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“Better Than Seeing Fairy Tales:” Contextualizing Curation in the Iberian Atlantic

by

Tim Betz

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

Lehigh University

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Thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in the Department of History.

"Better Than Seeing Fairy Tales:" Contextualizing Curation in the Iberian Atlantic
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Abstract

This paper asserts that the Spanish Monarchy displayed curiosities from the New World as a way of asserting global supremacy. Curiosity collecting, the formation of private and public collections, and the creation of catalogs and descriptions of exotic wonders were important operative functions of the Empire from the discovery of the New World in the fifteenth century by the Habsburgs through the end of the eighteenth century under the Bourbons. An early modern fascination with collecting and display affected the ways the Spanish Empire presented itself in the context of the wider world into the eighteenth century. This study also suggests an alternate stream from which the Spanish Enlightenment would flow, suggesting that there was a trajectory between imperial ethnographic collecting in the sixteenth century and the collection and display of natural history specimens in the eighteenth. The Spanish Empire curated its global imperium through the reigns of two separate imperial dynasties, the Habsburgs and the Bourbons. Indeed, the Spanish Empire was significantly more than God, Gold, and Guns—it was an Empire of Curatorship and Display.

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"I saw the things which had been brought to the King from the new land of gold…all the days of my life I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart as much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art, and I marveled at the subtle *ingenia* of men in foreign lands," noted an awestruck Albrecht Dürer in 1520 upon seeing a touring exhibit of golden objects that Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés sent to King Charles V. Dürer, perhaps the most disciplined observer of his time, exclaimed that seeing the glint of Mexico was "so much better than seeing fairy tales."[1] The display tangibly placed the New World before the eyes of the Old and proved the existence of lands previously unknown to Christian Europe. The Spanish Crown's early desire to collect and exhibit its transatlantic empire created a visual vocabulary that claimed (and reclaimed) colonial possessions through the end of the eighteenth century.

The Spanish Empire was held together with glue made of equal parts colonialism and display. To display the New World was to claim sovereignty over it. Curiosity collecting, the formation of private and public collections, and the creation of catalogs and descriptions of exotic wonders were important operative functions of the Empire from the discovery of the New World in the fifteenth century through the end of the eighteenth. Science powered the Iberian Atlantic world. This paper asserts that an understanding of Iberian science is not complete without phenomena such as curiosity collecting and museum display. The imperial collecting policies of the Hapsburgs was a direct precursor to the scientific advancements of the eighteenth century, Bourbon era imperial policy, and the formation of the Spanish national museum—the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural— which were all intertwined in the knot of the projection of imperial

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[1] Albercht Dürer, *Albrecht Durer: Diary of His Journey in the Netherlands, 1520-1521*, intro by J.A. Goris (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, Ltd, 1971), 53-54. Durer witnessed the collection in Brussels, where Charles V was serving in his capacity as Holy Roman Emperor.

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power. All are facts neglected by the current literature. This paper asserts that an early modern fascination with collecting and display affected the ways that the Spanish Empire presented itself in the context of the wider world into the eighteenth century. Furthermore, it suggests an alternate stream from which the Spanish Enlightenment would flow, asserting that a trajectory existed between the ethnographic collecting of the sixteenth century and the collection and display of natural history specimens in the eighteenth. In a literal sense, the Spanish Empire curated its global imperium through the reigns of two separate imperial dynasties, the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons. Moreover, this paper suggests that the newly installed Bourbon Crown used established imperial tactics, rather than scientific advancement and reform, to strengthen its hold on its vast empire.

By curating a series of pertinent primary sources I hope to demonstrate the ways in which the Empire distilled the world around it. I seek not to provide a sole explanation for science, curiosity, collecting, and museum display in the Spanish Empire. Rather, I seek to present a thoughtfully curated analysis of a way in which the monarchy established its empire throughout the colonial period. The Spanish Empire was significantly more than God, Gold, and Guns—it was an Empire of Curatorship and Display.

A Culture of Display

Seeing was believing. When Dürer exclaimed that witnessing the objects that Cortés sent the king was "so much better than seeing fairy tales,"[2] he was expressing the

[2] Albrecht Durer, *Albrecht Durer: Diary of His Journey in the Netherlands, 1520-1521*, 53-54. Fairy tales had a complex meaning in the early modern period that combined reality and fantasy, see Kathryn A. Hoffmann, "Of Monkey Girls and a Hog-Faced Gentlewoman: Marvel in Fairy Tales, Fairgrounds, and Cabinets of Curiosities," *Marvels and Tales* 19, no. 1 (2005), 67-85. Hoffman notes that marvel was an

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gravity of viewing actual tokens of a newly contacted (and soon to be subjugated) civilization. The “fairy tales” Dürer witnessed did not materialize magically into the view of unsuspecting European eyes. Instead, the display was the physical culmination of debate about the fringes of the known world. Rather than being theoretical and imagined, Dürer's objects were visual proof of the margins and of the extent of empire.

A culture of display was long a part of the ways in which Europeans deciphered the world in which they lived. Pierre Alain Mariaux notes that collections in the pre-modern world germinated in church treasuries. Objects became part of such a collection when a collector deliberately curated them and they fell out of an economic market.[3] However, collections were not strictly ecclesiastical. Throughout the early modern period, private collections were an important tool that elites leveraged for personal gain and prestige. Notables such as Jean de Berry, King Louis XI, and Cosimo de Medici built their official public collections on the tripartite foundation of a desire to study the natural world, a fascination with the miraculous and the wondrous, and a desire to collect the works of the ancients as well as contemporary marvels.[4] Often, these collections (which

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important underpinning that dominated early modern culture. “The marvel that built hundreds of fairy tales in early modern Europe also fed court tastes in collection and display, made fairground display of people with corporeal anomalies profitable, put mermaids into medical treatises, and posed stuffed basilisks and dragons on the shelves of early museums,” 66-7.

[3]Pierre Alain Mariaux, “Collecting (and Display),” in Conrad Rudolph, ed. *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*. (Hoboken:Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 214-6. Mariaux notes that Church treasuries were divided up in different categories: *ornamenta (ornamentum)* were objects meant to decorate a church, *apparata (*or *ministerium*) were objects needed for liturgical ritual, and *regalia*, which were liturgical outfits, as well as relics and other precious objects. The result was a varied collection containing objects of religious and practical function which often were imbibed with an element of wonder or marvel, see 216.

