form<sup>36</sup>.', this influence on the transfer of information from the animal body is especially important for the history of science. Manuals on taxidermy are technological, if not scientific, works in themselves. Darke analyses the manual of Browne in this way; she finds that he places his own work on the subject within the broader technological literature on taxidermy, within this body of work he anatomizes the information these texts contain. Darke calls his work an 'almost paleontological process of reconstruction', as he from these texts creates a completer, more 'whole' work of literature on taxidermy. He builds it up from the fragments that are the available material on taxidermy, not unlike the act of taxidermy does with an animal body. The body here being the body of literature on taxidermy<sup>37</sup>. Here it is important to differentiate between the body of literature and the physical bodies of animals. When speaking of bodies of knowledge on this subject the linguistics can get complicated, but it is interesting that the works on taxidermy in themselves provide narratives, and thus a kind of subjectivity. Darke points out that the way Browne's conveys his message, in a conversational, informal tone seems to agree with his own subjectivity. Browne states that the taxidermists must closely observe nature, be true to it, but he himself is human and is limited by his ability and influenced by his 'opinion', that stem from his extensive experience in the craft<sup>38</sup>.

Another implication of the 'objective' illustrations by ornithologists is that their image of 'the' animal was often a mixture of several, if not hundreds, individuals of that species. This entailed an ultimate specimen that in fact did not exist<sup>39</sup>. Contradictory like the objective type produced through subjectivity is the singular-plural status the taxidermy animal holds. An animal appointed as the type specimen for the species becomes representational for that entire species—*embodies* that entire species. This singular, individual specimen thus becomes manifold. It loses that individuality, instead of 'an elephant', it becomes 'African elephant- *Loxodonta Africana*'.

Taxidermy has an inherently scientific foundation. As the significance of taxidermy to science was, so too is the status of taxidermy manifold. The act of taxidermy is something that has been studied and improved, as has the literature on it, in is that way a scientific-technological field. On the other hand, it is a craft in support of other knowledge-fields, rendering it a technique. Taxidermy also is always artistic, the human hand creates it while interpreting how it is natural, thus it holds a unique place between objectivity and subjectivity.

*Manuals; written instructions, practice and craft.*

As with any subject that lives in human culture, it is not possible to cleanly separate the whole of taxidermy into parts. Some relevant information on the textual sources on taxidermy have been treated above through the research of Verity Darke, and other relevant theories will follow below. Manuals of taxidermy have been significant in its history and its significance to history of science, as seen above. On the Dutch practices of taxidermy in natural history collections, very little is written.

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<sup>36</sup> Darke, *Nineteenth-century Body-Object*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Aloj, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 73.

In fact, there were barely any academic publications until a recent article by Marieke Hendriksen, who describes the use and status of taxidermy in the Stadtholderly cabinet in the early modern period<sup>40</sup>. As Farber argues, Hendriksen too states that since the first major publications on taxidermy, no significant changes occurred in the technique. This introduction will give an overview of the developments in taxidermy in written instructions towards 1800, and the 'Manuals' chapter will discuss the publications and advancements in taxidermy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and after in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the status of the technique, its relation to the animal-object and the status of the taxidermist will be discussed in chapter one.

Hendriksen argues that despite the rise of publications on taxidermy in the second half of the eighteenth century, the practice is then by no means perfected<sup>41</sup>. In fact, very few taxidermied specimen from this time survived. When discussing publications in the Dutch language, Hendriksen describes a manuscript by Arnout Vosmaer (1720-1799), an 18<sup>th</sup> century collector residing in Amsterdam. He wrote this manuscript to instruct travelers to 'exotic lands' in the preparation of specimens to take home, and this may have well been one of the first texts like this in Dutch. Sadly, it was never published, and Hendriksen's research concludes that it also was not quite up to date with contemporary taxidermy technology, as the description of the Stadholder's specimens suggest<sup>42</sup>. As adequate preservation techniques and publication on these techniques became increasingly necessary with the rise of overseas travel and specific missions out of interest in natural history, taxidermy is fundamentally connected to colonialism. Often taxidermy manuals refer literally to 'the colonies' as a source for colourful specimen to be prepared, and as the site of preparation. The assumption of possession of this 'exotic' nature by the Dutch (or other Western people) has a colonial character, as taxidermy specimens were considered as 'the still and silent token of the marvelous life-forms inhabiting faraway lands'<sup>43</sup>.

Vosmaer describes the use of some techniques that are deemed problematic, like drying the specimen, which causes shrinkage and thus complicates natural representation of the animal<sup>44</sup>. Despite his wanting taxidermic qualities, Vosmaer built an impressive collection. Through his connections he became keeper of the Stadtholderly cabinet in 1754, and added to it his own collection of about fifteen thousand specimens<sup>45</sup>. The animals that died in the menagerie that was part of the Stadtholder's collections, were stuffed and added to the dead collection. Hendriksen's research indicates that 'although he understood the basics and appreciated the skills required to make a successful specimen, he did not do the taxidermizing himself'<sup>46</sup>.

After Vosmaer all Dutch taxidermy literature stems from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that will in chapter one be discussed together for the first time. Studying, analyzing and exploring these manuals gives a new, unique perspective on taxidermy in the Netherlands. These manuals contain the transmission of expert-craft knowledge, in a little-spoken language, which makes this information specific for the Netherlands. It is a valuable source on the particularities of this scientific craft, as many of the professional knowledge was presumably transferred orally, in a guild-structure, so this our only source for learning the about the skill in the time-period<sup>47</sup>. While being very valuable, this does give

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<sup>40</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*.

<sup>41</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1112.

<sup>42</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1115.

<sup>43</sup> Aloj, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Stuffing would then lead, of course, to a much smaller object than the animal would have been.

<sup>45</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1116.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, 1117.

<sup>47</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum*, Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies* and Patchett, *Taxidermist's apprentice*

the obligation to emphasize how much of a hands-on practice taxidermy is, this is expertly described by authors like Petra Kalshoven and Merle Patchett<sup>48</sup>. They describe elaborately the skill, expertise and *touch* that is needed to make a successful work of taxidermy. These findings undermine the use of the manuals, since they make it so clear that it can't be sufficiently learned without hands-on experience. However, for travel overseas the manuals were the best one could get when the traveler was not trained in taxidermy. As stated before, the manuals were often printed for this purpose explicitly, but not always. Another thing to consider is that self-taught taxidermists were trained through their own experience, but found support and useful considerations in the taxidermy literature when they were collecting in foreign countries.

The size of the manuals is relevant here too, as they were often small and thus suitable for travel to 'exotic' lands. More explicit is often the reference to the colonies in the titles of the manuals, as we will see in chapter one. Elaine Ayers, a scholar on natural history manuals suggests that these booklets, collecting all natural 'data' from a nation's colonies can be seen as 'imperial science'. Growing public museums, gardens, zoos and libraries would then exhibit the findings from these new faraway places<sup>49</sup>.

By studying the Dutch taxidermy manuals this research aims to unravel the intent of the author and taxidermist when making taxidermy, their concept of the animal and nature, their concept of the 'exotic' origins of some specimens, the 'scientificness' of the taxidermist's endeavors, the level of professionalization of taxidermy and the general attitude towards taxidermy.

#### *Museums; collections, ideologies and surroundings of taxidermy.*

'The museum' is a substantial subject in the history of science, and much has been written on its origin, meaning and epistemology<sup>50</sup>. For the sake of this research, the public natural history collections in 19<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands that were open to the public and had some sort of governance are considered museums of natural history. The starting-point of natural history collections is hard to pinpoint, but it can be established that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the 'exotic' elements achieved a 'more and more prominent place in Dutch collections'<sup>51</sup>. This was thanks to the rise of international trade the Dutch had with many countries in the eastern and western worlds, and it was of course exactly this sea-travel that made some sort of preservation for natural history specimens necessary. A famous example of a great 17<sup>th</sup> century collection is that of count Johan Maurits (1623-1679), who collected many specimens in Brazil alongside ethnographic objects. Other famous early collections are that of Paludanus, at Enkhuizen, Albertus Seba, and Frederick Ruysch in Amsterdam<sup>52</sup>. Collections like these were essential to the emergence of taxidermy, places where the animal was objectified by the viewer's gaze<sup>53</sup>. In a mid-eighteenth-century publication on natural history in

<sup>48</sup> Patchett, *The Taxidermist's Apprentice* and Kalshoven, *Gestures of Taxidermy*.

<sup>49</sup> Ayers, *A Few Plain Instructions*, online scientific blog. Retrieved 24-10-2019.

<sup>50</sup> See for example MacGregor, Arthur Grant, and Oliver Richard Impey, eds. *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Europe*; Ed. by Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor. Clarendon Press, 1987 or Jardine, Nicholas, James A. Secord, and Emma C. Spary, eds. *Cultures of natural history*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, or Asma, Stephen T. *Stuffed animals & pickled heads: The culture and evolution of natural history museums*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Impey and MacGregor, *Origin of Museums*, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Impey and MacGregor, *Origins of Museums*, 119.

<sup>53</sup> Aloj, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 92-93.

Holland, Johannes le Francq van Berkhey remarks that there are so many natural history cabinets in the Netherlands, that you can find almost no city or town without cabinets of (amateur) collectors<sup>54</sup>.

Another indispensable publication when writing on Dutch Natural History is Hendrik Engel's 'Alphabetical List of Dutch Zoological Cabinets and Menageries'<sup>55</sup>. He asserts that there were at least 1700 individual natural history collections, and with this work it can be concluded that in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cabinets of this kind bloomed and became abundant in the Low Countries. The end of 18<sup>th</sup> century also showed a start of university and societal collections; scientific societies started their cabinets but there was no national institute that displayed a natural history collection. L.B. Holthuis, author of the history of the Dutch national natural history museum, ascribes this to the lack of national sentiment that is caused by the several provincial governments acting quite autonomous. He goes on to describe the disastrous consequences of the French period for the status of the Dutch natural history collection<sup>56</sup>. Finally, as a silver lining, after this French period there is a national collection established, which will be the starting point for the *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*<sup>57</sup>. Generally, the industrial revolution changing the distance between city and countryside, causes a rise in the popularity of natural history museums and zoos. Here could industrial workers encounter the natural world without leaving the city<sup>58</sup>. One of the earliest Dutch Natural History museum was this *Rijksmuseum* founded in 1820, which is still the national history museum, today known as Naturalis. This museum's history predates its establishments, as in it reside collections dating back to the Netherlands's early modern cabinets, e.g. that of the Stadtholder. In his history of the *Rijksmuseum*, L.B. Holthuis ascribes the richness of these cabinets to the Dutch's fleet sailing all the seas of the world and taking home not only merchandise, but also naturalia and collectibles<sup>59</sup>.

The character of the natural history collections moved from, very roughly, from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Wunderkammern or curiosity cabinets, that revered the 'book of nature', a way in which studying nature was studying God<sup>60</sup>. From here they moved into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where more and more enlightenment-scientific societies formed their own collections, and with great impetus from the publication of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* in 1735, natural history collections became more taxonomic, if not scientific towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>61</sup>. From this point on science, and subsequently natural history collections, started to professionalize. Being a scientist became a profession, and science came to be linked to official institutes. This was also the time that public collections started to arise, as before 1800 there were only two public collections in the Netherlands<sup>62</sup>.

Technically organization of spaces changed too in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this is described aptly by Hooper-Greenhill in her book 'Museums and the shaping of knowledge, relying on Foucault she states:

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<sup>54</sup> Berkhey, *Natuurlyke historie van Holland*, 1. Retrieved from dbnl:

[https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/fran011natu01\\_01/](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/fran011natu01_01/) on 22-07-2019. Freely translated from Dutch: 'dat ons Holland een magazyn van zeldzaamheden, byzonder van uitheemsche voortbrengzels der Natuure is geworden. Geen Stad, geen Dorp byna is 'er, of men vind 'er kabinetten, of naspeurende liefhebberen.'

<sup>55</sup> Engel, *Alphabetical list*.

<sup>56</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 9. Now 'Naturalis'.

<sup>58</sup> Aloj, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> This is thoroughly described by Erik Jorink in his 'Het 'boeck der natuere': nederlandse geleerden en de wonderen van Gods Schepping, 1575-1715'.

<sup>61</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 138.

<sup>62</sup> Sliggers, *Verdwenen Museum*, 8.

‘Through the organization of ‘cells’, ‘places’, and ‘ranks’, the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional, and hierarchical. Spaces fix positions and permit circulations; they mark places and assign values. They individualize things and individuals in a vast table of discrimination and distinction. The division of spaces and bodies entailed the establishment of records: day-books, ledgers, inventories, filing cabinets, and archives, were all required to document the spatial distribution of bodies and things. Thus, in the eighteenth century, the classificatory table became both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge.<sup>63</sup> These organizations are directly applicable to the physical and intellectual space of a natural history museums, and can be placed next to the intellectual organization of the knowledge of nature that has been systematized by Linnaeus. With its objects placed within impressive rows of cabinets, ordered by species, a museum gives a very formal impression, it is a monument to natural science. But scientific or ‘orderedness’ is not the only impression prepared natural specimen give us humans. Wonder was, and still is, the first thing people experience upon seeing a taxidermy objects for the vast majority of spectators. The extent of the dominance of wonder over the other possible impressions a natural history collection gives us, is influenced by the spatial organization of the collection. This is of course known to museum curators, and how the collection is displayed is often a conscious choice, depending on the representation of the animal the museum curators want to highlight; its scientificness, naturalness, rarity, or other characteristics of the collection or object. This is one of the ways the intellectual space of the museum influences the representation, physical space and meaning of the collection. Another way the museum can ‘do’ that is through its history, how the museum was established and what ideas lied at the basis of this establishing. Where the collection comes from carries meaning, this meaning accumulates and stays with the collection or object through its existence.

True to its origin, taxidermy is still a major component of natural history museums (collections) around the world. Stephen Asma mentions in his study on museums that as he ‘eventually came to explore more and more collections, I began to see that the real stories were to be found in the diversity of representational acts, particularly when analysed historically. I was increasingly drawn to discover the variety of ways that representational objects could be constructed and could communicate conceptual information and emotional experiences. There is no grand unifying theory of all collecting activity.<sup>64</sup> Neither is there a grand theory of taxidermy, as it eludes definition, and can only be properly analysed in context located in time and space. For example, Asma notes that in modern day museums the collections convey a message of caution towards human’s greedy attitude towards the earth, and the consequential extinction of species. This ‘narrative’ would not hold in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century taxidermic objects, where this ecological threat would not have been present. The products of the craft were irreplaceable in the development of natural knowledge, and for the production of convincing taxidermy natural knowledge was a requirement as well.

With the public role that these collections, spaces and objects perform, a representational role is an unavoidable consequence. At first face, they represent nature, directly, and were meant to do this, initially anyway. Indirectly however, these collections, the spaces they occupy and their arrangement, represent the way nature was perceived or *constructed* by their creators, and with the

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<sup>63</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1992. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=170020>. Quote in quote: (Foucault, 1982b:281).

<sup>64</sup> Asma, *Animals and Heads*, 14.

perceiving of nature, also the perceiving of culture and man's role in it. With this in mind, examination of the collections from a historical viewpoint can bring interesting insights to the states and views on man, 'pure' nature, the wild, and many related concepts in their time. The (almost exclusively) men that comprised the collections<sup>65</sup>, shot the animals and prepared them were in every step of the way reaffirming their concept of self and nature. A fascinating example of this is described by Donna Haraway in her landmark essay 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy'. In this essay Haraway sheds light on the many complexities involved in the nature-making and/or self-making that is the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist. She follows the widely acclaimed taxidermist and curator Carl Akeley in his trip to Africa, where he wants to collect specimen for the Natural History Museum in New York City. In her essay on his life and philosophy she explores a few themes. One of these is the notion that to achieve 'manhood', in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America you have to risk your life and/or kill. Other themes that are important to Haraway (in no particular order): the erasure of (black) authorship in science, the narrative of white manhood in naturalist's work, representing with and without killing, interwovenness of nature, art and science. In her work we find a great example of how to approach cultural history in 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in this thesis her meditations will be greatly appreciated and built on.

This idea of nature being represented as something closely related to conceptions about (human) masculinity is supported by Sally Kohlstedt, who describes American natural history museums and their diorama displays showing a skewed image of nature; towards the 'male' narrative. She states that 'professional taxidermists, almost exclusively men, viewed and presented their fieldwork and even zoological preparations as enterprises requiring vigor, strength, and courage.', and goes on to conclude that 'taxidermists thus directed their audiences' gaze to the large and powerful male mammals, heightening the masculine strength of their captors<sup>66</sup>'. This is especially true when the taxidermists were also the hunters, but it is not a given that this always the case, as it often is not in Dutch national history museums that don't display grand dioramas. This lack of dioramas can also be found in German natural history museum, on which scholar Lynn Nyhart finds that they were hesitant in adopting this display strategy in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its lack of 'scientificness', she states that museum curators found these diorama's displays to be oppositional to scientific organization, that would be more classificatory<sup>67</sup>.

What is widely applicable, is Kohlstedt's observation that 'the men who organized and filled the museums projected their experience into exhibits, thus making personal virtues into public norms of masculine behavior.<sup>68</sup>' A case study conducted by Rebecca Machin in the Manchester museum confirmed that many of the displayed specimen in the museum were male, she finds that 'Of the

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<sup>65</sup>Two notable exceptions to this fact are one of the early (co-)authors on a taxidermy manual, Mrs. Lee or Sarah Bowdich Lee (1791-1856), naturalist author and author of a Taxidermy manual in 1857. Another exception is Martha Maxwell (1831-1881), whose private museum and dioramas allegedly influenced later taxidermist like Hornaday and Akeley (Marbury, 2014). For more on Maxwell, see Benson, Maxine (1986). Martha Maxwell, Rocky Mountain naturalist. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. For more on Mrs. Lee see Beaver, Donald de B. "Writing natural history for survival—1820–1856: The case of Sarah Bowdich, later Sarah Lee." *Archives of natural history* 26.1 (1999): 19-31.

<sup>66</sup> Kohlstedt, *Nature by Design*, 129. In Shteir and Lightman., *Figuring It Out. Science, Gender and Visual Culture*.

<sup>67</sup> Nyhart, *Modern Nature*, 38. In fact, Sweden is seen as the only continental European country that embraced the diorama natural habitat display, it are largely British and North American museums that display nature in this dramatic manner. For more on these displays see Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Kohlstedt, *Nature by Design*, 131. In Shteir and Lightman, *Figuring It Out. Science, Gender and Visual Culture*. This observation is further supported by the wonderful book on Dioramas by Karen Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, in which she explores the complexities of Swedish and American natural history habitat dioramas.



specimens displayed on the mammal gallery, 71% were male and 29% female. In the bird gallery, the distribution was slightly more balanced, with 66% male specimens and 34% female.<sup>69</sup> There is much more to interpret when discussing gender representation in natural history museums, but results this skewed are telling of a persisting male dominance in natural history collections. A case-study like this can unfortunately only be done in with very meticulous records of the 19<sup>th</sup> century museums, or in a contemporary museum, and for these reasons this will not be done in this research. It is interesting to keep in mind the bias of the animal-objects in display, and telling that is persists until today.

