

The Presentation of Mammals in early printed book illustrations

Introduction

In this presentation, the presentation of mammals in early printed book illustrations will be discussed in detail. Four images from four different early printed books will be analysed and compared with one another.

Image One



Firstly, Image one from Perrault Claude's 1688 book '*Memoir's for a Natural History*', is a copperplate engraving of both anatomical elements and a full-body depiction of a cat-a-mountain, which is a broad term for mountain cats. The process of copperplate engraving is where the image is carved into the copper plate, and then ink is poured inside the grooves of the plate and then printed onto the desired canvas (Germanprints 2013). This process is also an Intaglio technique. The top image showcases internal organs such as the spleen; kidneys; bladder and the brain (Thomas et al 1688), whilst the bottom shows the specific mammal in its supposed 'natural habitat'. An interesting thing to note here is the slight anthropomorphism of the cat-a-mountain, this can especially be seen in the face. It is noted that all of the animals throughout this book were dissected at the Royal Academy of Science, Paris (Thomas et al 1688 which showcases why the immense level of detail in there.

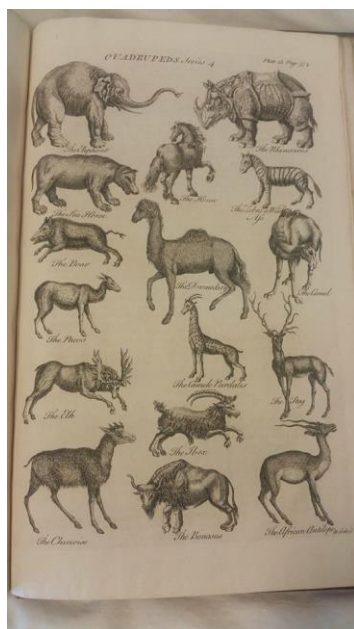


Image Two

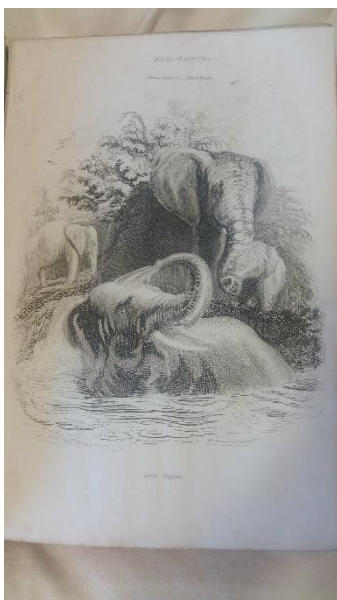
The next image was collected from John Hill's 1752 work of '*An History of Animals*', and showcases a large range of different mammals ranging depictions of elks and stage to elephants and camels. Again, this illustration is a copperplate engraving, and it is more than likely that this would have been one large print rather than indivual ones of each mammal. Although Hill's illustrations were created more than 60 years later than Perrault Claude's, the resemblance in the way these illustrations are drawn is uncanny. Not only are all of the animals depicted in a profile view, but they also share a similar stance. One thing to note is that Hill's depiction of the dromedary seen in the centre of this engraving is almost identical to Claude's illustration of a dromedary.



Image Three

The third image is a coloured, woodcut illustration of a fox from Thomas Pennants '*British Zoology*', published in 1766. This particular books is the largest out of all the books discussed, and is the only image that contains colour. Pennant was noted as being a naturalist, and would probably explain the stance in which this mammal is in. The fox is clearly in a vicious stance towards an unknown force, perhaps another animal or a human. The fact that this woodcut illustration is in colour immediately sets it out from the rest of the images, and there is also a considerable amount of true likeness to it.

Image Four



The final image in this presentation is a wood-cut engraved illustration of two adult and two baby Indian elephants from Georges Cuvier's *'Cuvier's Animal Kingdom: arranged according to its organisation'*, printed in 1840. Similar to a copperplate engraved illustration, woodcut engraving is another intaglio technique that involves the illustration being cut into the end of a piece of wood and then printed (Tate n.d). The elephants are portrayed in their natural environment, similar to Images one and three. It can be argued that the depiction of these mammals is the most accurate and showcases a greater artistic ability that could perhaps be more advanced than all of the images that have been looked at.

Connecting the images

Natural History

The notion of natural science is an aspect that is important to discuss here in relation to all of these images. Natural science is the study of the 'natural world', mostly animals and plants, and can be said to have traces to Greco-Roman thinkers such as Aristotle. Some of Aristotle's work focusing on the natural world includes 'history of animals' and 'animal locomotion' (Bluenile, n.d). Natural science took place as a discipline through the Renaissance and into the 17th and 18th century, showing the want and need for a scientific approach to mammals in the 16th – 18th century. For the majority of people living in this period, the animals that are depicted in these books would have been 'exotic' and would have never been seen before. So, these early printed books would have been a source of learning for these people. However, this leads onto the notion of accuracy in relation to the images that have been discussed in this presentation.

Accuracy

Another theme which provides a connection with all of the images is the notion of accuracy. When looking at the difference between image one and image four, there is a clear indication of how the level of artistic accuracy has developed for the better. The cat-a-mountain in image one, as stated previously, has a very human-like face, whereas the elephant possesses more typical features of the animal.

Conclusion

To conclude this presentation, showcasing natural history is something of great importance to share with the world. Claude, Hill, Pennant and Cuvier all present mammals and other creatures in their own way through the use of copperplate and woodblock printing, and although the level of accuracy and artistry varies.

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