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From New Spain to Mughal India: Rethinking Early Modern Animal Studies with a Turkey, ca. 1612

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Do turkeys enjoy thanksgiving?

— Arundhati Roy[1]

On the sixteenth of Farvardin, March 25, 1612, the Mughal emperor Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir (1569–1627) noted in his personal memoirs, the *Jahangirnama*:

> I had ordered him [Muqarrab Khan, a high-ranking noble in the Mughal court] to go to the port of Goa on several items of business and see the vice-rei, the governor of Goa, and to purchase any rarities he could get hold of there for the royal treasury. […] Without consideration for cost, he paid any price the Franks [Portuguese] asked for whatever rarities he could locate. […] He had brought several very strange and unusual animals I had not seen before. No one even knew what their names were. […] One of the animals was larger in body than a peahen and significantly smaller than a peacock.[2]

The animal in question was the American turkey or the *Meleagris gallopavo*, a bird that had, until this time, never been seen in India. The emperor sought to comprehend the strangeness of the bird—a bird whose name he did not know—through careful ekphrasis. Jahangir continued:

> Sometimes when it displays itself during mating it spreads its tail and its other feathers like a peacock and dances. Its beak and legs are like a rooster's. Its head, neck, and wattle constantly change color. When it is mating they are as red as can be—you'd think it had all been set with coral. After a while these same places become white and look like cotton. Sometimes they look turquoise. It keeps changing color like a chameleon. The piece of flesh it has on its head resembles a cock's comb. The strange part about it is that when it is mating, the piece of flesh hangs down a span from its head like an elephant's trunk, but then when it pulls it up it stands erect a distance of two fingers like a rhinoceros' horn. The area

[1] Arundhati Roy, "Do Turkeys Enjoy Thanksgiving?" *The Hindu*, January 18, 2004. Although Roy's article uses the pardon of a turkey by the President of the United States on the National Day of Mourning, otherwise known as Thanksgiving Day, to mediate on new imperialisms, the question has great resonance from an animal studies perspective.

[2] Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, translated, edited, and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston as *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution,1999), 133.

> around its eyes is always turquoise-colored and never changes. Its feathers appear to be of different colors, unlike a peacock's feathers.[3]

Eventually, the emperor designated the court artist Mansur (active 1590–1624), who had received the honorific title Wonder of the Age, *Nadir al-ʻAsr*, to draw the bird's likeness or *taswir* "so that the astonishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them."[4] Echoing the emperor's punctilious ekphrasis, Mansur's ca. 1612 painting, too, was a careful and precise study, a likeness or *taswir*, of the bird (figure 1). Meticulously applying color in small areas to define the texture and sheen of plumage, the artist depicted the turkey against a monochromatic tinted background that accentuated bodily presence through naturalistic verisimilitude.

Mansur's perceptive delineation of the turkey was unprecedented within the artistic cultures of the Mughal court. Indeed, Mansur's own ca. 1594–95 painting of a pair of grey francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) and western tragopans (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) in an illustrated *Baburnama*, the memoirs of the first Mughal emperor Babur (1483–1530), was characteristic of the pictorial strategies employed by artists in the imperial atelier to visualize the natural world (figure 2).[5] In Mansur's painting, the francolins are grounded in a hilly landscape that indicates the natural habitat of the bird, which stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas westwards to the Indus valley and eastwards to Bengal. The artist's ca. 1612 turkey, in contrast, hovers in space. Even as each feather and fold of skin is marked by minute brushwork, the body of the bird floats

[3] Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 133.
[4] Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 133.
[5] For the history of the manuscript, see Ellen Smart, "Paintings from the *Baburnama*: A Study of Sixteenth-Century Mughal Historical Manuscript Illustrations" (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1977).

over a lightly sketched ground demarcated by a row of flowering plants which its claws do not reach. The ground, it seems, is intentionally separated while the unembellished background, with a slight monochromatic tint, highlights the visceral presence of the bird. At the same time, the sweep of brush strokes on the top margin suggests an aerial perspective without a defined horizon line. What compelled Mansur to place the turkey at a slight remove from the ground, estranged from its worldly context as it were? And, how could art history have missed such a deliberate estrangement, especially given the immense scholarly attention that Mansur's oeuvre has been subjected to in the recent past? The arrival of the turkey in the Mughal court, I propose, offered Mansur a new visual language for the representation of nonhuman animals, precipitating a significant shift in the artist's oeuvre. The painting of the turkey thus presents critical insights into both the dense global entanglements that constituted the early modern world and the human-nonhuman interactions that shaped representational conventions in this period.