[4] Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion.* (Princeton: Pinceton University Press, 1994), 171-3. One cannot help but be reminded of the Medici family, the de facto rulers of the Florentine Republic. Among the collection of Lorenzo *il Magnifico* were ancient wonders as well as the art of his contemporaries (such as Sandro Botticelli and Michelangelo), whom he ravenously cultivated and collected. Such a vast collection became a meeting place for Florentine intellectuals and one of the great think tanks of the Italian Renaissance.

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were traditionally called *Wunderkammern* or rooms of wonder)[5] contained a large variety of objects, demonstrating the power, prestige, and cosmopolitanism of their owner.[6] Amassing collections was “a calculated exercise in image management,” that created a vocabulary that the nobility could employ to visually establish control over a vast domain.[7] Likewise, *Wunderkammer* owners desired to illustrate the world in its full completion in order to be both an object of contemplation and fascination for visitors.[8] Objects that were part of such collections cannot be understood as separated from the rest of the collection. Rather, collectors formed narratives through the display of the entirety of the collection.[9]

While scholars have studied the complexities of collecting throughout the Spanish empire, they have narrowly focused on collecting for scientific knowledge, such as botanical expeditions to find usable and valuable plants such as cinnamon and quinine. While many of the objects in Spain’s Early Modern collections (such as what Dürer witnessed in Brussels) had great value, they became emblems of power instead of commodities themselves.[10] As Marjorie Swann explains, curiosities were

> “valuable insofar as they were amazingly anomalous. Natural objects were considered ‘wonderful’ if they were rare, exotic, or remarkable in form (usually large, small, grotesque, or beautiful): its large beak made the Brazilian

[55] Wunderkammern were particularly popular among the aristocracy of Germany and Bavaria throughout the early modern period and the Enlightenment.
[66] Jan C. Westerhoff, “A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the Polyhistor, and the Early Modern Wunderkammer,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 no.4 (Oct 2001), 633-650.
[7]Marjorie Swann, *The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 20.
[8]Stefanie Gänger, “The Many Natures of Antiquities: Ana María Centeno and Her Cabinet of Curiosities, Peru, ca. 1832-1874,” in Philip J. Kohl, Irina Podgorny, and Stefanie Gänger *The Making of Archaeology in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 115.
[9]Daniela Bleichmar, “Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections,” in Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall, eds. *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 16.
[10]Carina L. Johnson, “Aztec Regalia and the Reformation of Display,” in Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall, eds. *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, 87.

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> toucan a 'wonder'; the bird of paradise from New Guinea was deemed 'marvelous' on account of its plumage, the dodo was 'wonderful' because it was a flightless bird. Human artifacts were likewise esteemed as 'wonders' if they were particularly rare, ingenious, or fashioned from natural objects in unusual ways: featherwork, tobacco pipes, kayaks, and snowshoes from the New World were much prized, as were examples of Chinese porcelain and Turkish damascened metalwork…the ability to command wonder had social and political value in early modern Europe."[11]

Early modern collecting was a mechanism for harnessing and mastering the wondrous by removing exotic objects from their context and placing it into an understood framework and location.[12]

Examples of first hand encounter and depiction in the mid-sixteenth century should be seen as the product of "a culture of the marvelous" engrained in the Early Modern brain as the expected norm. The known world—that of Christian Europe, existed at the center and the unknown—the pagan, the monstrous—existed on the margins. Distant but still able to be understood and explored, a subject of wonder and marvel. Europeans encountering the New World brought with them centuries of cultural baggage surrounding the conceptualizations of wonder and curiosity.[13] One of the earliest

[11]Ibid., 25.

[12] Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, 34.

[13]For an in depth (and marvelous) study of the impact of wonder on colonial expansion, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). In my definition of the wonderful and the marvelous I am following Greenblat who noted that "In the Middle Ages, Jacques Le Goff has observed, there are endless references in both popular and learned writing to 'marvels' *(mirabilia)* but little or no discussion of 'the marvelous' as a category [Jacques Le Groff, *L'Imaginaire medieval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 18ff.]. Le Goff argues that this is because there is something disturbing to the dominant ideology about marvels, something unpredictable and alien, as if the proliferation of wonders bespoke a tacit, unorganized, but tenacious resistance to the Christian orthodoxy, an atavistic survival of the old pagan marvels and the belief in a plurality of spiritual forces. Gradually, through the concept of the miraculous, supernatural and strictly Christian elements are separated out: in the Christian marvelous, there is only one author, one source of all spiritual power. Thus the Church was able to make predictable, to legitimate, and to colonize some of the old marvels, while at the same time pushing what remained toward the realm of magic. Le Goff suggests that in the later Middle Ages there were other

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examples of this phenomenon is in the writings of the Ancient Roman Pliny the Elder, who wrote of bizarre half-human monsters from the far corners of the world. These include the Blemmyae (men who had faces in the center of their chests), dog faced men, Anthropophagi (cannibals), and the men without shadows.[14] *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, recounted voyages of the fictional Sir John Mandeville to the Holy Land and beyond, including all the odd races and customs encountered along the way.[15] The result is a fictitious account of vivid descriptions of monstrous races, outlandish customs, and exotic locales.[16] Pliny and Mandeville are only a small sampling of a vast corpus of literature that explores a theoretical first contact with a new world.[17] The outsiders found in these worlds were always placed on the opposite end of the teeter-totter from where a European readers saw themselves—neither Christian or European, they were uncivilized wonders on the fringe.

This cultural phenomenon continued after contact and is evident in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, first performed in 1611 at London's Globe Theater. The play is set on an island where a sorcerer has enslaved a half-man named Caliban (who serves as a theatrical stand-in for indigenous Americans). In the opening monologue of Act V, Miranda, the sorcerer's daughter, gapes in awe at the world before her, exclaiming, "Oh wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave

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strategies for containing marvels, including what he calls its 'aestheticization'," 155-156. Highlighted area not clear…

[14]Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*. John Bostock and Henry T. Riley, eds. and trans. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1855).

[15]Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1954).

[16]Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57-8

[17]Richard G. Cole, "Sixteenth-Century Travel Books as a Source of European Attitudes Towards Non-White and Non-Western Culture." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116, no. 1 (1972), 20.