When approaching taxidermy through its surroundings; museums, there is a lot to consider. As we've seen above, among those considerations are the physical organization of the surroundings, the interpretation of poses, the actual statistics of specimens in a natural history museum and many other factors. In chapter 2, mainly the intellectual space will be considered, as in many of the Dutch museums the physical space has changed significantly over the years and was thus difficult to research. Where possible the buildings and impressions the museum environments give will be considered. The interpretation of nature, and the meaning this interpretation presses on taxidermy, is different for each institute, taxidermist and collector. This meaning will thus be analyzed through certain categories, in this research dubbed 'styles of knowing nature'. These different styles can be scientific, religious, educational, colonial, nationalistic, edifying, private/amateur styles, and are not mutually exclusive. The museums treated will be the Scientific Society of Zeeland's museum, the National Natural History Museum, the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam/Amsterdam Zoo, the Mission's museum at Steyl and the Natural History Museum 'Natura Docet' at Denekamp. These museums have been chosen because they have been established at different times and at different places, and stem from different intellectual considerations. In this way, they can offer a broad, diverse view on the influences a museum can have on the meaning of their collection. What determines these styles is alluded to above, and can be the formal organization of the museum, the history of the museum and the person beliefs of the museum's director or curator. In chapter two these will be discussed for several Dutch natural history museums and so what taxidermy's meaning and identity contains in these specific institutes.

*Material; individuality, identity and narrative of an (animal-)object.*

In this last chapter an in-depth look at the meaning and identity of taxidermy will be taken by exploring the stories of individual taxidermy objects or displays. An 'object-biography' is an example of a method to sketch such a holistic story of an object, and this research will do some variation on this story-telling; the object narrative. Samuel Alberti writes about this in his famous essay 'Objects and the Museum', the following:

'We can trace the careers of museum things from acquisition to arrangement to viewing, through the different contexts and the many changes of value incurred by these shifts. In doing so we study a series of relationships surrounding objects, first on the way to the museum and then as part of the collection. These are relationships between people and people, between objects and objects, and between objects and people. We encounter not only collectors, curators, and scientists but also visitors and audiences. In this conception the museum becomes a vessel for

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<sup>69</sup> Machin, *Gender Representation*, 51.

the bundle of relationships enacted through each of the thousands of specimens on display and in store.<sup>70</sup>

This could be seen, at least, as a compelling new angle to write a broader history. More than that, Alberti states, it can provide a valuable embedding of scientific practices in material culture. He distinguishes the use of the item as classificatory, analytical or in display and its role as something a visitor of the museum experienced<sup>71</sup>. Interestingly, in the types of objects Alberti distinguishes ‘artificial or natural, dead or alive, human or animal, organic or inorganic, unique or representative’ it comes to mind that taxidermy often is both of the juxtaposed adjectives. It is artificial and natural, the animal is dead but presented as if it were alive, it is organic material mixed with inorganic materials. Alberti is aware of this naturally, as he states that objects in natural history are prone to ‘slippage’ between clear cut categories like ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’. They are material culture and were made to be that through the human activities of collecting, preparing and exhibiting<sup>72</sup>.

Of great importance in an object-history is the ‘giver’ of the object to a museum. This is not always known, but when it is known what path a collection traveled it is oftentimes described to great lengths. Similar to this identity through (previous) ownership, Alberti observes many smaller natural history collections owning an iconic specimen. These objects’ status was shaped by their individual history, and thus they hold an emblematic status<sup>73</sup>. Regardless of its history a natural history object always has at least one other status; a taxonomical status. When an individual history is present however, the taxonomical meaning of an object is often overlooked.

Finally, the object on display is perceived by visitors. Its viewers lay meaning into it through their gaze. What the visitor of a museum saw was influenced by the museum and its choice of representing, but what he/she/they felt can only be influenced to a certain extent. Alberti states that objects are mute, but through their archival material a life-story can be written. The ‘polysemic’ museum object ‘channeled and enabled a series of relationships—between collectors, manufacturers, curators, scientists, conservators and visitors—and the museum object was inalienably connected to those in its trajectory.’<sup>74</sup> Whether these connections are perceived and felt upon meeting the object remains to be seen, as at times museums go to great length to present the object constricted to only one of its roles.

Apart from the object-biography several historians have written about the objects’ talkativeness of narrative. The muteness of the object, that Alberti mentions is disputed by several current historians of science, among whom is Lorraine Daston. In her book ‘Things that Talk’ she explains the talkativeness of objects: ‘Descartes believed that language was distinctively human, a criterion for distinguishing *Anthropos* from *automaton*. Yet the things treated in these pages [Daston’s book *MdV*] manifest something of the plenitude, spontaneity, and fitness of utterance Descartes ascribed to language. Even if they do not literally whisper and shout, these things press their messages on attentive auditors—many messages, delicately adjusted to a context, revelatory, and right on target. Skeptics will insist that all this talk of talk with respect to things is at best metaphoric and at worst a childish fantasy about tongues in trees and books in brooks. Accept these doubts for the sake of the argument: there is still the puzzle of the stubborn persistence of the illusion, if illusion it be. If we

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<sup>70</sup> Alberti, *Objects and the Museum*, 560-561.

<sup>71</sup> Alberti, *Objects and the Museum*, 561.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 563.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 566.

<sup>74</sup> Alberti, *Objects and the Museum*, 571.

humans do all the talking, why do we need things not only to talk about but to talk with?<sup>75</sup> A narrative through Daston's theory could so almost be interpreted as an object-autobiography. Although audible talk is never (without human interference) performed by an object, 'things' are crucial to talk and story-telling. Things become talkative when they fuse matter and meaning, and meaning is almost always pressed onto a taxidermy object. Rachel Poliquin reflects on this in her essay 'the matter and meaning of museum taxidermy', she celebrates the recent appraisal of museum taxidermy as a historical and culture object and elaborates on this: 'First, the historical bracketing of taxidermy and the practices in collecting and mounting animals, and second, an unravelling of the various cultural, political and ideological forces which have shaped how nature has been used and interpreted within museums<sup>76</sup>.' She goes on to state that these shifts are significant in the engagement of both ontological and symbolic factors. Poliquin agrees with Daston that objects, taxidermied objects in particular, are able to 'fashion their own readings'<sup>77</sup>. They talk to us by wanting to make us talk about how they talk to us, they concretize and localize complex relationships between man, nature, violence etc. Stating that this dimension of taxidermy objects in museums is rarely discussed, she researches this feature of various objects in different museum collections, how they talk to their audiences about themselves, ourselves and the significance of taxidermy<sup>78</sup>. Poliquin's research is connected to Daston's in connecting talk and thing.

The object-history can discover interesting aspects of the meaning of the object. In her book, *The Breathless Zoo*, Poliquin elaborates on the impressions taxidermy can make, and the meaning or significance it holds. For example, on extinct species she states that the taxidermy object is the 'definition of irreplaceable', no matter how much other material (video's or photographs) there is of this species, the physical presence of an animal is quite incomparable<sup>79</sup>. This makes clear how experiencing the physicality of an animal-object holds an impression that is unique to taxidermy. A different example is that described through Victorian taxidermy polar bears, 'The bears' aggressive standing poses make clear the era's reveries of exotic animal dangers in distant lands. As such, the bears are documents of a British cultural imaginary which has slipped—thankfully or not—forever into history.<sup>80</sup> Here taxidermy objects can stand as a symbol for a colonial mindset, or a hunter's or masculine mindset, similar to those described above by Haraway and Kohlstedt. In taxidermy, hunting-trophies bear special meaning, as they contain what Garry Marvin dubs two 'notions of authenticity', one is how it relates to the story about the hunt prior to its killing and the second resides in the physical object that is the trophy<sup>81</sup>. This is captured by the taxidermy's skillful craft as in any other taxidermy object, but the hunting narrative is unique to a taxidermy trophy. These are examples of the original angle an object-biography can provide. Giovanni Aloï, a taxidermy expert states on this, 'they [taxidermy objects MdV] are commodities that can enable the retrieval of discursive formations, cultural conditions, practices and power/knowledge relationships between humans and animals.'<sup>82</sup>

Another interesting aspect to the meaning of taxidermy is the act of killing or death that is necessary to taxidermy. 'Death is what makes taxidermy possible, but taxidermy is not motivated by brutality.

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<sup>75</sup> Daston, *Things that Talk*, 12.

<sup>76</sup> Poliquin, *Matter and Meaning*, 125.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Poliquin, *Matter and Meaning*, 125.

<sup>79</sup> Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 2-3.

<sup>81</sup> Marvin, *Enlived through Memory*, in Alberti, *Afterlives of Animals*, 204.

<sup>82</sup> Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 53.

It does not aim to destroy nature but to preserve it, as if immortally, and to perpetuate the wonderment of nature's most beautiful forms. As such, taxidermy always tells us stories about particular cultural moments, about the spectacles of nature that we desire to see, about our assumptions of superiority, our yearning for hidden truths, and the loneliness and longing that haunt our strange existence of being both within and apart from the animal kingdom.<sup>83</sup>, as Poliquin describes. This also makes clear how it could be hard to make general claims about the meaning of taxidermy objects, they meanings animal objects contain are particularities about specific people, locations, ideas about the animal and animals themselves. It can be generalized, as Poliquin does, that taxidermy tells us mainly about ourselves. Humans perform taxidermy and display an animal-object thus ultimately place meaning upon the animal-object will be.

This strange relation to the animal, or animal kingdoms, that humans experience is further described in John Berger's famous essay, 'Why look at animals?'. In this essay he sketches our complicated relation with animals, and how it influences their display and status. He states that 'in the beginning' animals constituted the first circle of what surrounded man, or rather, were in the core of that circle with us. Similarly, William Ashworth notes that in the period of the scientific revolution the emblematic view of the animal that persisted throughout the Middle Ages gave way to a more 'clean' view of the animal, less connected to the earlier magical way of thinking and thus less connected to humans<sup>84</sup>. The animal became (more) categorized. The development of the language of man lead to exclusion of the animal in the man's inner world much earlier than the transformation Ashworth describes. Both worshipped and subjected, mortal an immortal, like and unlike, Berger claims looking at animals is fundamentally ambiguous. With industrialization and the modern world, Berger states that over the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared from the human experience

With the scientific revolution's reduction of animals to soulless beings<sup>85</sup>, they can today be divided into *family* and *spectacle*, Berger states that 'animals are always the observed. [...] What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know the further away they are.'<sup>86</sup> At the same time nature is a value-concept<sup>87</sup>, and the 'wild animal' becomes some sort of ideal. The zoo came into existence parallel with the disappearance of animals from daily life, Berger sees the institute as a monument the impossibility of man-animal encounters outside of this artificial setting. Following the tradition of menageries, 'public zoos were an endorsement of modern colonial power. The capturing of the animals was a symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands. 'Explorers' provided their patriotism by sending home a tiger or an elephant. The gift of an exotic animal to the metropolitan zoo became a token in subservient diplomatic relations.'<sup>88</sup> The zoo was framed however, according to Berger, as another kind of museum, a display of knowledge of natural history. The visitors did usually visit more

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<sup>83</sup> Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Ashworth, *Natural History and the Emblematic Worldview*, 132-156.

<sup>85</sup> Berger, *Why look at animals?*, 255.

<sup>86</sup> Berger, *Why look at animals?*, 259.

<sup>87</sup> Donna Haraway explains how nature becomes a moralizing force in national history towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in her famous essay *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*, 21-22 (specifically, but the idea is used in the whole essay).

<sup>88</sup> Berger, *Why look at animals?*, 259.

out of wonder and curiosity than direct thirst for knowledge, which may be compared to the visit of a natural history museums, as we will explore in the following chapters.

Berger writes about live animals, but these theories are easily applicable to the taxidermy animal. Where Berger describes that in the zoo a cage is a 'frame around the animal', in the natural history museum this would be the display-cabinet. Where Berger sees the zoo-animal, or any modern animal, as marginalized and only existing in our shared conscience to be looked at, this is the more explicit function of a taxidermy animal-object. This more explicit role is curated by the museums, collectors and taxidermists, but the effect of this assigned role might not always be as intended, as Alberti states 'those who have custody of dead as well as living animals play crucial roles in this representation, but that their intended interpretations do not always tally with the meanings afforded to animals by visitors'<sup>89</sup>. Another way in which the animal can be considered marginalized by taxidermy, is in its physicality. As Marvin states, 'in order to represent any animal, most of it must be discarded, and only those parts—skin, skull, hooves, claws and teeth—that can be preserved from biological deterioration are kept to replicate to whole', while this animal will then represent all of the animal; its entrails are absent<sup>90</sup>. This makes the notion more convincing that the taxidermied animal is a human-crafted cultural object that represents animals, coincidentally made out of parts of that animal<sup>91</sup>.

The meaning of a human-crafted, animal-object is always manifold. Everything that touched the animal or animal-object influenced its status and its meaning. The identity of the individual animal-object is established by itself, but talking about who interpreted, posed or collected the animal can approximate its identity. In chapter three this will be done for several objects or installations in Dutch national history museums, that will give a pluriform and ambiguous image of the Dutch taxidermy object's meaning.

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<sup>89</sup> Alberti, *Afterlives of Animals*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Marvin, *Enlived through Memory*, in Alberti, *Afterlives of Animals*, 211.

<sup>91</sup> Sometimes even out of parts of *other* animals, in case of extinct animals. For more on this see Kalshoven, *Piecing Together the Great Auk*, 2018, where Kalshoven describes material from multiple animals being used in rendering in as convincing as possible replica great auk.

## Chapter 1

### Taxidermy in Manuals

‘There is no excuse for bad work. To ruin an animal with shoddy taxidermy is to forfeit the only true canvas we have on which to represent it, and it condemns us to amnesia, ignorance and incomprehension.’<sup>92</sup>

#### *The written conception of the Animal-Object*

To explore the practice of taxidermy in the Netherlands, several 19<sup>th</sup> century sources in taxidermy will be discussed. Combined, this chapter gives an overview of the meaning of taxidermy through the written word in the Netherlands. The texts will be approached more or less chronologically, and analysis will be done based on the actual text, knowledge and history of authors, the professional environment they find themselves, and where possible reception and use of the texts.

Whereas towards the late eighteenth century many skilled craftsmen had become valued as intellectuals, e.g. (landscape- and still-life) painters, who appreciated nature while representing it, it appears that taxidermist did not enjoy the same rise in reputation<sup>93</sup>. Throughout the history of science, certain crafts have played significant supporting parts to major scientific works Initially considered strictly separate, science and technology, modern history of science acknowledges the great stimulus technological developments have had in the history of knowledge<sup>94</sup>. In the case of taxidermists in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century however, these craftsmen were more often than not left to anonymity, despite their skill being indispensable to the survival of the, at that time immensely popular, natural history collections<sup>95</sup>. Because of the lack of printed instruction on taxidermy, it is most likely that the skills were transmitted orally, in something of a guild structure before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While it is hard to connect any personal details to the persona of taxidermist before 1800, Hendriksen makes a guess towards the taxidermist Vosmaer might have employed for ‘his’ Stadtholderly cabinet’s specimens<sup>96</sup>. Adriaan de Klerk, is the name that appears in the Middelburgsche courant in 1766, with an advertisement for the preparation of animals. He is in fact

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<sup>92</sup> From the 2010 novel ‘Beatrice and Virgil’ by Yann Martel, 95-96.

<sup>93</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1122.

<sup>94</sup> See for more on the relation between techniques and science for example Roberts, Lissa L., Simon Schaffer, and Peter Dear. "The Mindful Hand. Inquiry and Invention from the Late Renaissance to Early Industrialization." *History of Science and Scholarship in the Netherlands* 9 (2007).

<sup>95</sup> Berkhey, *Natuurlyke historie van Holland*, 1. Retrieved from dbnl: [https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/fran011natu01\\_01/](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/fran011natu01_01/) on 22-07-2019. Freely translated from Dutch: ‘dat ons Holland een magazyn van zeldzaamheden, byzonder van uitheemsche voortbrengzels der Natuure is geworden. Geen Stad, geen Dorp byna is ‘er, of men vind ‘er kabinetten, of naspeurende liefhebberen.’, and prof. H. Engel’s list containing thousands of Dutch natural history collections Engel, Hendrik. ‘Alphabetical list of Dutch zoological cabinets and menageries.’ *Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde* 27.1 (1939): 247-346.

<sup>96</sup> Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1123.

the first individual that can be linked in this way to the profession of taxidermy in the Netherlands, with mention of his paid services before that of his own cabinet and admission (later in Amsterdam). This anonymous status did not change significantly until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the opening of the national natural history museum in Leiden, the *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*. In the museum's history, written by L.B. Holthuis, a genealogy of taxidermists is described.

When the *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie* was just founded by the naturalist Coenraad Jacob Temminck (1778-1858), two taxidermists were among its staff. One of those was Jacobus Thomas Ter Meer (1803-1877), who became first taxidermist in 1828, and was the first in a long line of Ter Meers who would be taxidermists for the *Rijksmuseum*<sup>97</sup>. Jacobus Thomas ter Meer's father was famous in Leiden for producing mechanic dolls, but also stuffed animals. This might be how he was connected to Temminck, and his children and grandchildren would continue this practice until the last ter Meer was bought out of the museum by the University of Leipzig in 1907, by which he is still celebrated today<sup>98</sup>. Jacobus Thomas ter Meer was celebrated as well, and quite famous in his day for the meticulous and naturally realistic ways of his work. As Holthuis states, in these days museum specimens were displayed and structured in natural poses to be exhibited<sup>99</sup>. This display was open to the public on certain days, as many museums then were not 'full-time' open to general public or non-scientific interested parties<sup>100</sup>. These artistically posed specimen of course took up a lot more space than scientifically prepared specimen in study-skin forms, as an unstuffed skin can be easily stored in a drawer whereas a mounted animal-object, prepared in action on a branch would need a place in a display case<sup>101</sup>. Furthermore, the specimens were vulnerable to damage by UV-light. Temminck was worried about this, and Holthuis describes how he pressed the governmental officials to make changes that would permit the collection to be stored in a scientifically responsible way<sup>102</sup>.

All the ter Meer's proved extremely skilled in their craft and were known in the field of biology and natural collections. Holthuis states than 'During the 19th century taxidermist of zoology and ornithology formed the elite of the Museum and of the technical crew. They were deemed artists, whose work was appreciated for both its artistic and its scientific value and in this the Ter Meers were a class apart<sup>103</sup>'. With Temminck as director of the museum, the staff grew slowly and the number of taxidermists grew to eight in 1830<sup>104</sup>. Holthuis declares that not much is known about the different taxidermists, many of them started to work in the museum when they were very young (the youngest mention is thirteen years old) and were gradually schooled in their craft at the museum<sup>105</sup>. The most common reason for the employees to leave the museum was to work in the colonies or Dutch trades posts (Indonesia, Ghana among others), and many of them sent in specimens from their new positions<sup>106</sup>. Although Holthuis writes exclusively on the *Rijksmuseum*, he

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<sup>97</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 36. See: <https://naturkundemuseum.leipzig.de/ausstellungen/herman-ter-meer/> visited 22/07/2019, 11:30.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>100</sup> Sliggers, *Verdwenen Museum*, 181.