As a discipline with roots in Enlightenment rationality, art history, however, has taken objects and artistic representations produced by the human species as its principal archive and locus of analysis. Accordingly, artists, their patrons, and their audiences emerge as the primary agents in this history. In contrast, building on a broad interdisciplinary spectrum of scholarship that has explored interactions between human and nonhuman animals, the emerging field of animal studies has become increasingly central to disciplines such as philosophy, history, and literary criticism.[6] To a certain

[6] A few representative examples include Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter, 2002): 369–

extent, art history, too, has responded to the political, ecological, and ethical demands of animal studies. But the response has largely been restricted to engagements with artistic projects in the present.[7] How, then, might perspectives from animal studies—and eco art history more broadly—unmoor our engagement with the early modern period from its speciesist bias? What do we stand to gain from this unmooring? The question has taken on a new urgency as we face the Sixth Mass Extinction, the most cataclysmic extinction event in the history of the planet after dinosaurs went extinct around sixty-five million years ago during the late Cretaceous period.[8] This catastrophic human-induced Anthropocene extinction, scholars have argued, had commenced with the ecological imperialism propelled by European colonization in Africa, Asia, and the Americas from the 1500s that also led to the accidental and deliberate global circulation of animals, pathogens, and diseases.[9] The arrival of the turkey in the Mughal court was part and parcel of this early modern global bioeconomy.

418, Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Karen Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), and Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[7] See, for instance, Ron Broglio, *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) and Steve Baker, *Artist|Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). For the most part, art history's engagement with animals in the early modern period has focused on iconography, symbolism, natural history, and collecting practices. See, for instance, Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), Janice Neri, *The Insect and the Image: Visual Nature in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) and Pia F. Cuneo, ed. *Animals and Early Modern Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

[8] For the Sixth Extinction, see Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014) and Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), among others.

[9] Scholarship on the history of post-1500 European ecological imperialism is vast. Seminal volumes include Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial*

Certainly, writing an art history of the early modern world that works against its own anthropocentricism presents a conceptual challenge. For our access to the nonhuman animal is limited to an anthropocentric archive; animals lack language that is proper to the human.[10] Put differently, the turkey's "gobble" is unintelligible to the human ear. We will never know what the turkey that reached the Mughal court in 1612 sensed or expressed. The turkey, in this sense, resists history—ecocritical or otherwise—functioning as the one who cannot be heard.[11] Thus, rather than either recovering the real animal or abstracting nonhuman life into an allegory or a symbol, visual representations read obliquely, against the grain, might make visible, albeit partially, the economy of relations between human and nonhuman animals. Discussing the little cat that was observing the naked philosopher in his Paris apartment, Jacques Derrida had famously noted: "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there."[12] This reciprocity of looking could conceivably lead to a place where we perceive the 1612 painting not only as an artifact created by the stable human subject, that is, the

Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Recently, scholars have argued that the European colonization in the early modern period should be seen as one of the "origin stories" of the Anthropocene. See, for instance, Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[10] Recent scientific research has, however, challenged the Enlightenment idea that language separates humans from other animals. The anthropocentricism of animal studies is addressed in Erika Fudge, "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals," in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 3–18.

[11] While I am, by no means, comparing the nonhuman animal to the figure of the colonized subaltern, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's provocative essay provides a framework to rethink the politics of nonhuman speech and representation. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. Derrida, too, writes about the impossibility of "giving speech back" to animals. Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am," 416. More recently, historians such as Aaron H. Skabelund have asked "can the subaltern bark?" to highlight the absence of animals in history's archive. Aaron H. Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 14.

[12] Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am," 397.

artist Mansur, but also as an outcome of an accumulation of interspecies relations that shaped representational registers in the early modern world.