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new world that has such people in't."[18] Miranda's soliloquy, which stemmed from the notion of Early Modern marvel at the unknowable, was a honed societal tradition percolated in the fabric of European culture. Wonder and marvel were commonplace in the Early Modern mind, which was both in awe of the fantastical and terrified of the potential of the known to spin out of control into the monstrous, plunging comfortable reality into unfixable chaos.[19]

As a result, examples of strange peoples and monsters were always located elsewhere. Throughout literature, they never invade the sphere of normalcy or infringe upon Western notions of order. Rather, they are on the fringe, documentable, but a first-hand encounter was implausible. Therefore, they were safe to explore. [20] However, the contact between Europe and the New World at the end of the fifteenth century tore down this conceptualization. The fringe became accessible. The well-defined boundary of the known and the unknown, the center and the margin, the known world broke apart.

Europeans living on the continent received their chance to encounter actual peoples from the New World early in the sixteenth century. In perhaps one of the most bizarre examples of Europe's encounters with Americans, Cortés sent a large delegation of Mexica[21] performers to the court of Charles V in 1528. Though part of a larger trickle of indigenous visitors to the Old World, the 1528 group proved to be the largest and the

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[18] Shakespeare, *The Tempest* act 5, sc.1 , 203-205.
[19]John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[20]Walter Mignolo, "Crossing Gazes and the Silence of the 'Indians' in Theodor de Bry and Guaman Poma de Ayala," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 41, no. 1(2011),174.
[21] I have elected to use the terms Mexica and Nahua to describe the people that Cortés encountered in the Basin of Mexico. The term Aztec is a constructed term that emerged in the nineteenth century. Mexica refers to the political entity that formed the Triple Alliance. Nahua refers to the larger ethnic group of speakers of Nahuatl who made up the Mexica but were not exclusively Mexica.

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most memorable. Among their number was a team of *ullamaliztli* ball players,[22] dwarfs, dancers, and jugglers who toured Europe before performing for the monarch in Valladolid in the summer of that same year. The troupe made a lasting impression at court and performed before various notables (including Pope Clement VII during a brief stint in Rome). Like the objects that Cortés shipped back to the king from the new land of gold, the people became an object to be viewed and studied—less actual individuals than an exotic token of a newly discovered world.[23]

The traveling Americans spawned a trend of European theatrical mimicry throughout the 1530s.[24] As the colonial theorist Homi Bhabha has argued, the performance of race reduces the colonized culture to the fetishized outsider.[25] In a European performance of an outsider, cultural differences are magnified, throwing dissimilarities into the light. The unknown becomes definable within a known worldview. Through the performative act, the human similarity of the Amerindian was wiped away. The oddities were highlighted and exaggerated.

An operative force in the courts of pre-contact Europe, an established culture of display, curiosity, and wonder, provided a vocabulary that the Spanish Crown would employ to claim control over their newly acquired colonial domains throughout the

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[22] The ball players were depicted in a series of drawings by Christoph Weiditz in 1528 when they were at the court of Charles V. Weiditz created drawings of much of the shipment of Mexica that Cortés sent to the court. For more information, see Jean Michel Massing, “Early European Images of America: The Ethnographic Approach.” In *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, Jay Levenson, ed., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991): 515-520

[23] For more on contextualizing the bodies of the colonized, particularly through art, see Ann Rosalind Jones, “Ethnographer’s sketch, sensational engraving, full-length portrait: print genres for Spanish America in Girolamo Benzoni, the De Brys, and Cesare Vecellio,” *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Print Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011), 137-17., Peter Schrag, *The European Mind and the Discovery of the New World* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965).

[24]Max Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 176. An excellent example of theatrical mimicry of the time can be found in George Chapman’s 1613 *Memorable Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln’s Inn,* which prominently featured Native Americans. Their costume can be seen in a costume design drawing executed by court artist Inigo Jones that same year.

[25]Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *October* 28 (1984), 131.

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colonial period. Through first viewing and then mimicking, Europeans were able to take unknown and exotic customs and peoples from outside of the fringes of their knowledge and place them squarely into a Euro-centric framework of control and colonialism. The close proximity of indigenous peoples in the courts of Europe, followed by the duplication of those people in performance, provided a safe discourse for Old Worlders to understand and claim control over the growing expanses of the world around them.

"From the New Land of Gold": Displaying the Conquest

After arriving in Tenochtitlan in 1519, Hernán Cortés sent a shipment of indigenous objects to Charles V to prove the magnificence of his newly acquired territories and to win the sovereign's favor for his unscheduled continental incursion. The conquistador wrote to the monarch, stating that, "We agreed to write your Majesties sending them all the gold, silver, and jewels which we have obtained in this country over and above the fifth part which belongs to them by right."[26] Though Cortés did not provide a manifest for his shipment, the cache almost certainly contained the objects given to him as part of Moctezuma's gift which included turquoise and gold jewelry, a cloak, and assorted shields, banners, and regalia.[27] These are also the same objects seen by Albrecht Dürer very soon afterwards in an exhibition in Brussels hosted by Charles V in his

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[26]Stuart B. Schwartz, ed. *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico*. (Boston and New York: Saint Martin's, 2000), 77. *Hernando Cortés: Five Letters, 1519-1526,* ed. J. Bayard Morris (New York: Norton, 1991), 16-20. The fifth part or *quinto* real refers to the conquistador's traditional tribute to the Spanish Monarch from explorers and miners

[27]Bernardino de Sahagún describes the cache as follows: "Then they [the Mexica] dressed up the Captain. They put on him the turquoise serpent mask attached to the quetzal-feather head fan, to which were fixed, from which hung the green-stone serpent earrings. And they put the sleeveless jacket on him, and around his neck they put the plaited green-stone neckband with the golden disk in the middle. On his lower back they tied the back mirror, and they also tied behind him the cloak called a *tzitzilli*. And on his legs they placed the green-stone bands with the golden bells. And they gave him, placing it on his arm, the shield with gold and shells crossing, on whose edge were spread quetzal feathers, with a quetzal banner. And they laid the obsidian sandals before him. And the other three outfits, the gods' appurtenances, they arranged in rows before him." It is important to note (really just for the man's character and the flavor of the colonial experience) that immediately after this gifting, Cortés ordered the envoys to be put in irons. *Victors and Vanquished*, 95.