<sup>101</sup> A primitive form of taxidermy in which the skin of the animal is not stuffed or posed, but cleaned, dried and left 'empty', it is stored lying on its back (usually) in cabinets protected from decay.

<sup>102</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 37.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, 38. Freely translated from Dutch: "*Gedurende de gehele 19e eeuw vormden in het Museum de preparateurs voor zoogdieren en vogels de elite onder het technisch personeel. Het waren kunstenaars, waarvan het werk op zowel artistieke als wetenschappelijke merites gewaardeerd werd en de Ter Meers vormden een klasse apart in deze.*"

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>105</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 31.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

does provide a valuable image of the work of taxidermist in the Netherlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to keep in mind that this museum was the most prestigious institute to be affiliated to for a taxidermist with scientific interests in this time, but nonetheless it is useful material for comparison with other natural history collections and writing on this subject in the country, and it supports the assumption of a guild-structure in the teaching of the craft of taxidermy. As we will see further on, late in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century some professional activity in taxidermy seems to be present outside of the museum, who worked for private individuals in mounting their collected animals or hunted specimens. With very few written traces, these seem to be anonymous, early-modern taxidermists Hendriksen writes about.

### *The works of Slabber, Temminck and Hubrecht.*

With the advancements in travel, science and public museums the previous anonymity of the taxidermist-collector changed seriously in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Holthuis notes. Still however, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century quite little is known about the practice of taxidermy in the Low Countries. Despite its development, establishing of zoos and museums, fewer than ten publications on taxidermic practices in Dutch are known. These publications are discussed below, together. In this research the written instructions, teachings, of taxidermy in Dutch are critically evaluated for the first time. It appears that a practical craft like taxidermy was still taught in a pupil-master structure, as Holthuis observes happened at the *Rijksmuseum*. There are also mentions of self-taught taxidermists<sup>107</sup>. The lack of Dutch publications on taxidermy can't be due to the lack of taxidermy practiced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, as it is in this time that most of museums are 'stuffed' with specimen and taxidermy pieces become fashionable in Victorian styles<sup>108</sup>. The most likely explanation is thus the predominantly oral transfer of this technical knowledge, or the domination of books in another language over those in Dutch.

The first printed work in Dutch on instructions in taxidermy is that of Martinus Slabber (1740-1838) in 1816. This is quite early in taxidermy manuals in general (the famous English ones are often dated mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) and in Dutch in particular, as there are so few of these known<sup>109</sup>. Slabber was a self-taught scientist and member of the *Zeeuws Genootschap*, a scientific society of the province Zeeland. In Zeeland a lot of ships from the VOC, the WIC and other international companies and destinations harbored, so there was no lack of exotic specimen<sup>110</sup>. Slabber prided himself in being a good taxidermist, and collector of over four-hundred birds<sup>111</sup>. Despite him being a member of the scientific society, his collection was private and not related to a professional/scientific museum. He disliked seeing animals stuffed unnaturally, so he took it upon himself to write a manual, specifically on the stuffing of birds<sup>112</sup>. This booklet, consisting of 64 pages, was printed in Amsterdam in an

<sup>107</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 38. Holthuis mentions élèves that would work their way up to independent taxidermists, and the first in the line of the Ter Meers was also apparently self-taught.

<sup>108</sup> Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 137.

<sup>109</sup> Examples of famous English taxidermy manuals are: Brown, Thomas *"The Taxidermists' Manual; Or, The Art of Collecting, Preparing, and Preserving Objects of Natural History: Designed for the Use of Travellers, Conservators of Museums, and Private Collectors."* A. Fullarton and Company, 1849. Etc., Browne, Montagu. *"Practical Taxidermy"*. L. Upcott Gill, London, 1878., Davie, Oliver. *"Methods in the Art of Taxidermy"*. D. McKay, London, 1894.

<sup>110</sup> VOC is the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; United East-Indies Company and WIC is the West-Indische Compagnie; West-Indies Company (South-America was referred to as the West-Indies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>111</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, vii, 63.

<sup>112</sup> Slabber means with 'naturally' mostly that the poses the birds are mounted in are like those they portray when alive. Ibidem, 9.



unknown quantity. The level of distribution across the country remains obscure, and it is unclear if it was aimed at aspiring taxidermist at home and/or in more 'exotic' places. Another unanswered question is exactly how Slabber thought this work would be used, it is unusual in its genre as it contains no images; something almost all British taxidermy manuals do, but then they are of a later date<sup>113</sup>.

Comparable in a sense is the work on taxidermy of Temminck, who, in his role of director of the *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie* wrote some instructions on how to handle and prepare different specimen for museum use and display. His instructions were published in 1825 and he seems unaware of any earlier publication on the matter, but his work is strictly aimed at the employees of the *Rijksmuseum*. Although the Slabbers' work is published only 10 years earlier than Temminck's, they differ greatly in style. Slabber tells a detailed story of his mission to learn about taxidermy, where he went to ask about this and who he usually works with in his hometown of Middelburg. Temminck wrote a formal protocol, much more of a professional manual without any personal reflections, which are abundant in Slabber's work. Slabbers style seems to correspond to that of the early-modern amateur-naturalists, who has great self-taught expertise but is not a scientist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sense, connected through his skill to a professional institute. Slabber has in 1778 already published a work of microscopic observations of insects (*Natuurkundige verlustingen behelzende microscopise waarneemingen van in- en uitlandse water- en land-dieren*), which was later translated to German. In his later work on stuffing birds, he mentions in the preface that it isn't just important for the collector of natural history objects that these objects are well kept, but also that the collector has some knowledge about the order of nature, so that the collection can be transferred to the next generation in the right order<sup>114</sup>. He expresses his considerations on publishing his booklet as he had just heard of two French works on taxidermy instructions that had appeared, but decided that these were insufficient if one of was to stuff birds well<sup>115</sup>. Furthermore, he is familiar with an 'art dictionary' by Noel Chomel, that also gives some instructions on the preparations of animals, but these instructions Slabber found 'so lacking that I felt it necessary to refute this method in this treatise'<sup>116</sup>.

The Chomel dictionary or encyclopedia was translated from French, and spread in the Netherlands from 1743. It is unlikely that Slabber was familiar with this first edition, as this is before the first publication by Réaumur, and did not contain instructions on taxidermy. It is more likely that his Chomel edition is one of a later date, or an addition to the first one by other authors. The several editions of Chomel's art- or household-dictionary were popular and widespread, as the many

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<sup>113</sup> Slabber does mention his wish for nature to be studied, and so to study God, and his admiration for all who do so, and his wish for his work to contribute to this. Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, 1-3.

<sup>114</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, v. Freely translated from Dutch; "Zoo dat, uit het hier voren aangehaalde een opmerkzaam lezer ontwaart wordt, dat het niet genoeg is, om eene verzameling te maken van Natuurlijke zeldzaamheden, behoorende onder die, welke bij voortduring moeten waard worden, voor Insekten inde Vederen, of Mijten, of eenige andere Diertjes, waardoor zij ten verderve zouden gebragt worden; maar dat ook de verzamelaar de noodige kennis zich moet eigen maken, waardoor zijne verzameling in d ebeste orde bewaard blijft, opdat zij aan den Naneef kan overgebrat worden."

<sup>115</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, v. Slabber mentions two publications that he deems unfit to instruct on the stuffing of birds. The first without author by the title "*Memoire sur le manière de preparer et de conserver les diverses curiosités d'Histoire Naturelle*" and the second by and author named Nicolas, "*sur la methode de preparer et de conserver les Animaux*".

<sup>116</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, vi. Freely translated from Dutch; "Wat nu betreft het werk van Noel Chomel, in zijn kunstwoordenboek, pag. 3951, hetzelfde is alles zoo gebrekkig, dat ik mij genoodzaakt heb gevonden, het, in de Verhandeling, te moeten wederleggen."

reprints indicate<sup>117</sup>. They were reviewed in periodicals too, so this suggests that there was a considerable part of the public that had access to these instructions (although, again, they were found very unsatisfactory by Slabber)<sup>118</sup>. This widespread availability of a household work that contains taxidermy instructions also suggest taxidermy not being considered a proper profession, but something practical or useful in the private sphere. Finally, Slabbers mentions a work by Temminck that he finds useful, he states that it was printed in 1815 in Amsterdam, a small tractate that was spread only among friends and family<sup>119</sup>. This work appears to be distinct from the above-mentioned instruction on handling natural history objects for the museum, as it is printed 10 years earlier and is not referenced elsewhere. He does not mention any more on this, and it is unclear whether he based some of his work on Temminck, but this does seem unlikely as Slabber himself was well-established in the natural sciences and in taxidermy. Slabber finishes his preface with expressing his wish that his treatise may be useful for collectors, and that when it encourages collectors to get to know the Creator and his creatures better, he would be happy<sup>120</sup>.

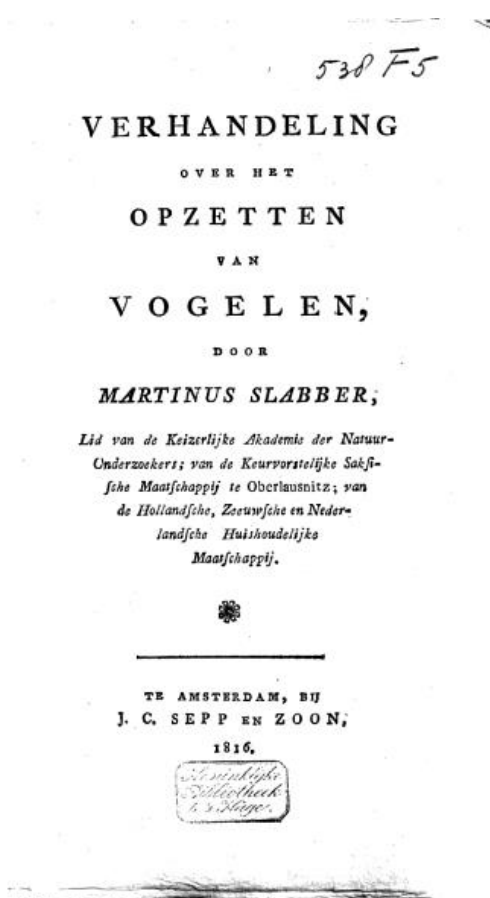


Figure 1: Scanned image of the frontispiece of Slabber's work<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>117</sup>See: van der Sijs, *Verantwoording van de digitale uitgave van het Huishoudelyk woordboek door Noël Chomel (1743)* on [https://dbnl.org/tekst/chom003huis01\\_01/chom003huis01\\_01\\_0001.php](https://dbnl.org/tekst/chom003huis01_01/chom003huis01_01_0001.php) (retrieved 24/07/2019).

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, and Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, vi.

<sup>120</sup> Ibidem, x.

<sup>121</sup> Image retrieved from open access eBook on [https://books.google.nl/books/about/Verhandeling\\_over\\_het\\_opzetten\\_van\\_vogel.html?id=QTBTAACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.nl/books/about/Verhandeling_over_het_opzetten_van_vogel.html?id=QTBTAACAAJ&redir_esc=y) on 02-09-2019.

In his text Slabbers gives relatively little space to the actual instructions, a great part of the text is introduction to, and descriptions on, how he himself learned and searched for the art of taxidermy. This conversational style is something unfamiliar to all the other authors on taxidermy, which also suggest that Slabber had an early-modern notion of science and taxidermy early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before turning to what one needs to master in order to stuff birds, he lists natural scientists he feels indebted to, among the names mentioned are Rumphius, Meriam, Linnaeus and Réaumur<sup>122</sup>. This makes it clear that Slabber does feel very connected to the natural sciences, despite his work being anything but formal knowledge-production.

The five most important factors when treating the stuffing of birds are, according to Slabber, that one needs to know the sexes and species of birds, one knows how to protect the objects against perdition, one must be aware how to treat distinct eyes of birds, one must know how to make birds stand in a natural pose, and lastly, one must know what is needed to display each bird, true to his nature and features, in a picturesque manner<sup>123</sup>. When elaborating on the first point, Slabber emphasizes that it is necessary for an aspiring collector and taxidermist of birds to know at least the majority of birds in his/her country by looking at their beaks and feet, but it is much preferable to know all birds in this manner, and add knowledge of birds from other countries too. He describes travels to Holland, and visiting fellow natural history collectors in his search for the ideally composed collection. When expressing his regret at the resin-casted specimen many of the cabinets he visited hold he adds that he is very pleased with the specimen in the Stadtholderly collection: 'After visiting many collections, I found no better, true-to-nature stuffed birds, than in the cabinet of the Prince of Orange, which were collected under the first director, mister Vosmaer, although the birds, collected under de second director, mister den Heer, were stuffed by way of resin-casting<sup>124</sup>'. Resin-casting is a preservation technique in which, unsurprisingly, the empty skin is filled with liquid resin, which after hardening renders a rigid, unnatural specimen. Another stuffing-technique that Slabbers describes was much used in this period is the filling of the empty skin with bundles of tobacco-leaves; which also leaves the specimen looking awkward.

Similar to the taxidermist Hendriksen mentioned in her article (Adriaan de Klerk), Slabber meets a taxidermist that sells his craft, a Mr. Zonnenberg, and is delighted by his skill. Unfortunately, Zonnenberg is unwilling to share his recipes and techniques with Slabber<sup>125</sup>. Zonnenberg is not mentioned in other sources and Slabber does not provide any information apart from his name, but in combination with Hendriksen's find these mentions give the impression that taxidermists that sell their craft were not uncommon in this period, but that they were distinctly craftsmen; they were not artists or professionals connected to an institute. In collaboration with some of his acquaintances Slabbers sets out to develop his own stuffing-material and anti-perdition powder. For the stuffing

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<sup>122</sup> Réaumur is mentioned, interestingly enough, not for his pioneering work on taxidermy, but because a book he wrote on insects: "Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes" in 1740.

<sup>123</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van voogelen*, 9. Freely translated from Dutch: "1. Men moet geslachten en soorten kennen. 2. Men moet dezelfde weten te prepareren, opdat zij voor bederf bewaard zijn. 3. Men moet algemeen weten, hoe men onderscheidene oogen moet behandelen. 4. Wat men in acht te neme hebbe om de Vogels te kunnen doen staan, in dien stand, die zij naar hunnen aard vereischen. 5. Wat is er noodig te weten, om iederen Vogel, naar zijnen aard en eigenschappen, in eene teekenachtige houding te zetten."

<sup>124</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van voogelen*, 13. Freely translated from Dutch: "Zoodat, na vele verzamelingen gezien te hebben, ik nergens beter, met de natuur overeenkomstige, opzette Vogelen vond, dan in het beroemde destijds aanwezig zijnde kabinet van den Heere Prins van Ornaje, hetwelk wel onder den eersten directeur van het kabinet, den Heer Vosmaer, verzameld werd, echter de Vogelen, door den Heer, tweeden directeur Vroeg, bij manier van harsgieting, werden opgezet."

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem, 14.

Slabber settles on a material he calls 'Werk', a hemp-material used for the fabrication of rope. He claims to have excellent experience with the durability of this product in stuffed birds, with birds lasting years in great form 'as if they were stuffed yesterday'<sup>126</sup>.

On the powder Slabbers provides two recipes that he composed with his collaborators, one more suitable for birds with fatty skin (like ducks and geese), the other for birds in general. The first consists of ten ounces limestone powder, ten ounces plaster and 4 ounces flower of sulfur. The second recipe is: 5 ounces of quality resin powder, 3 ounces of burnt alum and 10 ounces of fine oakbark powder. When the to-be-stuffed bird is skinned, the skin is to be wetted with turpentine and then richly covered with the powder, all the while taking care that neither the turpentine nor the powder comes into contact with the feathers<sup>127</sup>. His third point on stuffing birds, regarding the eyes, is treated elaborately. He emphasizes to his reader to place the eyes befitting the situation of the birds to be displayed, e.g. fighting birds should have blacker (that is; more aggressive) eyes, than birds posed calmly<sup>128</sup>. Slabber proudly recalls a visit of two French men who praised the eyes of a bird in the Museum of the French emperor, that turned out to be a Cassowary bird from the Stadtholderly collection. Moreover, this bird had died in the zoological garden in Middleburgh, after which it was actually prepared by Slabber himself and his collaborator Pieter Brasser<sup>129</sup>. Brasser was a painter from Middleburgh, that also stuffed animals and birds. Slabber mentions him in relation to the painting of eyes, but also to the stuffing and mounting. Brasser, as opposed to Zonnenberg, can be found in some other sources. For example, he placed an advertisement in the *Middelburgsche Courant* in 1763 in which he offered to buy 'all sorts of recently died, East- and West-Indian, and other sorts of curious birds and quadrupled animals and will pay for them what they are worth, with exception of deer, goats and sheep'<sup>130</sup>. This is reminiscent of de Klerk's advertisement, described by Hendriksen, although he does not mention him selling his taxidermy craft directly, but can be another indication that the small independent taxidermist was a not-unusual phenomenon in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century.

Slabbers starts out discussing his fourth point, how to present birds with a natural pose, with lamenting on the lack of instruction Chomel gives (as he did with his text treating eyes), and concludes that annealed copper wire is the best material to mold the stance of various birds<sup>131</sup>. Finally, on how to prepare the bird 'so that it has a picturesque position', Slabber states that the taxidermist must be trained drawing and know about the center of gravity of various birds. When

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<sup>126</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van voogelen*, 19-20. Description of 'Werk' in Dutch: "Van deze Plant [Hennep/Hemp red.] maken de Touwlagers hunne mindere en zware touwen, als de zoogenaamde kabels voor de ankers der schepen; dezelve worden met teer doorkookt en dus doordrongen, waarmede zij, gemengd met pik, op de schepen onderhouden worden; de mindere touwen of kabels der ankers, voor hun gebruik niet meer dienstig zijnde, worden aan de Scheepstimmerlieden of wel aan de Lijnbanen verkocht, die dezelve aan stukken hakken, en met zware hamers fijn slaan, en alsdan krijg het den naam van Werk, hetwelk dan door de Scheepstimmerlieden wederom wordt gebruikt, om de naden der planken van de schepen zoogenaamd te kalefateren, of dicht te maken. Hoe zeer nu deze stukken twou tot Werk worden geslagen, behoudt het zijne kleur, en vooral de reuk van de teer, het balsemieke dat de teer heeft, blijft er altoos in, zoo dat de Hennep, daarmede doordrongen, te zamen bijna eene onvergankelijkheid uitmaakt,..."