The Global Career of a Bird Called Turkey

The story of the turkey that reached the Mughal court in 1612 is deeply intertwined with an early modern global economy of the collecting and gifting of exotic animals. Of the numerous unusual animals that circulated across vast oceanic spaces in the early modern period, the rhinoceros from Gujarat that arrived in Lisbon in 1515 as a gift to Manuel I of Portugal (1469–1521) is perhaps the best-known today. Immortalized in the German artist Albrecht Dürer's 1515 woodcut, the animal's circulation in Europe was, scholars have noted, symptomatic of an early modern global trade that rose in conjunction with new forms of collecting, new natural philosophies, and a concomitant attempt to master the natural environment through new pictorial technologies.[13] Scholarship on the global circulation of animals from Asia, Africa, and the Americas has largely centered on animals that entered European menageries, became subjects of European scientific representations, and thus accrued value within a European political and cultural economy. The practice of collecting exotic animals was, however, not limited to the European political sphere. Collecting unusual and strange animals was an

[13] The scholarship on early modern collecting and natural philosophies is extensive. Recent books include Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, eds. *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Karl A.E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith, eds. *Early Modern Zoology: The Construction of Animals in Science, Literature and the Visual Arts*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), among others. For specific animals, see, for instance, Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), Marina Belozerskaya, *The Medici Giraffe and Other Tales of Exotic Animals and Power* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), and Annemarie J. Gschwend, *The Story of Süleyman: Celebrity Elephants and other Exotica in Renaissance Portugal* (Philadelphia: Pachyderm, 2010), among others.

equally important facet of Indian Ocean trade in this period. Early modern narratives reveal that the emperor Jahangir, for instance, maintained a menagerie that housed 100 lions, 400 cheetahs, 6,000 Turkish horses, 12,000 elephants, and 2,000 camels, along with rare animals such as a zebra, giraffes, and a dodo.[14] The zebra, which was acquired from Abyssinia in 1621 and also painted by Mansur at Jahangir's behest, was subsequently gifted to the Safavid emperor Shah 'Abbas (1597–1629) (figure 3). Alongside the Mughals in India, the Ming and the Ottoman emperors, among other royal houses in Asia, were likewise known to enthusiastically collect unusual animals that were housed in imperial menageries.[15] Thus, in the context of the Indian Ocean world, animals such as elephants, zebras, rhinoceros, and giraffes were routinely shipped as part of diplomatic gift exchange, imperial spectacles, and strategic symbols of power and prestige, in process intensifying the biopolitical foundations of early modern empires.

It is in this milieu of a global trade in unusual animals that we must also place the turkey that arrived in the Mughal court in 1612. In the recent past, art historians have explored the symbolic and allegorical significance of the bird as it reached Europe in the

[14] Valmik Thapar, Romila Thapar, and Yusuf Ansari, *Exotic Aliens: The Lion and the Cheetah in India* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013), 118. Jahangir's memoirs, as well as paintings produced in the imperial atelier, give us an insight into the animals in Mughal menageries. Also see M. A. Alvi, "Jahangir's Passion for Exotic Animals," in *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, ed. Som P. Verma (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 83–93, Som P. Verma, *Mughal Painter of Flora and Fauna Ustād Manṣūr* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999), Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 19, no. 3 (2009): 336–38, and Asok K. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2012).

[15] See, for instance, Sally K. Church, "The Giraffe of Bengal: A Medieval Encounter in Ming China," *Medieval History Journal* 7, no. 1 (2004): 1–36 and Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