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capacity as Holy Roman Emperor. Dürer wrote that among the things he witnessed, there was "a sun all of gold a whole fathom broad, and a moon all of silver of the same size, also two rooms full of armor of the people there, and all manner of wondrous weapons of theirs, harness and darts, very strange clothing, beds, and all kinds of wonderful objects of human use."[28] Many of these objects were symbolically connected to Mexica leadership.[29]

In her illuminating chapter in *Collecting Across Cultures: Aztec Regalia and the Reformation of Display*, Carina L. Johnson notes that the collection that Dürer witnessed should be interpreted within the context of royal treasuries throughout Europe. For Johnson, the display of Mexica regal attire provided a visual vocabulary for the Spanish monarch to claim supremacy over newfound subjects and lands. For one monarch to own the royal regalia of another was akin to claiming them as a vassal. Johnson explains that:

> Material symbols of sovereignty were important in the rivalries of rulers. Throughout Europe and Asia Minor, political competitors asserted power and authority through the appropriation or possession of regalia, symbolizing their political domination over former or future holders. Thus, the Habsburgs parlayed their possession of electoral crowns or miters into political advantages when maneuvering with secular and ecclesiastic electors." This was, of course, not an arrangement that Moctezuma was aware of at the time that he gave Cortés his gift. He was performing a cultural suite of American ideas of gift giving in an effort to assert power and dominance. What Cortés (and the Crown) viewed the gift as an act of subservience, in reality it was Moctezuma's performance of an important cultural ritual that created a relationship of debt and exchange.[30]

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[28]Dürer, *Albrecht Dürer*, 53-54.
[29] Arnold Bauer, "The Material Landscape of Pre-Columbian America," in Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 15-45
[30] Johnson, "Aztec Regalia and the Reformation of Display," 87-88. For more information on gift giving among Amerindian cultures, see Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

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Johnson's assertion should be taken a step further. When he displayed Mexica regalia, Charles V was creating a visual vocabulary of control that continued far into the Bourbon period. A French translation of Cortés's 1522 letter to Charles V indicated that the Spanish monarchy was now competing on a worldwide stage, noting that the goods that the conquistador sent to the king were more grand than anything held by any prince in Europe or Africa, as well as any Christian, pagan, Saracen, or Turk.[31] The display, then, was a calculated means for Charles V to claim an imperium that stretched outside of the borders of Europe, marking him as a global monarch with an unprecedented transatlantic empire. While witnessing the treasure of Moctezuma was "better than seeing fairy tales,"[32] the Spanish Crown's ownership of such materialswas an assertion of Spanish imperial might and supremacy. Spain, as an imperial powerhouse, had stepped onto the world stage through curatorship.

All the World's a Page: Curated Books and Spanish Imperium

A desire to record and present the New World did not end with a shipment of physical objects to the king of Spain. Textual and visual accounts of the people of the newly found continent accompanied shipments of objects to the Old World. These texts served as a physical record of European encounter with the New World and provided a vehicle for the understanding the New World from the relative safety of a European library. Like collections of objects, these texts presented a curated (and thereby mediated) view of a newly discovered land. They are interpretive. They took the world apart and pieced it back together in a controllable and "comprehensive" way. Of particular note, are

[31] Ibid., 88-89.
[32] Dürer, *Albrecht Dürer*, 53-54.

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texts such as the Florentine Codex, the Barberini Codex, and the Tovar Codex, all of which are preserved documents of colonial interaction and function as curated texts. I have chosen these three texts because of their direct similarities. All three are illustrated texts that illuminate pre-contact Nahua life. Additionally, all three include (in whole or in part) text written in Nahuatl. While they are not necessarily directly connected, they are indicative of a dialogue that occurred between indigenous and European voices—they were all created at the behest of Spanish missionaries to understand the culture that they encountered. Moreover, they were all created (at least in part), by indigenous hands.

The most cited account of pre-contact indigenous culture is the bilingual opus *La Historia Universal de las Cosas de Nueva España,* produced by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún between 1545 and 1590 and preserved most completely as the Florentine Codex. The text is a comprehensive account over twelve books of the people, animals, and customs the friar encountered and is written in both Spanish and Nahuatl.[33] It serves as an encyclopedic record of Nahua culture and language. In the broader context of the period and Spanish imperial philosophy, Sahagún's text is a method of displaying Amerindian custom and culture for European consumption.

The *Historia Universal* is a comprehensive text. In book eleven (the Earthly Things), the friar records an account of the cultivation of cochineal, a beetle that yielded a potent red dye that Nahuatl speakers called Nochezli. The structure of Sahagún's text can be gleaned from his expansion on cochineal:

> "Its name comes from the nochtle and extli [blood] because it is formed on the nopal and is like blood, like a blood blister," records Sahagún. "This cochineal is an insect; it is

[33] For more on ethnography and European encounters in the New World, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man. The Amerindian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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a worm. The cochineal nopal is the breeding place of this cochineal. It lives, it hatches on the nopal like a little fly, a little insect. Then it grows; then it develops; then it increases in size. It fattens, it increases much in size, it thickens, it becomes round. Then it envelops itself in fat. When the worms are distended, they come to rest just like blood blisters. Then they cover themselves with a web. Then they die; they fall; also they are heaped together, swept up. With a broom they are heaped together."[34]

Sahagún's text both describes what he is encountering and contextualizes it within the greater fabric of Mexica culture—cochineal was an important insect that yielded dye that, because of its color, was culturally connected to blood, which was necessary for the functioning of the cosmos. The text of the *Historia Universal* is accompanied by drawings produced by Nahua artists, which creates a visual record of the people and culture of the pre-contact Nahua. Given the friar's eventual mission of conversion of indigenous peoples, one should not discount that in addition to being a major ethnographic text Sahagún's work functioned as an aide in conversion to Catholicism.[35]

In contextualizing the *Historia Universal*, one must understand the friar's background, philosophically. In *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity*, Walden Browne calls for a complication of the traditional view of the *Historia Universal* and Sahagún in general. Traditionally, the *Historia Universal* is placed at the start of a modern epistemology that ended with the formation of modern anthropology. However, Browne sees Sahagún as a more complicated figure. "Sahagún stands on a threshold of knowledge because his experience with the Nahuas tested the limits of knowledge…[his]

[34]Bernadino de Sahagún, *La Historia Universal de las Cosas de Nueva España*. Arthur O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, eds. (University of Utah Press: Salt Lake City, 1982), 239.
[35]This reality makes the *Historia Universal* a complicated source on pre-contact life. Though Sahagún clearly set out to make a complete account of the peoples and customs of the Basin of Mexico, his eventual mission and hope of their conversion must not be discounted. While an imperfect text, the *Historia Universal* still provides a fascinating window both to pre-contact civilization and the methods that the Catholic Church employed in the conversion of the peoples of the Americas.