<sup>127</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van voogelen*, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem, 28.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>130</sup> Advertisement on Delpher: "Middelburgsche courant". Middelburg, 01-03-1763. Visited on Delpher on 24-07-2019, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010201338:mpeg21:a0005>. Quote translated from Dutch: "P.M. BRASSER, Schilder, Woonende op de Vlasmakkt te Middleburg, Koopt alle soorten van Vers-Gestorvene, Oost-en West-Indische, en allerhande Vreemd Gevogelte en Viervoetige GEDIERTENS, en zal de zelve na haar waardij betalen: zyn hiervan uitgezonderd te Kopen HARTEN, BOKKEN, en SCHAPEN."

<sup>131</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van voogelen*, 34.

discussing the importance of knowledge on the center of gravity of birds, Slabbers reinforces his point with an anecdote about an acquaintance that possessed a stuffed flamingo, but was very disappointed because the bird could not stand on its own and kept falling over, because its feet were placed right next to each other, in which position the bird collapses forward. Luckily, Slabbers pats himself on the back, he was able to adjust the pose of the bird so it could be displayed gracefully<sup>132</sup>.

The last part of Slabber's text is filled with meticulous instruction on how exactly to cut and treat birds of different sizes with the above given recipes. He gives instructions on how to skin a bird the size of a dove entirely, on how to remove organs and flesh from the breast and gut of birds smaller than a dove, on how to treat birds that were shipped from the East- or West-Indies on liquor, and finally how to treat birds that were dried in the East- or West-Indies and how to improve them a little<sup>133</sup>. On the first two points Slabbers gives detailed instructions, and presses to keep in mind the structure of the bird, as the skins are flexible, and one could with too much stuffing 'turn a blackbird into a dove'<sup>134</sup>. On the birds transported in liquor Slabber advises to follow the same procedure as with other birds, except that he found the liquor can cause molding when not removed sufficiently. To remove the liquor from the specimen a soft soap bath is advised, then drying, and if the specimens are treated properly with the powders and turpentine, they will not be subject to molding<sup>135</sup>. Then, in the last section of his treatise, Slabbers discusses the improvement of insufficiently stuffed or dried specimens. He describes his disappointment in opening shipments from the Indies and finding specimens that are 'dried like a Stock fish'<sup>136</sup>, thus the need for reparation-technique of taxidermy. After describing these techniques, Slabber concludes that with as his witness the four-hundred bird in his collection, that after years still look as if they were stuffed last week, he feels confident in his techniques.

The treatise Temminck wrote on treating and preparing natural specimens in 1825 is much shorter, and much more to the point, even though it contains all animal species and not just birds<sup>137</sup>. In the publication there is mention of an earlier edition, in accordance with Slabber's mention, but this version can't be traced<sup>138</sup>. In this treatise Temminck corrects some of the instructions he wrote in the obscure earlier version, in addition to succinct instruction on the preparation for proper transport of specimen, and the protection against perdition of these. The most striking difference between Temminck's and Slabber's instruction is that Slabber does not mention any use of arsenical soap, whereas a mixture containing arsenic is Temminck's go-to conservative. It is quite interesting

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<sup>132</sup> Ibidem, 38.

<sup>133</sup> Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, 42. Freely translated from Dutch: "1. De manier om den Vogel van de grootte van eene Duif en vervolgens, geheel uit zijne huid te halen. 2. Om alle minder grooten dan die van eene Duif niet geheel uit hunne huid te halen, maar alleen de Borst en het opper en onder-Ingewanden weg te nemen. 3. Om zoodanige Vogels te behandelen die uit de Oost- of West-Indiën op Liquor, (dat doorgaans zoogenoemd Kelduivel is, hetwelk van Suiker gestookt wordt) over komen. 4. Om zoodanige Vogels, die inde Oost of West, zoogenaamd opgezet, of liever gedroogd zijn, in kastjes met eene houten pen in iederen Vogel gezonden worden, eenige verbetering te geven."

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 51. Freely translated from Dutch: "zoo dat men (...) van eene Merle eene Duif zou kunnen maken (...)"

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 60. Freely translated from Dutch: "Menigmaal mistroostig geweest zijnde, wanneer ik kastjes met zoodanige Vogelen, aan mijn adres bewkam, of kocht, en eenen of anderen schoonen en soms zeldzamen Vogel daarin vond, die geen stand had, maar als een Stokvisch gedroogd was, (..)".

<sup>137</sup> Temminck, *Voorschrift hoedanig te handelen*, 1-28.

<sup>138</sup> Ibidem, 11, and Slabber, *Verhandeling over het opzetten van vogelen*, vi: "Zoo dat alleen mij als het beste voorkwam, een Tractaatje door den Geleerden Heere C.I. TEMMINCK geschreven, doch hetwelk zijn Ed. alleen voor zich zelven en goede vrienden, te Amsterdam, bij de voorname Boekhandelaars J. C. Sepp en Zoon in 1815 heeft laten drukken, zonder eene algemeene uitgaaf daaraan te geven."

that Slabber appears to not use any arsenical compounds in his taxidermy, as this soap is used at the time, and Slabber claims his stuffed birds have aged so well. Arsenic soap is described in Dufresne's work in 1800, so could have been available in the Netherlands<sup>139</sup>. Another source on the arsenical soap invented by Bécoeur suggests that Temminck was connected to it through the acquisition of a collection and family contacts<sup>140</sup>. A collection Temminck had bought was allegedly prepared with the soap, and the seller had published on this in 1817, and Temminck's family was friends with an ornithologist who had in turn been trained by Bécoeur. This all suggest that arsenical soap might have come to Dutch taxidermy practices through Temminck's writings and work<sup>141</sup>. Slabber before him uses a Sulphur mixture for his specimens, that is known to work, but to be less preferred because its smell and its side-effect of changing the colour of specimen's skins<sup>142</sup>. Perhaps Slabbers sources are just less up-to-date than Temminck's, perhaps he trusts his tried-and-tested techniques. It is unclear if Slabber was familiar with the soap, he proclaims that he knew about Temminck's earlier treatise, but did not possess or have read it. Here, despite Slabber being the first to publish on taxidermy in Dutch, he seems to be a bit behind.

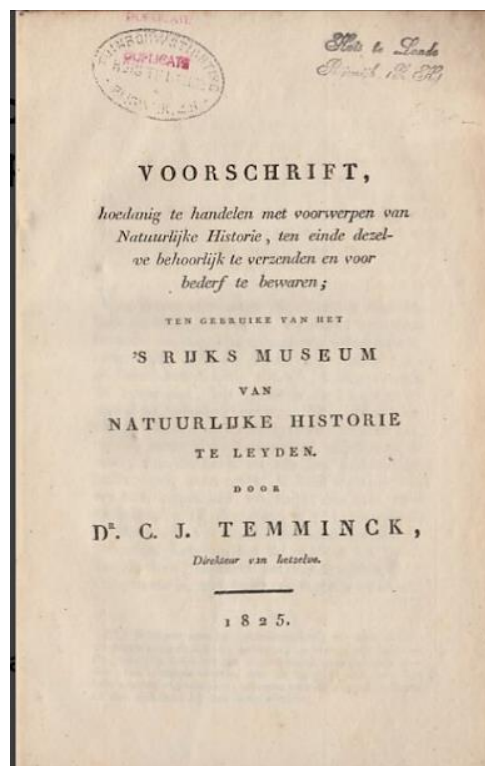


Figure 2: Frontispiece of Temminck's work.

The mixture Temminck describes for the conservation of all animals from within (to be applied with a brush) is the following: 'Very pure white soap (the best is that of Jerusalem), and pure water, let this boil together to a mush. [...] One adds to this; fine plaster until it becomes a thick mush and then

<sup>139</sup> Dufresne, *Sur l'Art de Taxidermie*, 439–462.

<sup>140</sup> Farber, *Taxidermy and Ornithology*, 563.

<sup>141</sup> Farber, *Taxidermy and Ornithology*, 563. The family's friend is Francois Levaillant (1753-1824) and the seller of the collection and author of publication William Bullock, title *A Concise and Easy Method of Preserving Subjects of Natural History* (London: William Bullock, 1817)

<sup>142</sup> Marte, *Arsenic in Taxidermy Collections*, 144.

one adds white arsenic, 1 lb. and campher in arak or wine spirit diluted ½ lb.<sup>143</sup> He goes on to state that when acted upon this instruction, the prepared animals will arrive in a very good state and without the least spoilage. The skins will be conserved in a very supple state which is necessary for the further art of taxidermy that they will be used in<sup>144</sup>. Interesting in Temminck's instruction is his emphasis on the desirability of the 'individuals' to be equipped with a label that will contain information on when the specimen was prepared, its species and name of the country of origin<sup>145</sup>. Another scientific addition to his manual is at the very end of Temminck's little work, where he shares with his reader the importance of collecting more than one piece of a specific natural history object for science. For the museum the relative beauty of a specimen doesn't matter, after all<sup>146</sup>. Here he hints at the 'objectiveness' of science that came into practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum context.

At Temminck's museum there were several taxidermists employed, and this is officiated in the records, so the anonymous taxidermist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that Hendriksen describes is not the dominant type anymore<sup>147</sup>. The elite that Holthuis claims the skilled taxidermists were in the natural history museum stands in contrast with the invisibility Hendriksen ascribes to the taxidermist of in the eighteenth century, possibly indicating a catching up of the taxidermists with the status that other skilled craftsmen had achieved earlier. This may in part be attributed to the growth of natural history museums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it can be attributed to the growing popularity of the natural sciences and taxidermy in general. With science and natural history museums professionalizing it is only logical that the trade of taxidermy did too. In his text Slabber describes a lot of qualities that the aspiring taxidermists need to possess; have knowledge of nature, be able to draw and to be able to assess the center of gravity in taxidermy mounts. Temminck lacks to mention these, which can mean that they are by then assumed for any taxidermists to have, as by then the practice starts to formalize. With Holthuis' praise for the institutional taxidermists and more and more names connected to the practitioners of taxidermy, still not that much is known about their practice in over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands, apart from the abovementioned works. Where and how they were taught, besides Holthuis' descriptions and some scraps and taxidermy literature, is also not clear. Where towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century some taxidermists' firms start to make a name, and at the turn of the century we can speak of 'famous' taxidermists, before this time these roles are not yet distilled<sup>148</sup>. With the growth of the national natural history museum and other museums this movement does start to get pace, and the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century finds considerably more works on taxidermy than the first.

After Slabber and Temminck, another work of interest is that of Ambrosius Arnold Willem Hubrecht (1853-1915), who published a booklet of 66 pages *'Handleiding bij het opsporen en verzamelen van voorwerpen uit het dierenrijk ook in Oost- of West-Indië'*, an instructional work on how to find and

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<sup>143</sup> Temminck, *Voorschrift hoedanig te handelen*, 10. Freely translated from Dutch: "Zeer zuivere witte zeep (beste Jeruzalemsche) Zuiver water. Dit te zamen laten koken tot brij, en er meerder water bij gieten, naar gelang der omstandigheid, wanneer hetzelfde omtrent koud is, voegt men er bij : - Fijne pleister of gips tot poeder gemalen 1 lb. Meng zooveel water er door als noodig is om een dikken brij te vormen; voeg ver volgens bij dit mengsel: Witte arsenic 1 lb. Kamfer in arak of wijngeest opgelost 1/2 lb."

<sup>144</sup> Temminck, *Voorschrift hoedanig te handelen* 10.

<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, 15.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>147</sup> See Hendriksen, *Animal Bodies*, 1122 and Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 38.

<sup>148</sup> An example of such a famous taxidermist is Paul Louis Steenhuizen (1870-1940), about whom later in this thesis more will be written.



collect animal objects ‘also’ in the East and West Indies. This work is by a much later date, 1879, so in that sense not entirely in the same league as Slabbers’ and Temminck’s efforts. How well-known Slabber and Temminck’s works were is also debatable, as a review of Hubrecht’s book notes how no other work by a Dutch author is known<sup>149</sup>. On instructions on preparation Hubrecht states to rely on a book published by Hermann Schlegel (1804-1884), a German ornithologist that was the director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie after Temminck<sup>150</sup>. This book was a ‘manual for practice of zoology’, a robust work containing over 500 pages, of which 6 were dedicated to collecting and thus preparing zoological specimen<sup>151</sup>. It is no surprise that both Schlegel and Hubrecht give the same recipe for the arsenical soap that should be employed to prepare skins for either taxidermy or travel. They both worked at the same institute as Temminck did before them, and the soap had by this time become a fixture in the craft of taxidermy. It is interesting to note however, that in Hubrecht’s work it is stated in a footnote that it is easiest to buy the soap. He gives the name of a firm in Leiden where it can be bought, this suggests that the art of taxidermy has become more widespread and practiced in 1879, as this is the first reference to sale of the soap in Dutch taxidermy literature<sup>152</sup>.

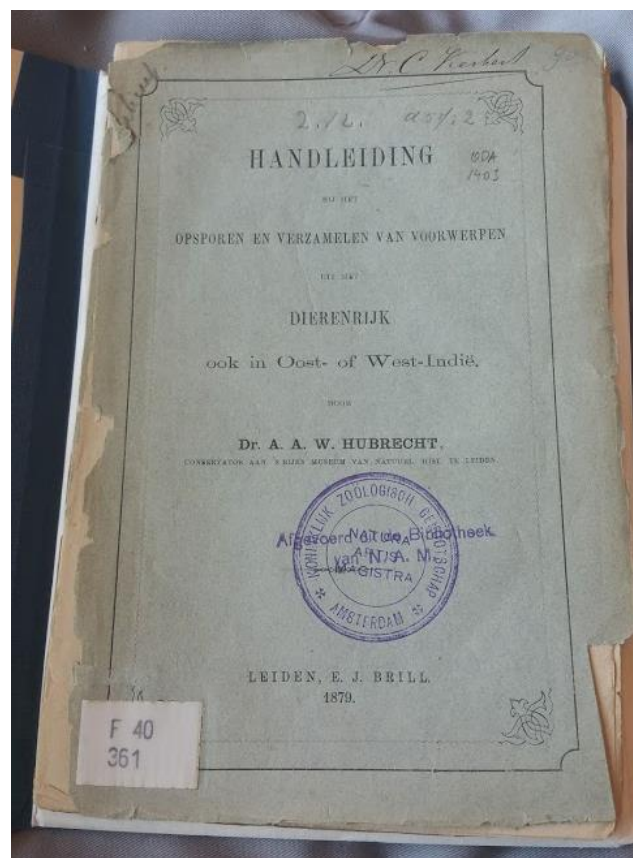


Figure 3: Cover of Hubrecht's manual<sup>153</sup>.

<sup>149</sup> De Tijdspiegel, Jaargang 37, 1880, pagina 132. “Er bestond in onze taal, tot hiertoe, voor zoover ik weet, geen enkele handleiding tot het verzamelen en conserveeren van dieren. Ieder dus, die uit liefhebberij bijeenvergadert, wat de fauna, hetzij in ons Vaderland, hetzij in Oost of West, hem merkwaardigs te zien gaf, moest dus òf telkens de hulp inroepen van den een of anderen vakgeleerde, òf zijne kennis putten uit buitenlandsche geschriften” Door E.J. Brill.

<sup>150</sup> Schlegel, *Handleiding tot de Beoefening van de Dierkunde*.

<sup>151</sup> Schlegel, *Handleiding tot de Beoefening van de Dierkunde*, xv-xxi.

<sup>152</sup> Hubrecht, *Handleiding bij het Opsoren en Verzamelen*, 51.

<sup>153</sup> Photo taken by author on 05-07-2019, of the exemplar owned by the Utrecht University Library.



In the preface to his travel-size work on taxidermy Hubrecht states that he oftentimes heard of traveler-collectors the complaint that they would have started collecting earlier, and more vigorously, had they have been aware of the proper methods and instruction on doing so<sup>154</sup>. Upon the missing of this knowledge, travelers let many collecting-opportunities go to waste due to lack of expertise. He regrets to admit that Germans, Englishmen and Americans are way ahead of 'us' (meaning the Dutch), he states that those countries have in publication many concise works of literature either thanks to their Marine departments, scientific societies or government, these works were abundantly distributed. Hubrecht believes that these works prompted many amateurs to dedicate hours to the study of nature and to the formation of collections that have been donated to scientific museums or have been kept for the future<sup>155</sup>. Because of this in Hubrecht's wish arose to create a similar work, to be sent to Dutch people that live in or travel to the colonies. In the execution of this plan he has found great support in professor Schlegel, who let him use his directions on taxidermy. In Hubrecht's work too, great emphasis is placed on labelling your specimen. About this he states: 'on this [label MdV] should be mentioned the specimen, place of origin, the date of shooting or killing and the sex. Without this all specimen lose the majority of their value to science. In the case of birds, it is furthermore of importance to know the colour of their eyes, as well as their feet, the beak and of fleshy parts like combs etc. that are still on the head. As it is oftentimes impossible to mention all this on the label attached to the animal, one writes a number. This number corresponds to that in a well-kept journal, in which one has the opportunity to write all the particularities, of the given specimen, down in a more elaborate way, as well as observations of the behavior etc.'<sup>156</sup> Hubrecht fuses the formal approach of scientific taxidermy with the travels and practices of 'exotic' taxidermy in this work, as he also gives instructions on how to place traps and work with locals in the catching of rare specimens, making the necessary act of killing explicit in manuals<sup>157</sup>.

The reviewer mentioned earlier, that noted that no other work than that by Hubrecht on the craft of taxidermy was known to him, notes that many amateur collectors had before relied on foreign works on taxidermy. This is telling, as two prominent men in natural history had already published some work on the matter, which has apparently stayed quite unknown. Another indication that the Dutch works were used very sparingly, is a questions and notices section in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century periodical '*De Levende Natuur*' in 1897, where the editors advise a reader that the best work to use when attempting to stuff a bird is that of Montagu Browne, published in 1896. They further state that according to the editors, there is no Dutch work known, that is up to date with taxidermy techniques: 'M.a. de K. at Haarlem, The best work, that deals with the preparing and stuffing of

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<sup>154</sup> Hubrecht, *Handleiding bij het Opsporen en Verzamelen*, voorwoord.

<sup>155</sup> Hubrecht, *Handleiding bij het Opsporen en Verzamelen*, voorwoord.

<sup>156</sup> Ibidem, 57. Freely translated from Dutch: "[...] dat iedere huid van vogel of zoogdier, alsmede ieder skelet, van een stevig etiket voorzien moet worden, waarop de plaats van herkomst van het exemplaar, de datum, waarop het geschoten of gevangen werd, het geslacht en zoo mogelijk de inlandsche benaming met duidelijk leesbaar schrift wordt aangegeven. Zonder deze verliezen alle voorwerpen voor het grooter gedeelte hunne waarde voor de wetenschap. Bij de vogels is het nog van veel waarde de kleur der oogen te kennen, alsmede die van de pooten, van den snavel en van vleezige deelen als lappen, kammen enz. Die nog aande den kop kunnen voorkomen. Daar het meestal niet wel mogelijk is dit alles op het aan te hangen etiket te vermelden doet men wel hierop een nummer. Te plaatsen dat men herhaalt in een geregeld bijhouden journaal, in welk laatste men dan gelegenheid heeft al deze bijzonderheden, datzelfde exemplaar betreffende, meer uitvoerig te vermelden, alsmede waarnemingen omtrent levenswijze enz., zoo dikwijls men tot het maken daarvan gelegenheid vond."

