

Transoceanic Animals as Spectacle in Early Modern Spain. John Beusterien. Connected Histories in the Early Modern World 2. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 254 pp. €99.

Using case studies of exotic animals put on display, *Transoceanic Animals as Spectacle in Early Modern Spain* by John Beusterien argues for the importance of humanistic studies in understanding animal extinction during the Anthropocene. Focusing on animal spectacles, which the book defines as “human visual representations of animals” (21), the book considers rhinoceroses, elephants, armadillos, bulls, and lions. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, five of these animals were forcibly transported to Spanish cities, where they were exhibited as captive wonders, preserved specimens, or blood sport participants. Referencing a wide array of early modern plays, poems, and art, the book argues that “humans in the early modern period set precedents for a future that undermined the sustainability of the living planet” (16).

Biogeography is a key concept in *Transoceanic Animals as Spectacle*. For scholars working in ecology or biology, biogeography is the study of the distribution of animal or plant species across different geographical regions, typically to examine how environment or human intervention shaped that distribution. In contrast, *Transoceanic Animals as Spectacle* models a type of biogeography that is highly individuated. As the book makes clear in its pedagogical appendices, a key step in its approach to biogeography is to “create a proper name for an unnamed animal” (237). Most of the animals in the book are assigned invented names related to toponyms from their birthplace or contemporary associations, although Fuleco the armadillo from sixteenth-century Brazil is named after the mascot for the 2014 FIFA World Cup games. In so doing, the book implicitly defends anthropomorphization and fabrication as strategies for studying nonhuman beings.

Transoceanic Animals as Spectacles considers animals displayed in early modern Spain who were born in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The book’s first chapter focuses on a theatrical enclosure in a Madrid hospital as a zoo-like space in which Philip II briefly placed an elephant and a rhinoceros from Mughal India. Following the scholarship of Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, the book tracks these two animals as they were moved across Europe as captive gifts between rulers. The book’s second chapter centers on the preserved body of a Brazilian armadillo held in a private Seville collection and the possible reactions of people who either viewed that body or a representation of that body. The third chapter discusses how seventeenth-century poets and playwrights commemorated a staged fight between a Spanish bull and a North African lion in 1631. A key recurring touchstone throughout the book is Albrecht Dürer’s 1515 depiction of a rhinoceros, bristling with martial and imperial connotations, which the book argues had an outsized influence on how subsequent exotic animals in early modern Spain were understood.

Joining scholarship by Erica Fudge and Peter Sahlin on the cultural history of animals in early modern Europe, *Transoceanic Animals as Spectacles* offers an example of how to read across many literary and artistic genres to analyze the histories of nonhuman beings. Scholars of European art history will value the book's careful study of the transmission of animal iconography in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish visual culture. Historians of human-animal interactions will appreciate the book's contributions to the field in the early modern period. By touching on non-European contexts, the book invites scholars to consider further the paradoxical relationship between theatrical display and violent erasure in early modern cities containing animal collections outside of Europe, such as Tenochtitlan or Agra. University professors intrigued by the book's methodology will be interested in the appendixes, which offer a sample assignment for teaching biogeography in undergraduate humanities courses.

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Early Modern Sovereignities: Theory and Practice of a Burgeoning Concept in the Netherlands. Erik De Bom, Randall Lesaffer, and Werner Thomas, eds. Legal History Library 47. Leiden: Brill, 2021. x + 310 pp. €141.

In 2014, a group of scholars organizing a conference on early modern sovereignties sought papers examining the influence of Spanish Scholastics' theoretical views about sovereignty on the politics of the early modern Low Countries. I know nothing about the submissions they received, their experiences at the 2015 conference, or the editorial process that culminated in the final volume. Whatever the case, the results seem to have abandoned the effort to examine how political theory influenced politics. In fact, members of the Salamanca School only appear in Gustaaf van Nifterik's essay, which compares two Spanish Scholastics' ideas about state power to those of Hugo Grotius. The other essays in this fascinating and useful volume underline that early modern political theories in the Low Countries tended to be reactive expressions developed as justifications for actions, decisions, and strategies that were driven by contingent military and diplomatic purposes. That is, when it came to ideas about sovereignty, practice often drove theory, and not the other way around.

Bram De Ridder's essay (which appears fourth) offers an intellectual framework that nicely encompasses the volume overall. De Ridder argues for the usefulness of understanding sovereignty not as a theoretical concept but as a type of political argumentation used to claim control over territory. As he explains through a study of treatises signed between 1576 and 1664, notions of sovereignty evolved willy-nilly with the military and diplomatic vicissitudes surrounding struggles over territory in the Eighty Years' War.