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devils—in tandem with his novel use of antiquity—mark the desperate attempt to shore up a medieval conceptualization of knowledge that could no longer bear the weight of complex, contradictory, life-worldly information like that was found among the Nahuas of sixteenth-century New Spain."[36] For Browne, Sahagún's rooting in the past is seen very directly in the title of his work—which he called *Historia universal de las cosas de la Nueva España,* which places it into a medieval context of universal history meant to cover the entirety of creation.[37] Browne's expansion of the *Historia Universal* noted, it is fruitful to read the text in the context of collecting, curiosities and *Wunderkammern*. In viewing collections of curiosities, the reader was to take in the whole, viewing the entirety of the collection as the sum of its parts, then focus on smaller aspects, studying each object deftly.[38] Daniela Bleichmar has asserted that such collections were "constructive narratives through strategies of display."[39] This is an operative similarity they share with Sahagún's text, as the friar worked to fit the whole of a world full of foreign oddity into the framework that was well digested and understood. Moreover, that presentation was a full and complete analysis of Nahua culture, which had been presented and curated for European understanding.

The *Historia Universal* is not the only curated text from the period, and should be considered with the Codex Barberini and the Tovar Codex. The Codex Barberini, titled

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[36]Walden Browne, *Sahagún and the Transition to Modernity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 213.
[37]Ibid., 120-122. For the medieval mind, understanding came from a complete command of knowledge of the entire universe, therefore, scholars sought to create texts that explained the entirety of the world in which they lived, all that had ever been and all that ever would be. Browne asserts that the most common translation of the *A General History of the Things of New Spain* is a misunderstanding of Sahagún's original intent—which was to create a *universal history* or *Historia Universal* of the New World—such a distinction places the text within a medieval framework.
[38]Daniela Bleichmar, "Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections," in Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall, eds. *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 27.
[39]Ibid., 16.

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Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis (Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians) of 1552, was produced by Martín de la Cruz in the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco and translated from Nahuatl into the more European-friendly Latin by Juan Badiano. The *Libellus* is the first extant pictorial record of Nahua herbs and medicine and was a combination of descriptive text and visual imagery.[40] Cassiano dal Pozzo, the secretary of Cardinal Barberini, produced a famous copy of the text that was included it in his *Museo Cartaceo* (Paper Museum). Likewise, another text that follows this framework is the magnificently preserved manuscript held at the John Carter Brown Library known as the Tovar Codex, commissioned by Juan de Acosta, a Jesuit missionary and naturalist, from Juan de Tovar. [41] Juan de Tovar, also a Jesuit, traveled throughout the region of Tula interviewing Nahua people and commissioning indigenous artists in order to compile the materials for the completed manuscript.[42] The volume contains a history of the Mexica accompanied with painted images illustrating life in the Triple Alliance up and to the arrival of Cortés. The text ends with a fascinating series of textual gymnastics where the author attempts to reconcile the Nahua calendar and cosmology with the Gregorian calendar.[43] It is beneficial to take a page out of Cassiano dal Pozzo's so-called Paper Museum when considering these curated texts. They all function as "paper museums,"

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[40]Martín de la Cruz, *The Badianus Manuscript (Codex Barbarini, Latin 241) Vatican Library: An Aztec Herbal, 1552* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1940).
[41]Juan de Tovar, *The Tovar Codex*, 1584, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.
[42] J.H. Parry, 'Juan de Tovar and the History of the Indians," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 121 no. 4(August 1977), 316. Parry notes that the friar was well known as a preacher, saying that "Admiring contemporaries called him [Juan de Tovar] the Mexican Cicero; but he was more than a gifted linguist and a popular preacher. He was a capable ethnologist and a sympathetic but clear-headed student of Indian tradition, who made critical use both of Indian painted codices and of oral evidence supplied by Indian informants." Written in 1977, Parry's read on Juan de Tovar still holds up—Tovar should be considered both as someone grounded in earlier European traditions and as someone who understood well the indigenous world into which he had become a part.
[43]Juan de Tovar, *The Tovar Codex.*1584, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University. See also J.H. Parry, "Juan de Tovar and this History of the Indians."

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presenting a collection of information for the consumption of a knowledgeable public.[44] Just as a collector curating a *Wunderkammer* would chose objects to place near each other, Juan de Tovar and Bernardino de Sahagún curated entries in the Tovar Codex and the *Historia Universal* to produce a mediated view of the New World. The information acts as carefully curated objects in developing a case for the monarchy.

Throughout the Habsburg period, representatives of the monarch collected information and proof from lands and peoples under Spanish control. Visually presenting the New World granted the monarchy the political capital necessary to claim possession over lands that many Europeans would never see. Spanish supremacy was defined by collecting. The empire defined itself, its territories, and claimed its colonial subjects by collecting, contextualizing, and display. Such trends would continue throughout the colonial period, and, as we will explore, would continue after the monarchical crisis of the eighteenth century.

Collecting, Display, and the Bourbon Iberian Atlantic

With a newly installed Bourbon dynasty after the harrowing War of Spanish Succession, it became more necessary than ever for the Crown to define its Empire and assert its leadership as stable and concrete. Throughout the court, thoughts shifted to a series of sweeping legislation known as the Bourbon Reforms, which ideally would consolidate royal supremacy.[45] Scholars have long debated the efficacy of the Bourbon

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[44] Such foliated collections existed throughout Europe, gaining popularity in the seventeenth century. Most famously, the Danish antiquarian Ole Worm published his Wunderkammer as the Museum Wormianum in 1654, which includes the bulk of the collector's extensive collection with images and Latin textual commentary on the finer points of the objects and the collection as a whole. Likewise, Ferrante Imperato, a Neapolitan apothecary, published an illustrated account of his cabinet of curiosities in 1599 which he titled *Dell'Historia Naturale*, which emphasized his credibility as collector of natural history specimens and a learned scholar. These examples are all curated texts—they are all paper museums.