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1 and a discussion on the best firearms to use can be found on page 49.

birds, is: Montagu Browne *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy* (London, Black Sons, 21 sh.). A proper Dutch book about this subject, completely up to date with new techniques, is not known. In appeared periodicals of 'Aviculture' and 'De Natuur' some instructions can be found; with help from Steenhuizen we will give a succinct instruction in the next edition. Merkelbach does deliver all the supplies<sup>158</sup>. In addition to where the soap is available, here is mention of sale of tools. Steenhuizen is mentioned in Holthuis' history of the Rijksmuseum as being a low-level employee and working his way up to taxidermist, so he is a shining example of the craftsman-taxidermist<sup>159</sup>. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century knows some small booklets aimed at amateur collectors of indigenous species, but a publication dedicated solely to the art of taxidermy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century isn't made until the private collector, Dr. C Eykman (1882-1965) writes his manual, simply named '*Taxidermie*' in 1949<sup>160</sup>. He was a veterinarian and amateur-ornithologist who was taught by Paul Louis Steenhuizen, and despite being an amateur-taxidermist himself he explicitly states in his work that these instructions are for scientific taxidermy. Eykman mentions in his preface that instead of mounting animals, for scientific purposes, it is much easier to prepare study skins, but does not mention much on this in his work<sup>161</sup>. He also mentions stores that sell arsenical soap as well as recipes of it, and as by this time the poisonous effects of arsenic are well-known, also mentions a non-poisonous conservation substance (although he admits to not having worked with this)<sup>162</sup>. Like the editors of *De Levende Natuur* he also mentions Steenhuizen as an authority on taxidermy, so apparently Steenhuizen remained so for over 50 years.

### Conclusions

Many of the publications on taxidermy instructions appear to be more or less travel guides for natural specimens (where wear sunscreen and drink water becomes wash with arsenical soap and close boxes or put in liquor). Some of the English publications are clearly artistic handbooks, that take very seriously the posing of the animal and the choosing of positions. The closer we come to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the more these books are both. Dutch taxidermy literature took off with Slabber, an amateur man of science, but also a member of a scientific society. He expresses great enthusiasm in his skill, and is proud of his taxidermy animal objects. In his work he uses many anecdotes and examples in order to make his message come across; taxidermy is an artistic endeavor that should be performed with great consideration. As stated, he is aware of an earlier (unrecovered) publication by Temminck, and regrets that this publication is not publicly circulated. What was described in this publication may never be known, but in the 1824 publication by Temminck proper 19<sup>th</sup>-century taxidermy is instructed. Whether the arsenical soap was described in the first publication is thus unclear, but it certainly was in the second for the first time in Dutch taxidermy literature. Furthermore, there is a great break in description style between Slabber and Temminck. Slabber was not part of a tradition but his take on the craft-instruction can be seen as part of the early-modern technician's approach, whereas Temminck had incorporated the technique of

<sup>158</sup> Vragen en korte mededelingen, de Levende Natuur, Eerste Jaargang, 1897 Amsterdam, pg 136. Redactie Heimans etc. Freely translated from Dutch; "*M. A. de K. te Haarlem, . Het beste werk, dat handelt over het opzetten van vogels is wel: Montagu Browne Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy (London, Black Sons, 21 sh.). Een goed Hollandsch boek er over, geheel op de hoogte van de nieuwere techniek, is ons niet bekend. In verschenen jaargangen van Avicultura en De Natuur valt wel het een en ander op te diepen ; als Steenhuizen ons wil helpen, geven wij in volgende afleveringen een beknopte handleiding. Merkelbach levert wel alle benodigdheden*".

<sup>159</sup> Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 68.

<sup>160</sup> See for an example of such a booklet: Bernink, J.B., Dingeldein, W. H. '*Hoe word ik preparateur? Eenvoudige handleiding voor verzamelende natuurvrienden*', Natura Docet, Denekamp. 1921

<sup>161</sup> Eykman, *Taxidermie*, 8-9. .

<sup>162</sup> Eykman, *Taxidermie*, 11-12.

taxidermy in the scientific zoologist's skillset. This skillset was adopted by Hubrecht, and he uses this in his instructions that are written specifically to the collecting and preparing (at least for travel) of specimen in situ. This means too that he adds instructions on hunting or trapping animals, making the act of killing explicit in writing. Finally, the Dutch word for taxidermy, 'taxidermie' is adopted by Eykman well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Slabber is a man of science and relies on the scientific tradition, but does not refer to his work as 'scientific taxidermy' or taxidermy for scientific purposes like Temminck does. This strengthens the assumptions that somewhere between these publications a breach in mindset towards preparing specimen occurred, or that Slabber is a 'residue' of the early modern tradition.

In general, the writings on taxidermy are indicative of a trend that moves from a 'small' craft, in personal spaces with some people making money off of it, and private collectors being more or less self-taught at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to a slow professionalization through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we see with Slabber, this 19<sup>th</sup>-century professionalization is not a given, but with the rise of natural history museums the art becomes formal, gets more printed instruction and is taught in professional environments; by the museum taxidermists. Furthermore, at the end of the century it is considered more of an art with skilled craftsmen. The 'great' taxidermists are known by name; as we see with Steenhuizen. The pivotal point mentioned in the introduction, with the coinage of the term 'taxidermie', used for scientific preparation of specimen, seems not to have happened in the Netherlands. That is, the term 'taxidermie' is not common until the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands, the Dutch terms 'conserveren', 'prepareren', or 'opzetten' ('to conserve', 'to prepare' and 'to mount' respectively) are more popular and used in scientific and non-scientific context interchangeably<sup>163</sup>. How and when this word came to be in use remains unfortunately unclear. What does seem to be clear though, is that despite the lack of use marking the change, the separation between simply 'stuffing' animals and practicing taxidermy took place 'in between' Slabber and Temminck's efforts at instructing taxidermy. Slabber displays all the features described by Aloï as that of the practitioner of early modern animal preparation, whereas with Temminck taxidermy has found its place within scientific context.

Also interesting is the 'art-dictionary' or 'household-dictionary' mentioned early in this chapter, Slabber often refers to it (as giving unsatisfactory taxidermy instructions). This information on taxidermy being in a sort of encyclopedia/household-manual gives an unusual view on the status of taxidermy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is reminiscent of a book some publications refer to, an American 'Ladies' Art Manual' which also contains instructions on taxidermy, albeit of a much later date, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>164</sup>. We can find hints here of a dual identity of taxidermy, artsy/crafty feminine, within households, as opposed to scientific/masculine, in professional institutes, a change that seems to have appeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Categories like these are never absolute, but with professionalization of science and thus taxidermy, the character of scientific taxidermy has left the 'household-dictionaries' and has moved to proper books written by prominent men of science. Furthermore, it is in a sense a colonial endeavor, it is a technique in part developed in order to teach about nature in nations the Western world owns, controls. Simultaneously, the great abundance of exotic specimen makes that they get used more in household décor and fashion, giving it a more traditionally feminine character. The Ladies' manual of although a comparable work was not available in Dutch.

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<sup>163</sup> The first publication by the title of 'Taxidermie' is by dr. C Eykman in 1949, but early 20<sup>th</sup> century taxidermist Paul Louis Steenhuizen is referred to by this profession,

<sup>164</sup> Anonymous, *Ladies' Manual of Art*.

## Chapter 2

### Taxidermy in Museums

‘In a sense, looking at nature almost becomes secondary to knowing human history: rather than textual description illuminating the animals, the animals now supplement a cultural exegesis.<sup>165</sup>’

#### *Institutes and Styles of Knowing Nature; the Animal-Object Institutionalized*

In addition to the textual representation and interpretation of taxidermy there is of course its physical presentation, placed in its surroundings. These surroundings, both physical and intellectual, may have as much of an effect on the meaning of taxidermy as the written word describing its practice. Taxidermy could end up in household décor or personal collections, but the most interesting in regards to taxidermy’s role is the taxidermy in museum collections and displays, there it was always meant to represent something. These specific physical surroundings, paradoxically, stem from an abstract or intellectual space regarding the museum. ‘The museum’ has a history that dates back centuries, influencing its meaning and weight along the way<sup>166</sup>. The physical museums we will discuss in this chapter were preceded by intellectual ideas and motivations, which led them to be the physical spaces they are and hold the objects they contain. The ideas that shape the museum shape the meaning of the collection as well. What is *meant* to be displayed does not have a one-on-one correlation with what *is* displayed, but it undeniably adds to it. In this chapter the influence of the museum-context on the collection’s and taxidermy object’s meaning will be explored. This will be done through the history of formation of the museum’s physical and intellectual space, and the ‘styles’ of knowledge of nature it performs. The styles of knowing nature a museum adopts can be scientific, religious, educational, colonial, nationalistic, edifying, private/amateur and are not mutually exclusive<sup>167</sup>. These styles will be elaborated on below, but before these categories are established it is important to determine the history of natural history museums in general and the implications of this on the meaning of a natural history museum.

It is generally accepted that modern natural history museums find their origin in the cabinets of curiosities that sprouted in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although they were not quite

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<sup>165</sup> Poliquin, *Matter and Meaning*, 126.

<sup>166</sup> See for its origins, Olmi, Giuseppe, O. Impey, and A. Macgregor. "The Origins of Museums: the cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe." (1985).

<sup>167</sup> The classification of the ways of knowing nature into these styles is inspired but not informed by, the works of Chunglin Kwa and Rachel Poliquin. It is thus largely my own taxonomy. For more on Kwa’s styles of knowing see; Kwa, Chunglin. "De ontdekking van het weten. Een andere geschiedenis van de wetenschap." (2005). For Rachel Poliquin’s ‘cultures of longing’, see: Poliquin, Rachel. *The breathless zoo: Taxidermy and the cultures of longing*. Vol. 1. Penn State Press, 2012.

modern natural history museums, these cabinets did hold a collection which held as a purpose to be shown to visitors. A scholar on museums, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill writes the following on these phenomena: 'By the end of the sixteenth century, collections and 'museums' had become fairly commonplace in Europe. Although these were often substantially different in practice, all had a single objective, that of producing a 'cabinet', a model of 'universal nature made private'. These 'museums' were organized in a variety of ways but, in each, spaces and individual subjects had the function of bringing together a number of material things and arranging them in such a way as to represent or recall either an entire or a partial world picture. These representational systems, these 'museums', emerged over a period of less than a century across a wide geographical and social field. The nature and identity of each system came about through the relationships and interactions of the various constitutive elements.'<sup>168</sup>

Early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century these cabinets were often of a private nature, and the visiting of them held some sort of privilege<sup>169</sup>. Paula Findlen has meticulously described the change of nature of these *Wunderkammers* over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in her famous book 'Possessing Nature', and she finds that the space of museum or library changed gradually from private, silent, to (more) public and conversable. The public in this sense is not that of a current public museum, still invitations were needed and some sort of link to the museum owner. In the Netherlands a very similar museum culture occurred, even though particular collection-owners were often happy to show interested parties their museums, they were unwilling to function as a doorman and wanted to give their visitors a tour of their prized possessions. Thus, in the low countries too, the public museum was very unusual before the 1800s<sup>170</sup>. There were some exceptions to this, in Haarlem both the Teylers Museum and the Holland Society of sciences' museums were more or less public, and even before these late 18<sup>th</sup> century museums some collections were open to non-Latin speaking public in early modern times in Haarlem<sup>171</sup>. A similar motion can be recognized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where many museums were primarily for scholars or acquaintances in the beginning of the century (even though they were called public), and became open to the actual public toward the end of the century, where tickets were sold and opening hours were widely known. On this scholar Lynn Nyhart states that 'science was associated with the civic museum, with an aesthetic of uniformity and with truth', art on the contrary was associated with drama<sup>172</sup>.

From the early premodern foundation of natural history collections, they moved into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where they were still status-symbols, but with the publication of Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* the nature of natural history collections changed fundamentally; the specimens could be type-specimen and hold taxonomical value<sup>173</sup>. Simultaneously the enlightenment initiated the rise of many scientific societies, that often created natural history collections for their own research and prestige. The 18<sup>th</sup> century holds the establishment of the first Dutch 'public' natural history museum, the Teylers Museum in Haarlem in 1778<sup>174</sup>.

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<sup>168</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 78.

<sup>169</sup> Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 99.

<sup>170</sup> Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 8-9.

<sup>171</sup> Driessen, J. (1996) *Tsaar Peter de grote en zijn Amsterdamse vrienden*, 38-39.

<sup>172</sup> Nyhart, *Modern Nature*, 76-77.

<sup>173</sup> Farber, *Taxidermy and Ornithology*, 565.

<sup>174</sup> This museum does not hold any works of taxidermy so has not been considered for this research, however it holds an important milestone-function as the first public natural history museum in the Netherlands and thus is useful when sketching an overview of the museums and their function in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Natural History Museums

As stated above, the first traditional public natural history museum in the Netherlands is the Teylers museum in Haarlem. It was founded in 1778 from a legacy of Pieter Teyler van der Hulst, who died in the same year. He left his collection and capital to a foundation that would establish the museum. This museum was more public than many of the natural history collection already in existence by that time, as it was more open to anybody. Visitors had to go to the concierge of the museum on certain days and he would usually let them visit the museum, in this sense Teylers was ahead of its time<sup>175</sup>. Similar museums or collections were open to the public at this time, but these were relatively short-lived; e.g. the natural history collection of the Holland Society of Sciences in Haarlem (opened in 1772, closed in 1866) and the art and nature cabinet of Stadholder Willem V in The Hague (opened in 1774, closed in 1795). One of the oldest Dutch natural history collections was that of the Zeeuws Genootschap (the scientific society of which Slabbers was a member), its 'Cabinet of Natural Rarities' was established in imitation of that of the Holland Society<sup>176</sup>. The Zeeuws Genootschap was one of the scientific societies that sprouted after the Enlightenment, it was a bit late to the party, but quickly built an impressive collection through its proximity to many international harbors that shipped specimen from foreign countries<sup>177</sup>. Among the organizers of the collection was Slabbers, who had the task of reorganizing the collection before it moved to Middelburg. Through political difficulties the museum in Middelburg never fulfilled its potential, but the Society was housed there until 1888. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century the focus of the Zeeuws Genootschap shifts from naturalia to historical and bibliographical items. This shift even resulted in the refusal of the board of directors to buy Slabber's collection of birds in 1824. Later they did acquire some birds from Amsterdam, but the museum was allegedly unimpressive. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of the specimens had perished or had been moved to other museums<sup>178</sup>.

Around the same time the Zeeuws Genootschap shifted its focus, the National Natural History Museum (Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie) was established in Leiden. In 1820 this museum opened and its collection and at that time it consists of three older collections; the private collection the first director Jacobus Coenraad Temminck, the national natural history cabinet's and the collection of the University of Leiden. This national natural history cabinet's stems from the French period and was never a public museum, but was in impressive collection. In exchange for his collection Temminck gets the position of director with a generous salary. The collection of the national natural history museum thus consisted of a private, a university and a national collection. Temminck's collection dated back to his father who was treasurer of the United East-Indies Company in Amsterdam. The Leiden University collection was the product of the collecting of many prominent university men, but the most important gift was that of King Willem I, who gave the Stadtholderly cabinet's contents to the university. This collection has a complex history of which we've read parts before, with names like Albertus Seba and Th.W. van Lidth de Jeude as its contributors<sup>179</sup>. Finally, the national cabinet of national history collection was much less important, kept and contributed to by C.G.C. Reinwardt as part of the 'Jardin du Roi' in the French period. The

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<sup>175</sup> Information retrieved from the Teylers Museum website on 12-09-2019,

[https://www.teylersmuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/organisation/fag?set\\_language=en](https://www.teylersmuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/organisation/fag?set_language=en)

<sup>176</sup> Zuidervaart, 'Kabinet der Natuurlijke Zeldzaamheden' in Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 156.

<sup>177</sup> The harbor of Middelburg thanked its economically successful status to the United East-Indies company and the West-Indies Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie and West-Indische Compagnie), that through their trading and colonial power needed a strong harbor in the strategic place of Zeeland.

<sup>178</sup> Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 156-171.

<sup>179</sup> More on the complex history of the Stadtholderly cabinet can be found in Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*, 11-14.

Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie was established after thorough consideration and among its first employees were many professional, university-educated men of science<sup>180</sup>.



Figure 4: Front of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie at Leiden, photo taken on 07-05-1882. This building is now the 'Museum voor Oudheden'. On the front it reads 'Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie'<sup>181</sup>.

Despite some of its collection stemming from a private/amateur collection, the *Rijksmuseum* institute was serious in its aim of portraying natural objects as objects within the knowledge-system of natural science. This was a scientific institute that was not open to anyone, and was meant to provide a place for scientific debate and research. Thus, for the greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Rijksmuseum was a space of scientific debate that was accessible by general public only during limited hours, with taxidermy specimens being used in establishing taxonomy science was literally performed in this museum space, for scientific individuals, by scientific individuals<sup>182</sup>. The general public could initially visit the museum on Mondays and Wednesdays from eleven to two, and later every working day from twelve to four in the afternoon<sup>183</sup>. The ideology of knowing nature performed and adopted by the Rijksmuseum is thus classified as being predominantly scientific, although not purely. Despite the museum practicing Temminck's scientific taxidermy and its explicit role as national natural science museum, the origin of large part of their collection had a less clear-cut purpose. With roots in colonial collecting and university museums this collection portrays an educational and colonial style as well.

The zoological garden of Amsterdam, *Artis Natura Magistra* (literally translates as nature instructs art), was founded in 1838 by 'the three W's', G.F. Westerman, J.J. Wijsmuller and J.W.H. Werleman.

<sup>180</sup> E.g. Hermann Schlegel (1804 –1884) and Fredericus Anna Jentink (1844-1913), for more information on this see Holthuis, *Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie*.

<sup>181</sup> Photo retrieved from Leiden City image database, <https://www.erfgoedleiden.nl/collecties/beeldmateriaal> on 25-10-2019.

<sup>182</sup> Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 181.

<sup>183</sup> Ibidem.