sixteenth century.[16] But the global or worldly scope and scale of the bird's dissemination has not been addressed by art history. As we now know, the turkey's dissemination in Europe was, in part, tied to Spanish incursions into the Americas. Although Spanish conquistadors such as Juan de Grijalva (ca. 1489–1527) and Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) encountered turkeys in Mexico, the bird reached Europe in 1520, when Alessandro Geraldini (1455–1524), then Bishop of Santo Domingo, sent a pair of turkeys to Lorenzo Pucci (1458–1531), an Italian cardinal from the Florentine Pucci family, with directions to admire the birds but not eat them.[17] By the early 1520s, the bird was included in a fresco by the Italian painter Giovanni da Udine (1487–1564) in the Villa Madama in Rome, alongside representations of other exotic animals such as peacocks and ostriches. Although the bird was still considered a rarity, its spread was rapid. By 1530, only nine years after Cortés had seized Tenochtitlán, the turkey, along with American foods such as tomato and maize, had become well established in Europe. The bird was in Germany in 1530, in France and England by the 1540s, and in Scandinavia by the 1550s. By the mid-sixteenth century, representations of the bird also started appearing more frequently, including in a ca. 1545 tapestry attributed to the Italian Mannerist painter Agnolo Bronzino (1503–72) and a life-size 1560s bronze by the Flemish sculptor Giambologna

[16] Sabine Eiche, *Presenting the Turkey: The Fabulous Story of a Flamboyant and Flavourful Bird* (Florence: Centro Di, 2004) and Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016), Chapter 2.

[17] The precise year in which the turkey arrived in Europe has led to some debate. The art historian Sabine Eiche argues that Ferdinand of Spain ordered his chief-treasurer in the West Indies to send to Seville ten turkeys with each ship sailing to Spain from 1511 onwards. Eiche, *Presenting the Turkey*, 15. In contrast, Andrew F. Smith, a food historian, argues that turkeys were raised in Spain from the 1520s. Thus, the first turkeys to arrive in Europe would be the ones sent by Alessandro Geraldini. Andrew F. Smith, *The Turkey: An American Story* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 16. Also see Dave DeWitt, *Precious Cargo: How Foods from the Americas Changed the World* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2014). My discussion on the circulation of turkeys in Europe is drawn from Eiche, *Presenting the Turkey*, Markey, *Imagining the Americas*, and Smith, *The Turkey*.

(1529–1608) for an artificial grotto in the Medici Villa di Castello near Florence (figure 4). The bronze was placed in the grotto, alongside animals such as unicorns, lions, elephants, giraffes, camels, and rhinoceros, suggesting that the turkey had a valorized place in the European imaginary as a bird that had not been seen before.[18]

By 1612, the bird had reached India. In 1615, William Edwards, the agent of the East India Company in the western Indian city of Ajmer, wrote a letter to London requesting three or four turkey cocks and hens as a gift for Jahangir, since the emperor "hath two cocks but no hens, and would esteem much of their brood."[19] In 1617, a similar request for turkeys for Shah 'Abbas was dispatched to London by British officers in charge of the Company's mission in Safavid Iran.[20] By 1674, the turkey had also reached China through a woodblock print map produced by the Flemish Jesuit priest Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–88) for the Qing emperor Kangxi (1654–1722) (figure 5).[21] Both turkeys—the one in Verbiest's map of the world (*kunyu quantu*) and the other painted by Mansur in 1612—are visually similar to a woodblock print published in the Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi's (1522–1605) *Ornithologiæ*, a three-volume encyclopedia

[18] See Claudia Lazarro, "Animals as Cultural Signs: A Medici Menagerie in the Grotto at Castello," in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, ed. Claire Farago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 197–227.
[19] "William Edwards to the East India Company in Adgmeare (Ajmere)," February 26, 1615. Published in *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East*, vol. III, 1615, ed. William Foster (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 19.
[20] "Edward Connock to the East India Company," August 5, 1617. Published in *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East*, vol. VI, 1617, ed. William Foster (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1902), 44.
[21] Recent scholarship on the map include Hartmut Walravens, "Father Verbiest's Chinese World Map (1674)," *Imago Mundi* 43 (1991): 31–47, Gang Song and Paola Demattè, "Mapping an Acentric World: Ferdinand Verbiest's *Kunyu Quantu*," in *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 71–87, and Daniel M. Greenberg, "Taxonomy of Empire: The Compendium of Birds as an Epistemic and Ecological Representation of Qing China," *Journal18* 7 (Spring 2019), http://www.journal18.org/3710.