[45] Gabriel R. Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759-1808* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2. As Gabriel Paquette puts it, "the old order, with its robust corporate

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Reforms, which have historiographically swung from a successful suite of legislation to a political pipe dream too large to realize. The reality of reform was probably somewhere in between—the Crown dreamed big and that dream was mediated on the ground by those living throughout the Spanish Empire in ways that followed local contingency, need, and resources.[46] However, no scholarly attention has been given to the ways in which the Bourbon Crown continued to employ the collecting methods of their Hapsburg predecessors in the assertion of their imperium. The Crown and its representatives sent expeditions into the Americas to map the territory in an effort to understand Spanish colonial possessions in order to exploit them for profit.[47] While not necessarily their immediate intended goal, the Bourbon expeditions provided a new influx of materials from the New World that trickled into European collections that provided a latticework for the newly installed dynasty to build upon a cohesive display of empire.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, collections of wonders had become a phenomenon among bureaucrats and were no longer solely confined to the ultra rich. José de Gálvez, head of the Spanish colonial office from 1776 to 1787 and former inspector

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entities, superabundance of privileges, and regional semi-autonomy was to be suppressed. In its place, reformers sought to erect a unified nation state, subservient to the monarchy, and fashion it into the generator of a new patriotic state." The Bourbon Reforms, then, were to be a narrowing of the privileges of the aristocracy ending in the consolidation of the power of the monarchy.

[46]Key studies that analyze the on the ground effects of the Bourbon Reforms are Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America*., Adam Warren, *Medicine and Politics in Colonial Peru: Population Growth and the Bourbon Reforms*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), and Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[47]See, among others Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), Daniella Bleichmar, *Visual Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

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general of New Spain, possessed a natural history collection of some renown. The vice director of the Real Gabinete, the Spanish national history collection, recommended that British mineralogist Joseph Townsend visit Gálvez's collection in the second half of the 1780s. Whatever Gálvez's position on the role of his own collection, amassing a comprehensive collection (presumably large enough to warrant visits from specialists and tourists) was an important and worthwhile use of funds and time. Once at the minister's collection, Townsend encountered specimens of quality, including emeralds superior for their size and luster as well as gold figural sculptures of birds and other wonders. However, he was disturbed to find that the collection was less for scientific knowledge and more for José de Gálvez's fame, as he "had no taste for science, was solicitous, not to acquire knowledge, but to increase his treasure." In her dissertation, María Bárbara Zepeda Cortés notes that Townsend's statement is in sharp contrast to the support that Gálvez exhibited for science expeditions, which had become the norm for the eighteenth century Spanish Atlantic.[48] Though the collection may have showed off the collector's patronage and support of scientific endeavors, one cannot deny the social capital that Gálvez gained from of owning it. Through his influence, he had been able to amass and display a collection of specimens that, whether he intended it that way or not, became a visual representation of the dominion of the Crown to which he was a particularly powerful vassal. In this way, Gálvez's collection is a microcosm of larger imperial collections.

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[48]Maria Bárbara Zepeda Cortés, "Empire, Reform, and Corruption: José de Gálvez and Political Culture in the Spanish World, 1765-1787" (Ph.D. diss. University of California, San Diego, 2013), 364 and footnote 178. Zepeda quotes Joseph Townsend, *A Journey through Spain in the years 1786 and 1787: with particular attention to the agriculture, manufactures, commerce, population, taxes, and revenue of that country; and remarks in passing through part of France*, 2nd ed. (London: C.Dilly, 1792), 1:288-289.

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The Crown believed it imperative that Spain possessed a national *Wunderkammer*, because serious discussions of science had shifted from Spain to the rest of Europe. In response, Ferdinand VI formed the Real Gabinete in 1752, but it languished as a glorified warehouse of crates and cartons.[49] As the eighteenth century continued, the Bourbon Crown began to espouse the notion that the collection should be cultivated in an official manner in order to be influential within the European scientific community. The intelligentsia surmised that the best way to achieve this goal was to build a relationship with a prominent collector who would both contribute to the national collection and help grow it in the future. In 1771, Charles III acquired the famed *Wunderkammer* of naturalist Pedro Franco Dávila, previously known as the *Gabinete de Historia Natural y de Curiosidades del Arte y de la Naturaleza*. Dávila's collection was considered to be a rival of the royal collection of the King of France—a distinction which, no doubt, delighted Charles III when he acquired it as part of his own cabinet.[50]

Dávila was a ravenous collector who often stole objects he coveted from friends. He was, however, a gifted antiquarian and naturalist. In exchange for the donation of his collection, Charles III named him the Gabinete's lifetime director in October 1771.[51] Through his long history of collecting (and theft), the director had cultivated a vast network of associates, which helped grow the institution's renown. He was part of an elite, cosmopolitan class of scientists that was beginning to emerge at the end of the

[49]Silvia Spatta, *Misplaced Objects: Migrating Collections and Recollections in Europe and the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 51.
[50]María de los Ángeles Calatayud Arinero, ed. *Pedro Franco Dávila: Primer Director del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural Fundado por Carlos III* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientiíficas, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, 1988), 57. A 1753 inventory of Dávila's collection is broken into 16 categories, ranging from shells, rocks, minerals, crystals, fossils, archaeological materials such as clothes and weapons, bronzes, miniatures, paintings, scientific equipment, to books and manuscripts, 60-61.
[51] Ibid., 114.

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eighteenth century.[52] Five years of set up followed, with the Real Gabinete opening to the public at the beginning of November in 1776, located half a mile from the Palacio Real on the Calle de Alcalá, near the royal post office.[53] A stampede of visitors eager to view the collection flooded into the galleries, which raised questions from Dávila about the security of the collection so much that he called in armed guards (the throng nearly trampled a watchman, who fled the museum for his life).[54]

Despite dangers to the security staff, the Real Gabinete was an achievement for the Crown and for the museum's first director. As director, Dávila informed colonial policy at the end of the eighteenth century. This is most evident in a 1776 royal edict housed at the John Carter Brown Library, in which the monarch encourages the authorities in control of the provinces of the Spanish Empire to "prepare and send to Madrid all of the curious natural things that you encounter in the lands and towns in your districts; and send them for the collection of the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural that His Majesty has established in this Court for the benefit and instruction of the public."[55] The edict is broken up into several sections, in which instructions are given for the collecting of specimens from the three branches of natural knowledge—mineral, animal, and vegetal. Additionally, it ends with copious instructions on the preservation of specimens for transport to the Real Gabinete.[56] Preparators throughout the world were to

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[52] Spatta, *Misplaced Objects,* 52.
[53] This location can be seen on G & L Bartholomew's 1893 map, "Plan of Madrid," that was printed in Edinburgh.
[54] Spatta, *Misplaced Objects,* 52.
[55] *Instruccion hecha de órden del Rei N.S. para que los virreyes: gobernadores, corregidores, alcaldes mayores é intendentes de provincias en todos los dominios de S.M. puedan hacer escoger, preparar y enviar á Madrid todas las producciones curiosas de naturaleza que se encontraren en las tierras y pueblos de sus distritos, á fin de que se colloquen en el Real Gabinete de Historia Natural que S.M. ha establecido en esta Corte para beneficio é instrucción,* (Madrid: 1776), John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, RI. 1.
[56] Ibid., 19.