Together they bought a small piece of land in Amsterdam to start their zoological garden. From the beginning the founders had the desire to include a natural history collection in their garden. Their collection of alive and mounted animals, their cooperation with Dutch scientific professionals of other institutes, and the publication of the first Dutch zoological journal 'Contributions to Zoology' made Artis a prestigious institute<sup>184</sup>. With its member-based structure, Artis was a pillar of Amsterdam culture, and even national culture. As author Donna Mehos puts it: 'Artis successfully pursued a variety of strategies in this process of national culture building; not only did the zoo directly foster scientific and musical culture, but it also embodied at least one traditional and crucial element of the Dutch national identity – colonial power. At Artis, animals and ethnographic objects provided a vision of colonial nature for the burghers at home in the fatherland.'<sup>185</sup> By looking through the Artis garden and buildings the Amsterdammers (inhabitants of Amsterdam) could experience the 'riches of the nation'. The natural history collection that was located in the main building, was presented as a traditional cabinet. It consisted in part of the specimen members sent to Artis, it actively bought specimen and in 1866 Artis bought the collection of the 'Hollandse Maatschappij der Wetenschappen' (Holland Society of Science) that was in very bad shape. Of this collection a about half was resold to compensate for the costs of acquiring it<sup>186</sup>. With the embodiment of colonialism and nationalism, 'crucial elements' to the Dutch national culture, Artis' style of knowing nature was undeniably colonial. On the one hand Artis had scientific intentions with its collaborations and publications, but displayed its collection in an 'old-fashioned' cabinet-style. Thus, while being useful to science, the predominant style of knowing nature of this institute is not scientific. The member-structure and prestige that was connected to Artis also gave nature here a hint of status, and entertainment. The entertainment-style is affirmed by the origin of the live-collection of Artis; this was of a menagerie, a travelling collection of animals for entertainment of wonder of people in the cities and towns it visited<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>184</sup> Mehos, *Natural History Collections Amsterdam* in Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 189. Dutch title 'Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde'.

<sup>185</sup> Mehos, *Members Only*, 14

<sup>186</sup> Mehos, *Natural History Collections Amsterdam* in Sliggers, *Het Verdwenen Museum*, 200.

<sup>187</sup> Artis had bought a travelling menagerie, that of Cornelis van Aken, in 1838. This menagerie contained many animals that came from colonial countries. Smit, *Aankoop van Aken*, 139-140.





Figure 5: The vestibule of the Zoological Museum Amsterdam, photo dated 1896<sup>188</sup>.



Figure 6: View of the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam from the Plantage Middenlaan, photo dated 1868<sup>189</sup>.

<sup>188</sup> Photo retrieved from the City of Amsterdam Archive image database [https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/start/11?q\\_searchfield=zo%C3%B6logisch+museum](https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/start/11?q_searchfield=zo%C3%B6logisch+museum) on 20-10-2019.

Two smaller collections, of a less national and professional-scientific nature were established around the end of the century in the peripheries of the country. In this time 'Kulturkampf'<sup>190</sup> in Germany caused some trouble for Catholicism, which led to the establishment of a German cloister in Steyl (near Venlo, in the province of Limburg) in 1875. It was the congregation of the Society of the Divine Word and three years after its establishment it started to send fathers on mission to China. During these missions many objects were acquired for the congregation. They stated four purposes with the collecting; to create interest in the mission, to educate their own aspirant missionaries about their destinations, to gift the objects to their own benefactors and to study ethnology within the congregation. Other than the collecting of the fathers and brothers themselves, the collection grew through the acquisition of pieces at local natural specimen vendors and at times the society received natural history specimen as inheritance by parishioners<sup>191</sup>. Unfortunately, there is no inventory of exactly what pieces were bought or inherited, but it is clear that there were acquisitions through the account books and the many catalogues of sellers (with notes on which items to purchase) the museum's archive holds<sup>192</sup>. The space of the museum changed considerably since its beginning, from a space in the old mission home, to sharing a space with the printing press, to its very own museum in 1931. There were brothers appointed, brother Philo and later brother Berchmans, that did the taxidermy of the specimen that were sent to Steyl<sup>193</sup>. Despite this not being a national museum, the missionary work is widely considered to be colonial as well<sup>194</sup>. The style of knowing nature the brothers in Steyl used is in the first place religious, at least in an institutional sense, but can also be classified as educational and colonial. In the museum's goals it was explicitly stated that the collection was built to teach their own brothers about the foreign countries the mission might visit, and create interest in the mission. They created interest by educating, showing, their audience what the mission-countries held in terms of flora, fauna and culture. As to the colonial character, especially the presence of an ethnographic collection affirms the colonial idea; not just the flora and fauna, but everything about this 'new world' is interesting and displayed. It is colonial because that it the origin of the material, these origins were seen as *theirs* to go and establish missionaries. Interesting here is despite the institute being religious, the study of nature was not explicitly referred to as a study of God but some scientific intention is suggested by the instruction-manuals for biological collection distributed among brothers going on mission<sup>195</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> Photo retrieved from the City of Amsterdam Archive image database [https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/sortering/sk\\_datering\\_ASC/start/12?q\\_searchfiel d=zo%C3%B6logisch+museum](https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/sortering/sk_datering_ASC/start/12?q_searchfiel d=zo%C3%B6logisch+museum) on 20-10-2019.

<sup>190</sup> (German: "culture struggle"), the struggle (c. 1871–87) on the part of the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck to subject the Roman Catholic church to state controls. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kulturkampf>, 09-10-2019.

<sup>191</sup> Van Uden, *Aspecten van Missie* in "Kunst met een Missie" (1988), 23.

<sup>192</sup> The museum owns several catalogs of the 'das Naturwissenschaftliche Institut - Naturalien und Lehrmittelhandlung in Halle an der Saale' of Wilhelm Schlüter, that sold all kinds of taxidermy mounts, from late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>193</sup> Van Uden, *Aspecten van Missie* in "Kunst met een Missie" (1988), 20-23.

<sup>194</sup> See for more on this e.g. Andrews, *Christian Missions and Colonial Empires*.

<sup>195</sup> This booklet was titled 'De Kurze Anleitung zum Sammeln zoologischer und botanischer Objecte' and was comprised by brothers of the congregation. It was circulated since 1905. Retrieved from an article in magazine 'Buun', 130. See Gorissen, Adri. "Schmetterlingenbroeder van Steyl". **BUUN**, 10, 2009. Drukkerij Knoops B.V., Venlo.



Figure 7: Advertisement flyer for the Missiemuseum Steyl, upon opening in the new museum building 01-02-1931.<sup>196</sup>

The other smaller museum is found in Denekamp, Twente. Localized in the very east of the Netherlands, this small village got its own natural history museum in 1911. The museum was founded by J.B. Bernink (1878-1954), a schoolteacher who grew up in the region. This schoolteacher Bernink had always had a passion for nature and it is from this passion that he developed the desire to open his own museum. He already had a collection of mounted animals, prepared by himself, most native to the region. With support of some of the great names in life science of these times he founded his natural history museum: 'Natura Docet'<sup>197</sup>, literally, nature teaches. Bernink was later considered a 'popularizer of nature', and the museum can be seen as characteristic to this description. In a small publication on collecting he explicitly states that the collector should use his collection so 'that it is a source of joy and education to many, not egoistically to just the collector'<sup>198</sup>. Aside from a testament to local flora and fauna, the museum later acquired a considerable amount of 'exotic' specimen, was gifted many pieces and most interestingly; was gifted African animal-objects collected on travel by a local prosperous resident. Initially an educational institution, the upper room with the exotic specimen was referred to as a 'curiosity cabinet'. With the aim of the museum being to teach visitors about nature, its style of knowing nature is classified as being primarily educational. This is supported by the approval and help the museum received from the

<sup>196</sup> Freely translated from Dutch: 'Visit the Great Mission-Museum in Steyl. Here one can behold a rich collection of the most different tools from the pagan mission-countries, that give us a clear image of the primitivity of the pagan religions of nature tribes and of the high standing, much admired, oriental art. Exotic animals from all parts of the world. Furthermore, a multicoloured, fantastic butterfly and bug-collection.'

<sup>197</sup> E.g. in the first year of the museum Bernink received gifts from prof. Hugo de Vries, famous botanist at the University of Amsterdam. Groothuis, *100 jaar Natura Docet*, 69.

<sup>198</sup> In 1921 he published a small booklet on preparing small local fauna and flora with his colleague W.H. Dingeldein, titled 'Hoe word ik preparateur? Eenvoudige handleiding voor verzamelende natuurvrienden', by J. B. Bernink and W. H. Dingeldein. 1921, *Natura Docet*, Denekamp. This work is omitted in chapter 1 because of its focus on flora and collecting in the region. Quote freely translated from Dutch: 'dat het verzamelde in goeden staat blijft en velen (niet in egoïsme alleen an den verzamelaar!) tot vreugde en onderrichting zij', *Ibidem*, preface.



great nature-educators in that time, like Eli Heimans, Jac. P. Thijssse and Hugo de Vries and the solemn dedication of the museum's director towards this purpose<sup>199</sup>.



*Figure 7: Picture of schoolteacher Bernink as taxidermist in his atelier<sup>200</sup>.*

### *Conclusions*

Through the held beliefs and mindsets behind these different museums we can draw conclusions regarding the position of the natural history collections they contain. These 'styles of knowing nature' have many forms, as seen above. Who exactly visited the museums remains largely obscure, but several museums were aimed at the local public. We treated the Zeeuws Society's collection that stemmed from the VOC-port and an 18<sup>th</sup>-century enlightenment ideal. The Natural History museum in Leiden aimed to be modern and thoroughly scientific, but its collection has a premodern history. The Leiden ideals hold a formal view of a natural history collection, the collection was seen through its purpose and scientific value. In Artis a colonial view of nature is undeniably present, as well, and connected to, a nationalistic view. This means the natural (history) collection is a means in expressing the power of a nation, what is seen is what is controlled. Artis was a scientific institute as well, it did research and published journals. Here we see that science and colonialism are not necessarily separated by different intentions. The two smaller museums we treated are apparently different from the larger, richer museums in the cities. First off, they are located in small villages. The small museums in small spaces give the museums a less prestigious or professional character, these were not museums led by university-educated men. Their directors were often self-taught in

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<sup>199</sup> Groothuis, *100 jaar Natura Docet*, 37.

<sup>200</sup> Photo provided by Willem Groothuis, from his personal archive, author of *100 jaar Natura Docet* (2011).

natural science and/or taxidermy. Their intentions were quite serious however. As stated above, Missiemuseum Steyl had several intellectual purposes. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the museum got busloads of visitors from other catholic congregations, but this number deteriorated later in the century. The idea of a mission is very similar to that of colony, here too are the 'discovered' areas presented as exotic and the culture and nature of these regions are used as an attraction. Finally, Nature Docet in Denekamp initially held a very proper meaning. To teach local people about local flora and fauna, but along the way turned to a display of 'exotic' nature as well.

All these styles of knowing nature show how institutes can use nature as a tool to teach or preach their specific ideology. Something they all have in common is that they want to teach the public about (their idea of) nature, so in sense they all subscribe to the educational style of knowing nature. While in these institutes the study of nature was an objective to their collection, their collection was used as an illustration of themselves as well. The taxidermy animal-object in this way of seeing it, seizes to be an individual being, or represent an individual specimen, and is within its surroundings part of a world-view. As we have seen, at Artis that world-view would be that of the powerful nation of the Netherlands, and the rich flora and fauna its colonies hold. It would awe the visitor, beholding this diversity of 'owned' nature. In Denekamp more emphasis is laid on the native flora and fauna, it paints in that sense a more modest sense of nature, while it does refer 'our nature', albeit from a different angle. Taxidermy in these collections is necessary to sustain it, and is thus a technique supporting the collection as a whole. The styles of knowing nature can be pressed onto taxidermy as well, within professional scientific institutes, professional scientific taxidermy was practiced. A large part of this was the fabricating of study-skins, but a collection as a whole does not convey a message with study skins, the presence of 'natural' taxidermy is necessary for a display. How these individual objects were created, displayed and interpreted in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Taxidermy through its Material

‘Not only do objects change through their existence, but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected.’<sup>201</sup>

#### *Stories by the localized Animal-Object*

This chapter will explore the natural history collection through its objects. An object within in a collection can through its place there tell us about the collection as a whole, about our perception of the animal, and about the meaning of taxidermy. In the previous chapter we have seen collections connected to the styles of knowing nature of their respective institutes, and with objects we can ask a related question: can a taxidermy object be connected to an ideology, and how would it endorse this? Is the idea of nature of one taxidermy object in a collection, of a whole collection, different in displays that stem from different styles of knowing nature? The approximation of the animal can be influenced by this style of knowing nature as well, but what the animal-object is in these localized environments is influenced by its personal history. It can be an emblematic animal, and extension of the self (trophies), a declaration of male/female nature, a type-specimen, etc. In this research it is assumed that the object is not absolutely in mute in Alberti’s sense. Although stories are accumulated by the object through its environments and shaped by the object’s physical surroundings, as well as the humans in it, there is the story in certain objects that is there inherently. It only needs an audience. In natural history museums this audience is provided by any and every visitor gazing at the animal object.

A taxidermy object is not an inherently natural object, it is an artificial object. It is a representation of nature, almost coincidentally made out of once-alive parts of nature. It has long been considered a perfect representation of nature, when it wasn’t considered as nature itself. This history of meaning attributed to an object, adds meaning to it in itself. The taxidermy object has played a role in establishing the concept ‘nature’, if not as whole then in parts<sup>202</sup>. It may also have played a role in establishing social order, opposite of nature, in human culture<sup>203</sup>. Karen Wonders states in her excellent work on museum diorama displays that ‘naturalistic representation in museum taxidermy became an issue only when the major natural history museums began to take more responsibility for public education, at the turn of the century. Ironically by that time mounted animals were no longer

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<sup>201</sup> Gosden and Marshall, *Cultural biography of Objects*, 3.

<sup>202</sup> Farber, *History of Ornithology*, 562.

<sup>203</sup> Poliquin, *Matter and Meaning*, 126.

of real value in research collections<sup>204</sup> In her work she discusses many of the great taxidermists of the early 20th century, and their interpretation of the natural world in their dioramas. These dioramas were obviously not used to establish type-specimen, but were ways to 'show' the animal in its natural habitat. This way of showing has always been an educational way of story-telling, as good education should entertain and incite wonder. In this way it is reaffirmed that the objects tell stories, at the very least, they tell the public-to-be-educated what they are, what nature is. This connects taxidermy to the traditional function of art, as Wonders puts it, 'that of evoking a sense of aesthetic beauty through the imitation of nature<sup>205</sup>' while at the same time being a crucial technique in the science of zoology, e.g. to have a 'databank' of prepared specimens is still crucial for taxonomic stability for the greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, science education can be considered part of science and the use in this for dioramas is apparent.

The duality of art-science seems to be crucial to the identity of taxidermy. It always holds a combination of knowledge and wonder. This wonder stems from the obvious beauty many taxidermy pieces hold, and from the earlier mentioned unsettling quality taxidermy has. Something once-alive that is appearing (in the case of good taxidermy) still very much alive. This brings us to an often overlooked, but necessary, part of taxidermy; death or killing. The material has to come from somewhere, from a dead animal. In feminist theory the act of killing is often equated to the act of becoming a man (as in male not human)<sup>206</sup>. The presentation of objects that are made from animals that were killed could thus tell us about manhood, or the maker's interpretation of manhood. This could make the object a trophy to that manhood, virility of the hunter, or strength of man. In this way Haraway describes taxidermy as an art that 'fulfils the fatal desire to represent, to be whole'<sup>207</sup>. On portrayal through taxidermy, Nigel Rothfels writes 'the critical point of trophy hunting, as opposed to hunting for the table or even for scientific purposes, is that however much the trophy hunter might like to imagine and portray himself as alone in the bush [...], these hunts are fundamentally about the performance of a spectacle back home.'<sup>208</sup> The animal as performance of self, of the wild nature far abroad, tells a story evidently more complex than 'just' a specimen. This story-telling quality transcends the categories of either art or science, as these can both be included in the object's narrative.

It is for this research purpose ideal when the life and object-life of an animal-object is completely documented, but more often than not its history has gaps. This does not necessarily mean it is impossible to interpret the meaning or narrative of an object. In this research has, where information lacks, the interpretation of the physical object filled in these gaps or added to the narrative. With the many ways of interpreting the taxidermy-object in mind, this chapters aims to explore different taxidermy objects or displays from an individual viewpoint. Through this 'close-up'-research it is possible to explore the identity of taxidermy in an object or display localized, and by doing this sketch the 'range' of taxidermy in the Netherlands.

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<sup>204</sup> Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, 23.

<sup>205</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>206</sup> Haraway, *Teddy bear patriarchy*, 21.

<sup>207</sup> Ibidem., 49.

<sup>208</sup> Rothfels, *Trophies and Taxidermy*, 134.



Figure 8: *Pan paniscus*, Schwarz 1929. Bonobo, Mafuka<sup>209</sup>.

### *Mafuka*

One of the specimens of the Leiden National Natural History Museum, now Naturalis, is a taxidermy object that, when it was alive, was named Mafuka (figure 9)<sup>210</sup>. Mafuka was a bonobo. He was a present to Artis from a rich benefactor from New York, named H.P. Wertheim. Of this benefactor very little is known, he was apparently rich enough to buy a live animal from the jungle. Mafuka was from the Belgian Congo, the benefactor bought him as a baby (figure 10) and send him as a gift to the Amsterdam Zoo, it travelled most likely through the Antwerp Zoo<sup>211</sup>. Who named him and why this name is unknown, but Mafuka is a Congolese or East-African name so it is possible he was named before he travelled to Amsterdam, it of course also possible that the zoo thought it fitting to give him a name from his original country<sup>212</sup>. Mafuka is the first described bonobo in history (he was initially named a small chimpanzee). Ernst Schwarz (1889-1962) published first on the bonobo in 1929 and for this he used the skull in a Belgian colonial museum, so it is unlikely Mafuka was the type-specimen<sup>213</sup>. This skull was initially mislabelled as that of a young chimpanzee, as was Mafuka himself in his life.

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<sup>209</sup> Retrieved from

<https://bioportal.naturalis.nl/result/multimedia/associatedSpecimenReference=ZMA.MAM.5958%40CRS&associatedSpecimenReferenceOperator=EQUALS&logicalOperator=AND&referrer=&from=0> on 22-10-2019.

<sup>210</sup> In references the animal is referred to as; Mafaka, Mafuko, Mafuka, Mafuca, and Fuka. Since they all refer to a bonobo or small chimpanzee at Artis this is assumed to be the same animal.

<sup>211</sup> Reitsma, *Duizend en een verhalen*, 242.

<sup>212</sup> Some references for 'Mafuka' retrieved from <https://jalablog.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/african-congolese-names-or-zairian-names.pdf> on 13-10-2019 and <https://angelsname.com/republic-of-the-congo-name/boy/mafuka>, on 13-10-2019.

<sup>213</sup> Schwarz, *Vorkommen des Schimpansen*, 425-426.