of birds (figure 6).[22] In all three instances, the turkey is portrayed in side profile with outstretched wings and tail feathers upright. But this is where similarities end. The bird in Aldrovandi's *Ornithologiæ* stands on a mound, flanked on the right by a sheaf of *oryza* or Asian rice, the significance of which we will turn to shortly. In Verbiest's map of the world, vegetation is replaced by bold lines to signify the ground upon which the bird is perched. Mansur's turkey, in contrast, floats in air, disassociated both from the comparatively miniaturized flora on the ground and the world that it assumedly inhabits. What prompted such a disassociation? Around the time Mansur was directed by Jahangir to paint the turkey, the artist had embarked on a project of painting naturalistic floral studies based on analogous plant illustrations in European herbals.[23] Unlike illustrated Safavid manuscripts that were in circulation in Mughal India, pictures from Europe perhaps offered the artist a model to experiment with a more naturalistic approach to

[22] The woodcut was published in Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiæ tomus alter…cum indice copiosissimo variarum linguarum* (Bologna: Giovanni Battista Bellagamba, 1600), 39. Prior to that, woodcuts of the turkey were published in Conrad Gesner's *Historiæ Animalium* and Pierre Belon's *L'Histoire de la nature des oyseavx*, making these two images the first visual representations of the bird within the domain of European natural history. Conrad Gesner, *Historiæ Animalium Liber III. qui est de Avium Natura* (Zurich: Christoffel Froschauer, 1555), 464 and Pierre Belon, *L'histoire de la nature des oyseaux, avec leurs descriptions et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel, escrite en sept livres* (Paris: Chez Guillaume Cavellat, 1555), 249. On Aldrovandi, see Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Science and Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Giuseppe Olmi, "'Things of Nature' from the New World in Early Modern Bologna," in *Images Take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, eds. Alessandra Russo, Dianna Fane, and Gerhard Wolf (Munich: Hirmer, 2015), 229–39. Greenberg was the first scholar to draw attention to the visual analogies between the turkey in Verbiest's map and the one in Aldrovandi's *Ornithologiæ*. See Greenberg, "Taxonomy of Empire."

[23] A ca. 1605–10 painting of lilies by Mansur was, for instance, based on European images circulating in Mughal India (Golestan Palace Library, Tehran; Ms. 1663, p.103). For Mansur's flower studies, see Robert Skelton, "A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art," in *Aspects of Indian Art: Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 147–52, Susan Stronge, "The Minto Album and its Decoration, c. 1612–1640" in *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin*, eds. Elaine Wright et al. (Alexandria, VA: Arts Services International, 2008), 82–105, Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King," and Das, *Wonders of Nature*, Chapter 6.

physiognomy. Even though we will never know whether Aldrovandi's *Ornithologiæ* had reached the Mughal court within ten years of its publication in Italy, the possibility of Mansur carefully studying the woodcut or a similar image that is yet to be discovered should not surprise us.

Art historians, however, have limited their engagement with the representation of animals, exotic or otherwise, in Mughal paintings as symbolic or metaphorical devices. Lions, sheep, wolves, and other animals, scholars have noted, assumed "allegorical meaning" within a system of kingship centered on the auratic presence of a worldly cosmopolitan monarch.[24] Paradoxically, what is omitted in this otherwise insightful engagement with the global histories of Mughal painting is the very physical presence of the animal in the court. Rather than seeing the bird as an absented trace or merely an amalgamation of lines, shapes, and colors in the masterful hands of the artist Mansur, an animal studies perspective urges us to take seriously the corporeal presence of the turkey. Such a reading, however, must proceed with caution. Unlike a sovereign subject with authorial intent, the animal does not leave a trace in the archive; unless, of course, we take into account paintings by Congo (1954–64), the celebrated chimpanzee in the London Zoo, and other imprisoned animal trained to paint by their captors and keepers. Consequently, we might concede that there is no real animal—a historical subject—to be found in art history's species-level archive.[25] It is solely from within the domain of representation that we will have to unearth the minor ruffles caused by the turkey that

[24] Ebba Koch, *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.
[25] For a discussion on archival absence, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24 (1985): 247–72.

appeared in the Mughal court in 1612. Nonetheless, the effect of the bird's presence, we will see, was significant for the history of art.