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use current best-practices for the collection and preservation of specimens that would eventually become both visual proof of a Spanish imperium and a collection for the edification of the public.[57] From the specificity of its instructions, it is clear that a specialist like Dávila was either the primary author or was heavily involved in its drafting.

From the 1776 decree, it becomes apparent that the Real Gabinete, despite being born out of an enlightened imperial desire to modernize, it was an inheritor of traditions of displaying curiosities that had existed for centuries previous. In a strictly functional sort of way, the *Instrucción* called upon a preexisting framework of empire that had existed since Spain began to expand across the Atlantic. In calling out to a vast network of viceroys, governors, *corregidores*, *alcaldes mayores* and those in charge of provinces, the Bourbon monarch was able to assert dominance over his empire. This was mobilized into existence. In a 1793 document at the Archivo General de Indias, Rafael María de Aguilar, the colonial governor of the Philippines, notes a shipment of objects that he is sending to the Real Gabinete, which includes a bronze statue of the "prophet Confucius" and stone dragons.[58]

As a result of the Crown's (and Dávila's) desire to collect everything, the Gabinete contained a wide array of objects that were outside of the scope of modern natural history. Among the collection were paintings by Diego Velázquez, objects from pre-contact indigenous civilizations, and a variety of non-biological samples. It was a

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[57]The 1776 *Instrucción* takes special care to note that it was the intention of the crown to create a collection that could be viewed by his subjects for their own enlightenment. Ibid. 4. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, intellectuals and government officials sought to create systems in which the public could be educated, which would lead to a better informed citizenry, which would, in turn, lead to a better nation. For more information on this, see Adam Warren, *Medicine and Politics in Colonial Peru: Population Growth and the Bourbon Reforms,* (Pittsburg:University of Pittsburg Press, 2010).
[58] Rafael María de Aguilar, "Envío de tres cajones para Gabinete de Historia Natural." Manila, 1793, Archivo General de Indias (AGI, hereafter), Seville, Estado, leg. 45, No. 12.

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selection of everything from within the realm brought together for public consumption.[59] In its presentation, the Real Gabinete was similar to other royal *Wunderkammeren*. This should not bring into question the Gabinete as an intellectual institution. Rather, it ascertains that understanding the phenomenon of the diverse collection curated by Dávila requires a more complex and broad understanding of the nature of Iberian science and intellectualism.

The full scope of the collection, and its context among the Spanish colonial project, can be well appreciated by studying Juan Bautista Brú's 1784 *De La Colección de Animales y Monstruos del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid.* Brú, the painter, designer, and chief dissector of the Real Gabinete, provides an illustrated account of the animals and "monstrous" specimens collected by the Real Gabinete from throughout the world. Over its two volumes, *De La Colección* describes and illustrates seventy one different specimens, all from around the globe (both from Spanish zones of control and otherwise). Brú conducts his descriptions of specimens held in the Real Gabinete throughout his text in similar ways. He makes no distinctions between curious items and regular ones and places them in dialogue with each other. In a text that covers seventy-one animals, specimens of curious nature number just five. This is not to say that curious specimens are not an important part of the volume. Rather, the monstrous and the marvelous hover over the complete text like a bizarre cloud. For example, the first six entries of the first volume contain, in order, a specimen of a sea lion, a manatee, followed

[59]See J. Miguel Morán and Fernando Checa, *El coleccionismo en España: De la cámara de maravillas a la galería de pinturas* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1985). The Real Gabinete contained a gallery of paintings, which included three by Murillo, three by Cano, one by Velázquez, two by Claudio Caello, two by Carreño, two by Alonso de Arco, two by Camilo, three by Matthias de Torres, three by Herrera el Viejo, one by Senero, and a possible painting by Mengs. See María de los Ángeles Calatayud Arinero, ed. *Pedro Franco Dávila: Primer Director del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural Fundado por Carlos III,* 104.

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by a chicken with three feet, a green oropendola, a hare with two bodies, and a golden heron. A pivotal point here is the normalcy with which curious specimens are included: they are not separated from their more traditional kin but are placed randomly throughout. Brú notes that he hopes that "this collection could guide aficionados of natural history to examine the exquisite specimens from many countries which are in the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural. I hope to show a complete collection of what is presented in this Real Gabinete."[60] Certainly, the seventy-one specimens that Brú describes are not the complete collection of the Real Gabinete, which was, by all accounts, vast and inclusive. They are, however, largely representative of the collection as a whole.

Brú's illustrations from the Real Gabinete are rendered in a naturalistic idealism. Though they existed in the collection as taxidermied creatures, they adorn the pages of *De La Coleción* as living creatures inhabiting a landscape rendered in exacting detail: the animals inhabit an environment. Likewise, animals that could be considered more curious are depicted in the same way as more normal ones. However, the animals in the catalog are portrayed in such a manner as to portray all parts of the animal, almost as a stand in for first-hand study—they are schematic views that dissect the creature as a subject of study rather than an actual animal. As Daniela Bleichmar has shown, such schematic views represented an idealized version of reality which could be understood as the

[60] Juan Bautista Brú de Ramon, *Coleccion de Laminas Que Representan Los Animales y Montruos del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid, Con Una Descripcion Individual de Cada Uno, Tomo 1* (Madrid: Andres de Sotos, 1784), vii. "Esta Colección podrá guiar los aficionados a la Historia natural, y servir para examinar con utilidad las exquisitas producciones de todos países, que encierran los hermosos Gabinetes de Historia natural, y en especial hacer conocer los individuos del Reyno animal. Espero formar una Colección completa de todos los objetos que presenta este Real Gabinete."