*Figure 9: Mafuka as a very young bonobo<sup>214</sup>.*

Mafuka lived his whole life in the zoo without ever meeting another member of his species. Here he had a caretaker, Mr Houtman, that was apparently very keen on him, and described him as ‘a very clever little boy’<sup>215</sup>. Mafuka became a popular attraction, he was allegedly very sweet and liked to play with his caretaker and children that visited the zoo<sup>216</sup>. Interestingly, the zoo’s expert on apes at the time, Dr. A.F.J. Portielje already suspected Mafuka was a member of a then unknown species. He wrote in the zoo’s annual magazine that Mafuka was ‘probably a new species’<sup>217</sup>. Mafuka the bonobo died in Artis in 1916, where he was known for sitting in a small chair, in front of his enclosure. After his death he was immortalized in that position by the zoo’s taxidermist Paul Louis Steenhuizen (who has been discussed in chapter 1). As shown in figure 11, Steenhuizen used a wooden whole-body frame for Mafuka, so it is possible that its skull was the skull Schwarz used in his publication, but this is purely speculation. Mafuka was thus turned in to an object. He was displayed in the Zoological Museum Amsterdam and subsequently in the Natural History Museum in Leiden, where it is now considered one of their ‘top pieces’. In the zoological garden Artis, Mafuka is remembered through a bronze sculpture, and is even mentioned on the Dutch Wikipedia page for bonobo<sup>218</sup>.

<sup>214</sup> Retrieved from the image-database of the city-archive of Amsterdam on 30-09-2019.  
[https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?q\\_searchfield=mafuku](https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?q_searchfield=mafuku).

<sup>215</sup> Bredasche Courant, 26 April 1923.

<sup>216</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>217</sup> Artis, Jaarboekje 1916.

<sup>218</sup> See <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonobo>, his name is here mentioned as ‘Mafuca’.



Figure 10: Paul Louis Steenhuizen in his taxidermy-atelier at Artis. Photograph also by Paul Louis Steenhuizen, here working on the frame of the bonobo Mafuka<sup>219</sup>.

There are several pictures of an animal described as a chimpanzee with the caretaker that was also Mafuka's caretaker, but since the name is not mentioned it remains not entirely sure of the ape in the pictures is in fact Mafuku. The picture of a Mafuka as a very young animal, above, is in fact the only photograph public mentioning him by name<sup>220</sup>. A picture in which the animal sits on a bench, something that was so typical for Mafuka that he was mounted in this way, in a pose identical to the ape in the bronze sculpture that is in remembrance of Mafuka, makes it quite safe to assume that these pictures are of Mafuka (figure 12). Another indication to this fact is that the majority of these photographs have been taken by Paul Louis Steenhuizen who was also an ardent photographer, known to use his photographs for his taxidermy, and the taxidermist to later prepare Mafuka. It is interesting that if the sculpture was modelled to this picture, the artist decided to remove the bench, giving the animal a more 'natural' pose in the sculpture<sup>221</sup>.

<sup>219</sup> Retrieved from

<https://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/nl/geheugen/view/minimap?coll=ngvn&identifier=NFA08>: on 22-10-2019

<sup>220</sup> His name mentioned there being one of the variations on Mafuka, 'Mafuku'.

<sup>221</sup> Since this is neither taxidermy nor fitting the scope of this paper, this is not further discussed but something could be deduced about an artist's need to manipulate a subject to make it seem more 'natural', when in fact it was human culture that made it less 'natural' in the first place, and it thus less true to the behavior of the actual subject.



*Figure 11: Most likely bonobo Mafuka, picture by Paul Louis Steenhuizen, with his caretaker Mr. Houtman, Mafuka is sitting on a bench<sup>222</sup>.*



*Figure 12: Sculpture of Mafuka by artist Cornelia Smit (ca. 1925), on display at Artis Amsterdam Zoo<sup>223</sup>.*

Mafuka is a quite ambiguous object, it holds scientific significance as the first described bonobo but otherwise it is a very sentimental piece. It could be described as a remembrance to a loved pet; immortalized in his favourite position. The object carries the heavy weight of a member of species isolated, and a cruel story of human interference in nature. Although it can't be established how the

<sup>222</sup> Retrieved from the image-bank of the city-archive of Amsterdam on 22-10-2019.

[https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/start/28?q\\_searchfield=chimpansee](https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail/start/28?q_searchfield=chimpansee)

<sup>223</sup> Photo taken by author on 10-10-2019.

animal felt in life, being separated from any other members of your species as a very young being and put in a zoo makes for a life with limited agency. Without any of this knowledge, the visitor perceives a bonobo sitting unnaturally, anthropomorphically, on a wooden stool (Figure 9). The animal-object seems awkward, its arms hanging in the air, seemingly mid-motion. In no interpretation of the object this animal is conceived 'natural', despite its natural-scientific significance. Since the publication on the species of bonobo was based on a skull, the taxidermy mount of Mafuka holds no real taxonomical value. When it became general knowledge that it is a bonobo, the taxidermy piece can in the museums it was placed in be used in an educational manner; if and how this happened remains unknown. The descriptions the national natural history museum gives of Mafuka, of him having been 'the most popular attraction at the zoo Artis', testify to the notion that more than anything, the mount of Mafuka is a nostalgic piece of taxidermy. It can be argued that perhaps even in his life, despite stemming from the Congolese forest, Mafuka never represented actual nature, but a human adaptation of it. The taxidermy object that parts of his body became, were used to create a souvenir of Mafuka, not a specimen for biological comparison. He was removed from nature before he matured, he was isolated in the zoo, being known to participate in human play, in life he was anthropomorphic. Considering Berger's marginalized animal (see introduction), Mafuka was de epitome of marginalized. He only existed to be looked at, in life and after.

### *The Steyl 'Diorama'*

In Missiemuseum Steyl we find an impressive display of nature. Confusing and overwhelming, the four metres-high case are packed with taxidermy animals (see figure 15 and 16). Assorted by roughly by order, the animal-objects seem to have no organization. As discussed in chapter 2, this museum stems from the missions of the congregation of the Divine Word, and has existed in the exact same shape for over a century<sup>224</sup>. A driving force being this current setup was brother Berchmans, who build the 'diorama' from scrap wood and other leftover materials. This wildly unusual setup houses almost 1500 animal-objects, collected through the congregation's missions and some acquired. Despite the seeming chaos of the 'diorama', some order can be found<sup>225</sup>. Brother Berchmans is inspired by the work of Carl von Hagenbeck, apparently aimed to pioneer showing mounted animals in a 'natural habitat'<sup>226</sup>. In addition to this theoretical background, he had a visual idea as well. The animals are placed in triangles, so that the eye of the visitor is guided to a central point high up in the display. Besides guiding the eye, this setup provides a certain calm in a seemingly overcrowded glass-case<sup>227</sup>.

There are some small dioramas in the Netherlands of native species, the Heimans diorama in the Artis Zoo being one example, but none containing 'exotic' specimen like the one in Steyl does<sup>228</sup>. This Steyl display is not a classical diorama, like those displayed in the great American natural history museums, but is clearly more than just a display case with specimens in it. The wall is made to look

<sup>224</sup> The information on the unchanged state of the display is retrieved from the museum's website: <https://missiemuseumsteyl.nl/museum-2/ontstaan-missiemuseum/> on 23-09-2019.

<sup>225</sup> Retrieved from an article in magazine 'Buun', 133. See Gorissen, Adri. "Schmetterlingenbroeder van Steyl". **BUUN**, 10, 2009. Drukkerij Knoop B.V., Venlo.

<sup>226</sup> Retrieved from an article in magazine 'Buun', 133. See Gorissen, Adri. "Schmetterlingenbroeder van Steyl". **BUUN**, 10, 2009. Drukkerij Knoop B.V., Venlo.

<sup>227</sup> Retrieved from an article in magazine 'Buun', 133. See Gorissen, Adri. "Schmetterlingenbroeder van Steyl". **BUUN**, 10, 2009. Drukkerij Knoop B.V., Venlo.

<sup>228</sup> The Heimans diorama in Artis is a north-sea beach diorama named in honour of Eli Heimans, a great nature-popularizer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, often mentioned together with Jac. P. Thijssse (who worked together in support of the Denekamp museum Natura Docet, mentioned earlier in this thesis).



like rock or other usual 'ground'-material with papier-mâché, the backgrounds are painted. The animals are ordered towards their 'type', herbivores among themselves, larger carnivorous mammals, birds of prey, deer and antelope-like grazers, exotic birds are among these 'categories'. In her work on habitat dioramas Wonders labels this kind of organization 'serial groups', as she describes this type of diorama 'the specimens are displayed in long shallow cases with no interior partitions. [...]. Particular species may be individually framed to create more intimate views, a practice that permits the viewer to see only one group at a time while remaining aware of the larger whole'<sup>229</sup>. This seems to be exactly what brother Berchmans has been describes as doing with his triangle-technique.



Figure 14: Front of the Missiemuseum Steyl, photo taken in 2013 (this is the same building as 1931 museum)<sup>230</sup>

No scientific ordering seems discernible in the diorama, nor any ambition to portray actual nature. Regardless, it is immensely impressive, and with its goal being to create interest for the mission-work, one can only imagine it being successful in that. What the animal is in this fantastic diorama is, is of course, complicated. Being a mission museum, the animal is labelled 'exotic'. The animal is approached as a 'collectable', the cases are stuffed full, and some pieces were bought to make the collection whole<sup>231</sup>. A flyer distributed within the catholic circles describes the Steyl collection and does mention several native birds of prey being included for scientific comparison, this and the pamphlets of instructions on preparation the brothers on mission were given suggest some sort of scientific motivation. The pamphlet is very short but thorough, and that it includes botanical and entomological instructions adds to the notion of a 'whole' collection<sup>232</sup>. With the diorama coming across as an altar of biodiversity, this is not about looking at any one animal so much as looking at a complete collection. The animal is not an alive being with behaviours or natural environments, but an inanimate piece, labelled, fitting in a whole.

<sup>229</sup> Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, 20.

<sup>230</sup> Photo retrieved from Wikimedia Commons,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AOverzicht\\_voorgevel\\_Missiemuseum\\_-\\_Steijl\\_-\\_20354276\\_-\\_RCE.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AOverzicht_voorgevel_Missiemuseum_-_Steijl_-_20354276_-_RCE.jpg), retrieved on 20-10-2019.

<sup>231</sup> Which pieces exactly have been bought has been lost in the records, but the museum's employees know that there have been bought pieces and the museum owns a lot of catalogues of a 'Naturwissenschaftliches lehrmittel-institut' that contains a lot of taxidermy objects.

<sup>232</sup> Pamphlet titled 'Naturhistorische Sammlung des Missionshauses St. Michael, Steyl, Post Kaldenkirchen, Rheinland.', and read when studying the Steyl archive on 10-07-2019.



Figure 13: Diorama in Steyl, side view of the north-side display of the diorama<sup>233</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Photo by author, taken on 10-07-2019.





Figure 14: Diorama in Steyl, side view of the south-side display of the diorama.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Photo by author, taken on 10-07-2019

At Steyl some individual objects catch your eye, for example a hunting scene, a tiger attacking a young cow. This is a sensational piece in a natural history museum. The hunting scene is clearly not taxonomic, it is meant more to display natural behaviour. Steyl has several other 'action' pieces like this, a male and female lion fighting, and a lammergeyer with its prey; a lamb. This piece is different from the two lions in that here the tiger hunts for killing, displaying a brutality of nature perhaps. It is different from the vulture in that here a mammal hunts a mammal, and the tiger is not native to Europe. This scene, set in a display adjacent to the ethnographic section of the museum, seems to suggest some brutality inherent to the 'exotic' lands the missionaries visited. Considering the aims the museum stated itself for its displays (to create interest in the mission, to educate their own aspirant missionaries about their destinations, to gift the objects to their own benefactors and to study ethnology within the congregation), an exciting hunting scene like this tiger attacking a cow seems to fit only in the interest-creating category<sup>235</sup>. The brother adjacent to the final product is brother Berchmans, the curator of the museum, so it can be assumed that the piece is made with their own already collected skins, see figure 17. This makes it a colonial piece in origin, and is interpreted as a hunting piece. The brother is proud enough to pose for the picture with the piece when it is in construction, and might have worked on it himself, this makes it likely to be a very desired piece by the museum. This human desire gives the object an interesting dimension, it was needed for the completion, or step to completion, of the collection. The hunting and killing it portrays holds a desired function in the Missiemuseum, while looking at the display the scene catches your eye in its activity and brutality.

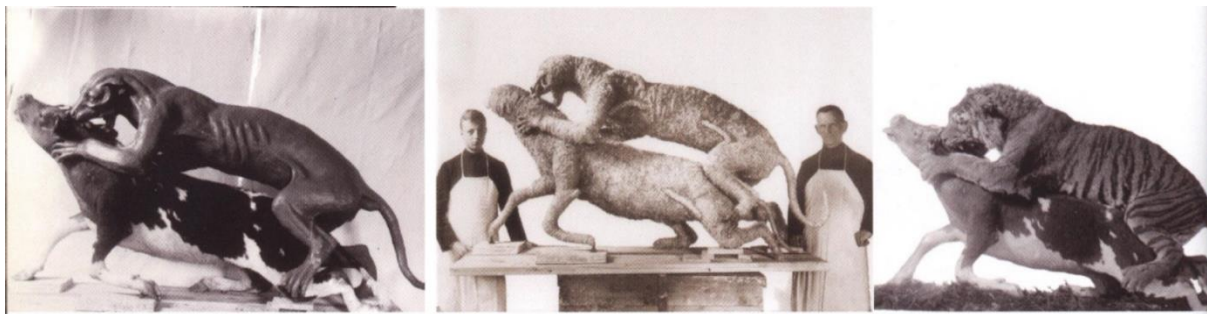


Figure 15:; Three photographs of different stages in the mounting of the tiger and cow, middle one with brother Berchmans on the right of the cast, and unknown man, original caption of photo says 'these photographs show how the mounting at Steyl takes place'<sup>236</sup>

This way of representing animals in taxidermy and dioramas is called a 'narrative group', by Wonders. This is described as 'often depending on the particular mythologies of certain species.', for example the 'survival of the fittest narrative'<sup>237</sup>. This is obviously the case with the tiger and cow, and might be a symbol for the 'fittest' that shot the tiger. Interesting here too is the adaption of a Darwinian narrative in a catholic environment, the 'survival of the fittest' narrative might here be less evolutionary in consequence and more matter-of-fact, the weaker cattle becomes prey to the mighty predator. However, with the collectors and hunters of the mission's specimens not being named, this tiger is not simply a trophy. This is an 'acting' animal, although it now exists to be looked at, it (presumably) did have a life in actual nature. Displayed in an overcrowded display, the hunting scene is at the top, the place expected to catch the visitor's gazes (See figure 18). It is tragic, dramatic representations of nature. Heavily interpreted by its makers to tell this story as compelling

<sup>235</sup> Kunst met een missie, J.G. van Uden, 23.

<sup>236</sup> Retrieved from an article in magazine 'Buun', 126. See Gorissen, Adri. "Schmetterlingenbroeder van Steyl". **BUUN**, 10, 2009. Drukkerij Knoop B.V., Venlo.

<sup>237</sup> Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, 21.



as possible. If this piece was made to teach aspirant-missionaries about the countries they would visit, they would think twice.

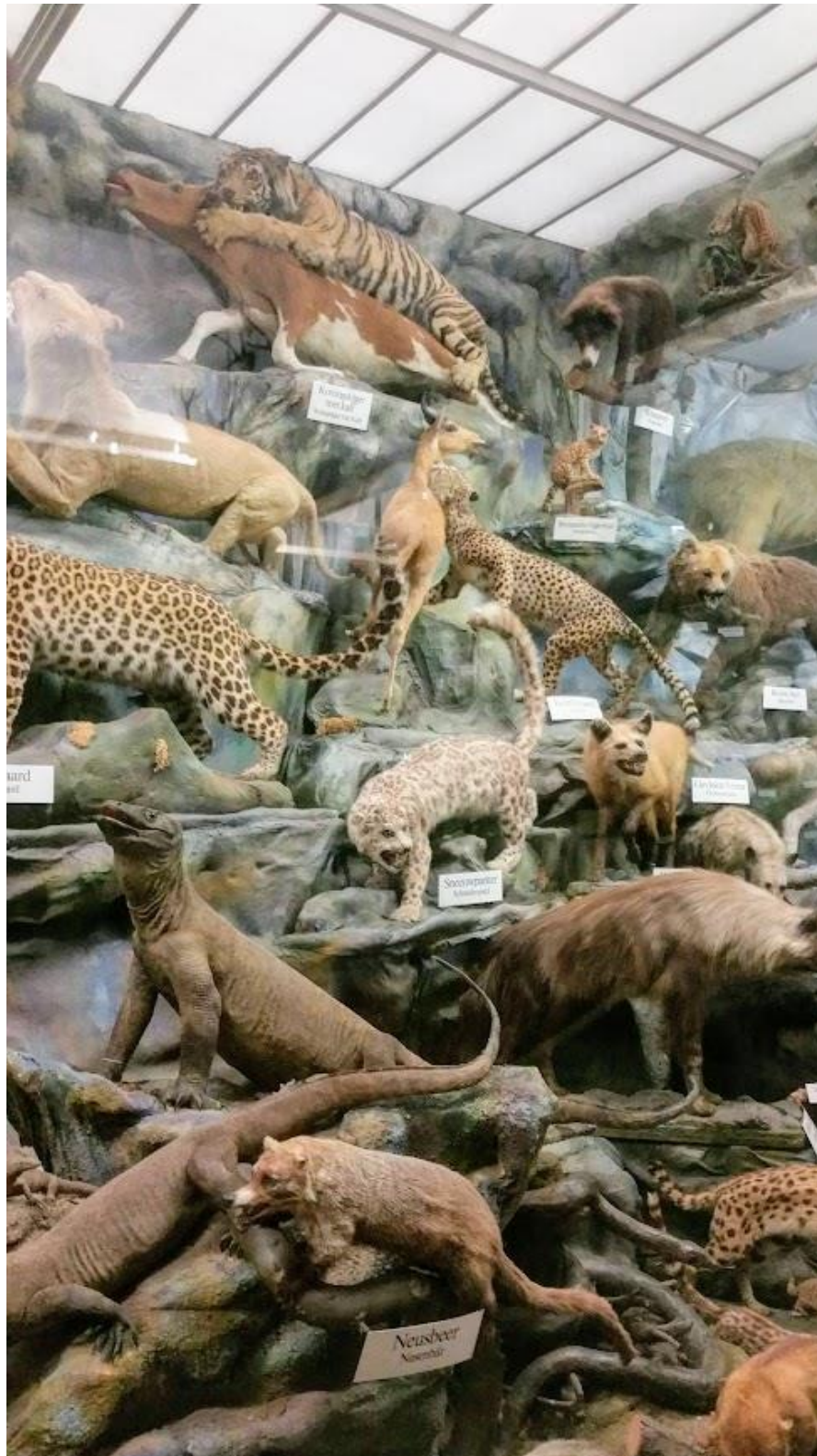


Figure 16: Part of the Steyl-diorama with on the top the tiger-cow hunting mount<sup>238</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Photo by author, taken on 10-07-2019.

### *Trophies and/or specimen*

In the East of the Netherlands, in Denekamp, a display in the museum Natura Docet is dedicated to the travel 'souvenirs' of Mr. W.F.J. Laan and his employee and companion H.A. van Mol (figure 19). These objects were hunted when local prosperous resident Laan went on an adventurous trip through the continent Africa (1923-1924) and shot elephants, among many other animals there, with the specific aim to gift them to the museum. This vividly reminds of the theory on manhood treated by authors like Haraway and Kohlstedt, two young men hunting in Africa, photographing and documenting their journey and having hired local help. This is a very 'standard' early 20<sup>th</sup>-century safari, with elephants being one of the ultimate animals to kill. Laan was a lawyer and lived in a local manor, he was interested in natural history and his companion van Mol was trained in taxidermy for the purpose of this hunting trip. Laan took him with him as companion but also to prepare the animals they would kill to send back. Van Mol was trained by the schoolteacher that founded the museum, schoolteacher Bernink, who was in turn a self-taught taxidermist<sup>239</sup>.



*Figure 17: Laan and van Mol on safari with part of their hunting company. Laan is the blond man on the left facing the camera, Mol is on the right wearing a hat<sup>240</sup>.*

<sup>239</sup> Groothuis, *100 jaar Natura Docet*, 81.

<sup>240</sup> Photo provided by Willem Groothuis, from his personal archive, author of *100 jaar Natura Docet* (2011).

The trip holds a combination of boyish, 19th-century ‘adventure’, hunting and the subsequent ‘manly’ killing. Even some mythology is included, Laan was allegedly charged by a dangerous beast, and van Mol saved him<sup>241</sup>. H. van Mol sadly died of malaria-fever a few years after their travels to Africa, he is buried at Laan’s estate and Laan’s ashes were later scattered over van Mol’s grave<sup>242</sup>. The African objects are displayed in a special case in the museum and some pictures are included there too, this set-up is described by Bernink’s daughter as ‘van Mol’s little shrine<sup>243</sup>’. A little plaque is placed in the Africa display, that says ‘As a remembrance to the late H.A. van Mol this display and its contents were gifted by Mr. W.F.I. Laan’.



Figure 18: Picture of the remembrance-plaque in the Africa display at Natura Docet, Denekamp<sup>244</sup>.

These African objects are not represented without their context, the display holds some photos from the travel-journal van Mol meticulously kept and was published after their arrival home<sup>245</sup>. These photos are reminiscent of those described by Donna Haraway (see figure 21); the hunters are pictured with their prey and weapons, making the depiction very close to death and the act of killing, their pride overtly clear<sup>246</sup>. There are two photographed instances of elephants shot in the travel journal van Mol comprised of their safari, these are in June and in July. Of the elephant shot in June van Mol describes preparing its feet, ‘two are destined to become umbrella holders and two are to become serving trays<sup>247</sup>’. One of these umbrella holders is on display in Natura Docet, see figure 22. The description of the killing of this animal is a lot less silly that the fate of its feet, the stalk and hunt are told as an exciting story:

<sup>241</sup> Retrieved from newspaper article by Harry Wonink, in the ‘Twents zondagsblad bijlage Dagblad van het Oosten’, published Sunday 5 March 1967. No specifications can be found on the beast or other circumstances of this incident.

<sup>242</sup> Retrieved from newspaper article by Harry Wonink, in the ‘Twents zondagsblad bijlage Dagblad van het Oosten’, published Sunday 5 March 1967.

<sup>243</sup> Groothuis, *100 jaar Natura Docet*, 148.

<sup>244</sup> Photo taken by author at Natura Docet, Denekamp on 02-03-2019.

<sup>245</sup> Groothuis, *100 jaar Natura Docet*, 160. The journal was titled ‘Van Khartoem tot Mafeking’ and bound in leather.

<sup>246</sup> Marvin, *Enlived through Memory*, Alberti, *Afterlives of Animals*, 211.

<sup>247</sup> Freely translated from Dutch: ‘twee zijn er bestemd voor een paraplu-standaard en twee voor presenteerbladen’. From the travel journal ‘Van Khartoem tot Mafeking’, 235.



‘Quickly we noticed a new elephant’s trail. We follow this through thick and thin and it brings us in dense overgrown plants and shrubs. Even from far away we can hear him chortle and spraying water. Slowly, step by step, we try to approach him. On less than 10 meters distance he is standing in an overgrown shrubbery. All of a sudden, he turns his head, and for an instance his teeth are visible. Immediately he comes out of the shrub and a loud shot, that Sir gave him, makes him fall down less than 3 meters away from us. Quickly Nassieboe gives him a couple more shots in his head and there he lies, the living locomotive.’<sup>248</sup>

The ‘Sir’ referred to here is Mr. Laan. The other killings were of two elephants, in July, shot from across the river. Of these the tusks were prepared and sent to Denekamp. On these killings van Mol describes Laan’s first shot as ‘a masterly shot, through the binoculars we saw blood coming from a wound near the heart’<sup>249</sup>. Shortly after this another elephant was shot there, and the two men were photographed with their tusks, before sending them to the Netherlands (see figure 21). In the journal van Mol regularly describes preparing birds, often by description (e.g.; small brown bird) and not by its name. He does describe ‘poelepetaten’ by their name, an alternative Dutch name for the Guinea fowl. Of this type of bird at least one is displayed in the Africa-case at Denekamp. While van Mol prepared all the specimen for the journey, at home either Bernink or a taxidermy firm finished the job. Some of their hunting trophies, among them buffalo’s and antelope’s heads, were prepared by Artis’ private taxidermy firm<sup>250</sup>.

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<sup>248</sup> Nassieboe was part of their safari company, a local hunter. Freely translated from Dutch: ‘Al spoedig merkte we een olifantenspoor, Dit wordt gevogld door dik en dun en brengt ons in een dikken lagen plantengroei van heesters enz. Terecht. Reeds op verre afstand hooren wij hem proesten en met water psuiten. Langzaam, voetje voor voetje, probeeren wij hem te naderen. Op geen 10M. Afstand staat hij in een dicht boschje. Hij merkt ons niet en dit deed ons nog roekeloozerworden. Opeens draait hij met zijn kop opzij en zijn tanden waren een oogenblik zichtbaar. Meteen komt hij het boschje uit en een hard schot, dat Mijnheer hem gegeven heeft, doet hem op geen drie meter afstand van ons neerploffen. Nog vlug owrden er door Nassieboe een paar shcoten in zijn kop gegeven en daar light hij nu, de levende locomotief.’ From the travel journal ‘Van Khartoem tot Mafeking’, 233.

<sup>249</sup> From van Mol’s letters to his friend F. V. Asten, bundled and numbered, page I-96. Freely translated from Dutch: ‘Het was een meesterschot, want men zag door den kijker dat het bloed uit een wond vloeiende nabije het hart.’

<sup>250</sup> Groothuis, 100 jaar Natura Docet, 160.

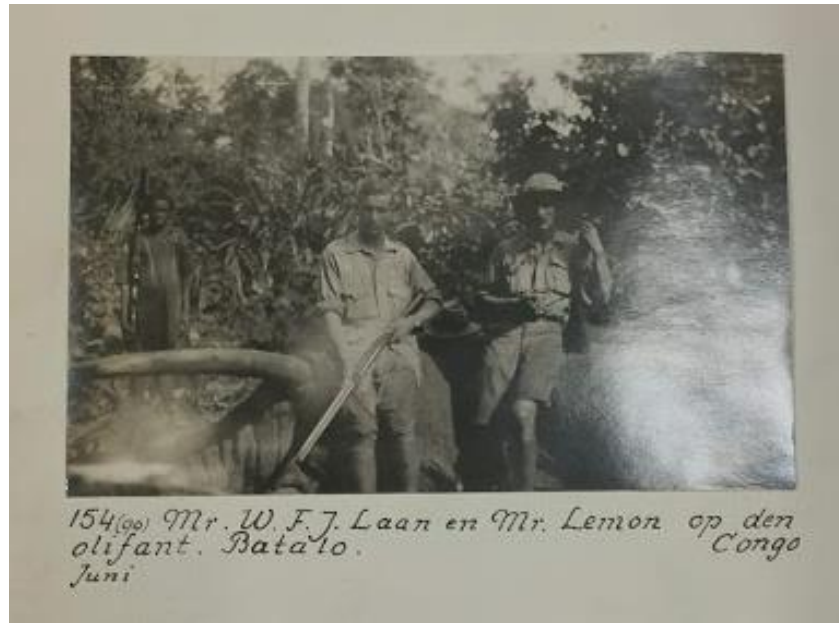


Figure 19; Mr. Laan and a hunter from their company photographed on a killed elephant in June 1924, Congo<sup>251</sup>.



Figure 20: Elephant's foot turned into an umbrella holder, displayed at Natura Docet, Denekamp.

<sup>251</sup>Photo taken by author of the original photograph in the travel journal written by H. van Mol 'Van Khartoem tot Mafeking'.



Figure 21: Elephants' tusks held by Laan and van Mol at Congo side by side with the tusks held by Bernink at the museum<sup>252</sup>.

In the display are many objects that are described as being killed or hunted on the journey. This gives the objects a much more 'acute' sense of death than 'regular' museum taxidermy. These are purposely hunted objects, but hunted with the purpose of sending them to the natural history museum. In the display these objects are 'souvenirs', if not outright trophies. They belong together not taxonomically, or because they are from the same continent, they belong together because they were collected on the same trip by two local men. The narrative they tell is way more about the men that went on an adventure and killed animals than anything about natural science. This is a narrative that is held through pictures, documents and letters, and the visitor only gets to see a fraction of this story. Although these taxidermic pieces are not mounted in a narrative style, but individually, their story might be more telling. However, there are very well mounted birds and other animals that do fit in the 'nature-teaches'-museum Bernink created. They do complete his teachings in providing specimen from Africa and many are mounted in a natural way. One could argue the displaying in context is actually a quite modern way of showing a complete(r) picture of an object's existence, as some current museums have started to do recently<sup>253</sup>.

<sup>252</sup> Photo on the left taken by author, picture of page in the travel journal written by H. van Mol 'Van Khartoem to Mafeking', photo on the right provided by Willem Groothuis, from his personal archive, author of *100 jaar Natura Docet* (2011).

<sup>253</sup> E.g. the 'Tropenmuseum' in Amsterdam has a small exhibition on natural history in which they disclaim that the museum does not always know how they came by certain objects.



Figure 22: Africa display at Natura Docet, Denekamp. Visible here are the trophy heads of various animals, various birds and the elephant foot, among other objects<sup>254</sup>.

## Conclusions

These taxidermy objects in natural history museums with a differing scientific degree, are all obviously more than a taxonomic object. The objects tell stories about their history, usage and role. All animal-object's narratives are ultimately about human actions, and this is most obvious in Natura Docet's Africa pieces. Whereas the Steyl hunting scene was composed as a story, holding a narrative, its 'artificial' story of nature does not compare to the actual hunting adventure two men lived, and that their trophies tell. Although neither of these objects tell a story of nature other than human nature, they do approximate the animal.

No one conclusion can be drawn about the identity of taxidermy in Dutch natural history collections, but this is a conclusion in itself. As diverse as the motivations to make and display taxidermy, are the meanings of the taxidermy object. From 'small' and personal; remembrance of a friend, hunting to prove or establish something about yourself, to 'big' and part of a dream; to create a display of the whole of nature in the institute of your faith, these meanings are all connected to the lives and ideas of humans. With the theories provided to us by authors like Haraway, we could easily compare the Denekamp story to their stories of virility and manhood. Both are stories about men hunting in 'exotic' lands. Similarities are in them photographing the kills, their purpose (established before going on the trip) to use the specimens for a natural history museum and them being able to prepare the specimen on site at least for the journey back home. They also both employed local

<sup>254</sup> Photo provided by Willem Groothuis, from his personal archive, author of *100 jaar Natura Docet* (2011).

hunters and crew for their safari<sup>255</sup>. The writings of Poliquin too offer categories for the 'longings' of taxidermy, and those treated about easily fit into several, but remembrance is of course a very strong match for the taxidermied Mafuka. They also prove that when talking about individual objects and their narratives you can do only that; treat them individually<sup>256</sup>. There is no grand unifying theory of taxidermy as there is none of human motivation or interest. Taxidermy thus becomes a story-telling device, it illustrates the human experience of nature.

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<sup>255</sup> Haraway, *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*, 20-64.

<sup>256</sup> Poliquin's 'cultures of longing' are Wonder, Beauty, Spectacle, Order, Narrative, Allegory and Remembrance. For more on these categories and their meaning see Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo* (2012)



## Final Remarks

The practice of taxidermy is messy, it deals with hands and touch and guts and blood. Out of this mess a clean mount is created by the taxidermist, recognizable in once glance as what it is meant to represent; this or that animal. But as we have discussed before, appearances are deceiving and the practice of taxidermy does not create a simple, clear-cut product. It never is just this or that animal, it is the animal's history, the taxidermist's history, its symbolism and many other factors combined. The history of taxidermy is also quite messy. Practitioners of taxidermy do not abide by the time periods modern historians assigned them, and more than there are clear trends discernable in the development in the practice, there is overlap between these trends. Animals are not just a natural history specimen when they are displayed in a natural history museum, or a hunting trophy when displayed as shot by an adventurer. Furthermore, taxidermy is a prima example for the intertwinement of science and technology.

Taxidermy in the Netherlands has professionalized over the 19th century, but not in the same pace everywhere. Very good taxidermy has been made in the early 19th century and before, and very bad taxidermy at the turn of the century and after. However, there is a trend of professionalization and increasing scientificness discernible, 'the' taxidermists does become a professional artist over the course of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, there are famous taxidermists in the Low Countries and information on the craft in print is abundantly available. In the Dutch writings on taxidermy this is recognizable too, before the 1800s the major source for taxidermy instructions was a 'household-dictionary'. Slabber changed this in 1816 with his pioneer work on the mounting of birds. His style and approach however, were more of an early-modern character than that of a 'modern' 19<sup>th</sup> century scientist. This modern approach was made with Temminck, who with his protocol for preparing natural history museum's specimen set the standard for Dutch museum taxidermy. After his work, Hubrecht, affiliated to the same museum, wrote a pamphlet for practicing zoology in the colonies. He thus made a formalized manual for the practice of taxidermy in situ, and made the hunting and trapping of animals explicit in his work. The word 'taxidermie' in Dutch, for taxidermy, was not adopted in the manuals until Eykman's manual in 1949.

In the 19th century taxidermy played an irreplaceable role in any public national history collection; it provided actual nature to look at. What this nature was, was heavily influenced by the institute's intellectual and physical space, and the accumulated history of their collections. We have encountered institutes that claim scientificness but harbor early-modern or colonial collections, not quite compatible with the so desired scientific objectivity. The history of these collection thus undermines the message of the museum. Smaller museums seem to be more clear-cut in their collections and style of knowing nature, but often stray from their laid-out path along the way of their existence too. With additions from missionary lands, religious institutes portray a colonial mindset, despite having set out to educate. In all these institutes the animal-object exists to represent their nature, is used in a message of conveying the animal. Nature thus used to portray a certain perception of the world is ubiquitous in Dutch natural history museums. The approximated animal is the animal that fits in the museum's style of knowing nature.

Individual histories of taxidermy objects provide valuable insights into the lives and thoughts of the figures that made them, shot them or collected and displayed them. Where they can barely be used to make general claims, they can be used to illustrate the complexities of understanding taxidermy. The main 'body of taxidermy' existent in today's collections stem from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. By exploring the animal-object's stories in this period the museum gains knowledge about itself too. By displaying the objects as part of their complete narrative, the visitors gain this knowledge too. Many

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideals about self and nature do seem pressed onto the museum's collections and individual taxidermy pieces.

It seems evident that many of the natural history museums still deem these 19th century or older objects irreplaceable in their teaching of nature, and a lot of depth could be added to this story by providing even some snippets of the individual object's narratives as well. With postcolonial and feminist critiques on museums on the rise, 'taxidermy has been contextualized as a difficult emblem of political and cultural imperialist pasts' in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the stories of individual taxidermy objects were to be told in full, they could provide a fruitful angle to answer those critiques with nuanced, complex stories that form the full meaning of the natural history objects<sup>257</sup>.

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<sup>257</sup> Quote from Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 18. For critiques see for example two recent articles in the Guardian, Daniel Boffey. 'Belgium comes to terms with 'human zoos' of its colonial past', The Guardian, 16-04-2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/16/belgium-comes-to-terms-with-human-zoos-of-its-colonial-past> and Amy Fleming. 'Why sexist bias in natural history museums really matters', The Guardian, 23-10-2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/shortcuts/2019/oct/23/bad-science-sexist-bias-natural-history-museums-specimens>

## Further research

Some interesting themes have come up during this research that due to feasibility of this master's thesis have not been explored fully. Some of these will be discussed below in order to provide some suggestions for further research, either for the author self or other researchers/students looking to learn more about taxidermy.

The relationship between photography/imagery and taxidermy is very interesting, and could provide a rich research topic. As stated in the introduction, Farber finds that many early natural history illustrations are based on taxidermy object, as there are no live animals of the species available. Montagu Browne, in his famous taxidermy manual, remarks that is entirely unthinkable that taxidermy is replaced by photography, as nothing compares to taxidermy. Kitty Hauser, a modern scholar, is surprised that taxidermy has not altogether been replaced by photography, as taxidermy does require cruelty and destruction of nature. Interestingly, photography of taxidermy is a genre of itself, much practiced by the famous Dutch taxidermist Paul Louis Steenhuizen. There might be some great considerations towards imagining nature in this subject.

The business side of taxidermy in the Netherlands in this period is entirely undiscovered, Delpher provides advertisements very sparingly. But literature suggests the existence of firms, sometimes connected to scientific institutions. English 19<sup>th</sup> century taxidermy manuals sometimes have in their title 'for profit', so this suggests some feasibility in taxidermy as a business venture. Whether this was the case in the Netherlands is thus not quite mapped out. In combination with the lack of anthropomorphic and diorama taxidermy surfacing in the Netherlands over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century this might provide interesting insights in Dutch culture.

The relationship between self-making, manhood and taxidermy has been explored in existing literature, but the 'male' narrative in taxidermy publications and practice could use some more research, especially in Dutch. As could the Dutch museums be studied on this 'male' gaze; not any research has been done in that subject, the Dutch masculine representing of nature. With the lack of dioramas less interpretation is possible in 'grand' narratives, and this might be telling of a more withholding manly culture in the Netherlands, but remains thus far unresearched.

Finally, there is something mysterious about various British 19<sup>th</sup> century taxidermy manuals mentioning the Dutch or the 'Hollanders' being the first to stuff and mount birds. There are some differences in these stories but some do mention a cassowary as being the first stuffed bird, Slabbers also mentioned a stuffed cassowary as one of his works. The cassowary is native to the Moluccas, and from there many prepared birds of paradise came into Europe in the early modern period, way before the practice of taxidermy had stabilized. Perhaps this is a coincidence but there might be something to explore in Dutch-Moluccas trade or practice in taxidermy in the early modern period.

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