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colonialist's eye focusing on the wonders of the world over which it was claiming possession.[61]

Much can be gained by placing Brú's account into dialogue with other curated texts—most namely Sahagún's *Historia Universal.* The texts serve as a presentation of an experience that the reader is not witnessing first hand. Like the *Historia Universal,* Brú's text provides a useful look at the ways in which the collection was thought of as a complete entity. They should be viewed as a whole complex tapestry of separate parts. Moreover, specimens that could be considered curious or wondrous were considered on an even foothold with more traditional samples. Three-legged chickens and normal-legged crocodiles together forming a complete narrative. Brú's text provides an account of the wonders of Dávila's Real Gabinete and of the far-reaching tentacles of the Spanish Empire, which had been able to collect, preserve, and display such specimens to the public. Like the *Historia Universal,* Brú's text (and by extension, the Real Gabinete itself), functions as a presentation and contextualization of the wonders of a world that was constantly being dissected and collected.

While the Crown was beginning to exhibit the fruits of their scientific labors with the *Real Gabinete,* science had long been a part of the Iberian imperial project. Likewise, in order to fully understand what was happening in the Real Gabinete under the tutelage of Dávila, one must contextualize Bourbon collecting practices within both the complexities of the scientific enlightenment and earlier colonial regimes. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has written in his *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations in the History of Science in the Iberian World*, the first hand study of the natural world through

[61]Daniella Bleichmar, *Visual Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7.

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botanical specimens, indigenous bodies, and the land itself (all essential parts of the scientific revolution) had their antecedents in the early colonial Iberian Atlantic.[62] This took the form of a culture of experimentation and the search for knowledge for financial gain, best capitalized in the form of cartography and natural history, fields marginalized in traditional narratives of the Enlightenment.

This different view of the nature of science marginalized the Spanish Atlantic in narratives of scientific modernity. Cañizares-Esguerra lays the blame on an Enlightenment historiography dominated by the British, with "narratives of modernity inaugurated first by Protestantism and later by the Enlightenment, both profoundly hostile to Catholic Iberia." Modernity was defined by criteria that existed outside of the Spanish project and therefore failed to describe the fullness of Iberian thought.[63] Rather than viewing the Real Gabinete in dialogue with contemporary collections (which it certainly was) one must view the collection and museum as an inheritor of a tradition that had its roots in the fifteenth century.

The Bald Cow and the Documented Empire

Two years after the Royal *Instrucción* of 1776, a farmer found a bald cow on his property near Veracruz. Local agents of the Crown considered the bald cow a marvelous specimen that should be preserved and studied. As the monarch decreed, information about the find was prepared and shipped from the New World to the Old. Scientifically, a bald cow was not particularly intriguing—one would assume it would be the same as a normally pelted cow. However, it most certainly adhered to the Crown's request to

[62] Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World*, 23.
[63]Ibid.

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catalogue anything from the animal kingdom that was "very curious or rare."[64] There was information to be gleaned, knowledge to be generated. A drawing of the cow was quickly produced and shipped across the Atlantic to Madrid and the Real Gabinete. [65]

The 1778 bovine curiosity typifies the ways in which the Spanish Empire functioned throughout the Bourbon period. Understood through the lens of scientific thought in contemporary Europe, the bald cow is an outlier. While it was scientifically interesting, it did not broaden scientific knowledge the same ways that other shipments from the New World would. However, when understood in the context of the ways in which the Spanish monarchy defined itself, the bald cow becomes normalized. While sent back to the monarch as a curious thing, the cow becomes just another touchstone of imperial control exerted through scientific cataloging and display. The Crown decreed that such objects be brought to Madrid, and it was made so.

Crown endorsed collecting had long been part of the Spanish Empire and was directly codified in the 1776 decree that demanded that agents of the monarchy everywhere aid the Real Gabinete in the creation of a complete reckoning of the wonders of what had become a global empire. Such a reckoning was not grounded in any notions of the Enlightenment. It enjoyed a healthy pedigree from the past—reaching far back into the history of the Empire to a gift that a monarch gave to a representative of another, starting centuries of colonial rule. Objects that were collected from the time of Cortés onward provided a visual vocabulary that emphasized imperial control. When Sahagún

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[64] *Instruccion hecha de órden del Rei N.S. para que los virreyes: gobernadores, corregidores, alcaldes mayores é intendentes de provincias en todos los dominios de S.M. puedan hacer escoger, preparar y enviar á Madrid todas las producciones curiosas de naturaleza que se encontraren en las tierras y pueblos de sus distritos, á fin de que se colloquen en el Real Gabinete de Historia Natural que S.M. ha establecido en esta Corte para beneficio é instrucción,* 4. "muchas curiosidades y cosas raras."

[65] Don Pedro Antonio de Cossio, "Diseño en colores de una vaca sin pelo que nació en una Hacienda de Vera Cruz" AGI, Mapas, Planos, Etc: México, No. 350.

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wrote about the process of cultivating and harvesting the cochineal beetle, he was creating a curated text within an established framework for understanding the wider world that echoed throughout the colonial period. Lands and peoples could be claimed and reclaimed by documentation and display. In the same ways in which the original shipment that Dürer witnessed in Brussels provided a vocabulary for control, Dávila's collection (both from his own halls and the result of the 1776 decree) at the Real Gabinete acted as a visual representation of imperial might. The crown used a preexisting framework of collecting and documentation to reclaim the Americas through an Enlightenment discourse of the availability of knowledge for the public.

Returning to the exhibit that one of the greatest artists of Northern Europe encountered at the beginning of the sixteenth century, one smiles that he thought the objects from the "new land of gold" were "so much better than seeing fairy tales."[66] The exhibit in question provided the existence of lands recently encountered and provided a framework throughout the colonial period to claim imperium—by displaying, by curating, by describing, the crown and its agents were able to both contextualize the New World and make it a tangible part of European understanding. It both existed and was the sovereign property of its discoverers—the Spaniards. A new dynasty after a bitter war, the Bourbons needed to prove that the fairy tales, and their dominion over them, were true. To do this, they relied on the functions that had been previously set out—of display, encounter, collection, and contextualization—to place the New World, now long part of the Old one—firmly under their control. Displaying objects in the Real Gabinete asserted Spain's place in the Enlightenment. Bourbon collecting projects made the New World and

[66] Dürer, *Albrecht Dürer*53-54.

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the Spanish Empire tangible as it had from the time that Dürer saw the objects from the land of gold.

The bald cow, a small scientific curiosity, becomes proof of the fairy tale the Spanish monarchy had asserted all along—Spanish imperial might throughout the known world.

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