The Bird from Elsewhere

In the recent past, the precipitously growing field of Mughal painting has led to the publication of numerous exhibition catalogs, monographs on artists, and books dedicated to specific styles. In this burgeoning scholarship, the artist Mansur has now gained distinction as "one of the greatest natural history painters of all time."[26] Scholars have remarked on the artist's perceptive representations of flora and fauna and fine line brushwork that poignantly captured the physiognomy of animals.[27] Mansur had begun his career in the early 1590s under the emperor Akbar (1542–1605)—his signature first appearing in a ca. 1594–95 imperial copy of the *Baburnama*, the memoirs of the first Mughal emperor (see figure 2). Between 1600 and 1604, the artist was employed by Akbar's son Jahangir, then still a prince residing in the north Indian city of Allahabad. Art historians have argued that the artist, under the guidance of Jahangir, a consummate naturalist, heralded a new turn in Mughal painterly cultures, one that brought to the forefront a keen attentiveness to the natural world that was possessed, controlled, and governed by the imperium. Without doubt, Mansur's documentary eye paralleled his

[26] Das, *Wonders of Nature*.

[27] Although Verma's *Mughal Painter* and Das' *Wonders of Nature* are the only two monographs on the artist, much has been written on Mansur in the last few decades. See, for instance, Tasneem Ahmad, "Nádiru'l-'Aṣr Manṣúr," *Indo-Iranica* 25 (1972): 51–5, Asok K. Das, "Ustad Manṣūr," *Lalit Kala* 17 (1974): 32–9, Milo C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India, 1600–1660* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978), 137–43, and Milo C. Beach, "Mansur," in *Masters of Indian Painting*, vol. I, eds. Milo C. Beach et al. (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Supplementum 48 I/II, 2011), 243–58. For a catalog of works that can be both ascribed and attributed to Mansur, see Som P. Verma, *Mughal Painters and Their Work: A Biographical Survey and Catalogue* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 261–71.

patron's project of systematically recording and describing natural phenomenon in the imperial memoirs.[28] It is with Jahangir's inheritance of the throne in 1605 that Mansur also rose meteorically within the hierarchies of the imperial atelier. It is thus no coincidence that Jahangir, an avid collector of curiosities, had ordered Mansur to draw a likeness or *taswir* of the turkey that his courtier Muqarrab Khan, the Mughal governor of Cambay and Surat in the west coast of India, had purchased from the markets of Goa during trade negotiations with the Portuguese in October 1611. In March 1612, Khan returned to the Mughal court in Agra with the turkey and a Southeast Asian monkey; Mansur completed his painting soon after.

The practice of painting birds was certainly not uncommon in the Mughal court. Along with illustrations that accompanied imperial chronicles such as the *Baburnama*, Persian epics, animal fables such as the *Lights of Canopus* (Anvar-i Suhayli), and translations of Indic texts, a number of independent single folio paintings of birds had been produced by artists during the reigns of both Akbar and Jahangir. Such paintings inevitably evince an attempt by court artists to locate birds in either an imaginary landscape or in the natural habitat in which the animal is found.[29] In a ca. 1570 painting of two rosy pastors (*pastor roseus*), the unidentified court artist, for instance, has presented the two birds perched on a rocky outcrop near grasslands at the edge of an

[28] For Jahangir's interest in the natural world, see M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir—The Naturalist* (New Delhi: National Institute of Sciences, 1968) and Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King."

[29] Other examples include a ca. 1575 partridge (Keir Collection, England) and a ca. 1610 peafowl attributed to Mansur (private collection; published in Beach, "Mansur," 256). For a brief discussion on independent paintings of birds, see Milo C. Beach, *Early Mughal Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27–37. For the Jahangir Album, see Ernst Kühnel and Hermann Goetz, *Indian Book Painting from Jahangir's Album in the State Library in Berlin* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926).

urban center that is barely visible in the background (figure 7). Migratory rosy pastors, indeed, appear in vast numbers in north India from Europe and Central Asia during the winter season and are often seen feeding in agricultural land near towns.[30] Thus, even though the undulating rock formations are derived from Safavid paintings, the landscape in the late sixteenth-century painting unmistakably mimics the bird's natural habitat in India by way of locating the species within a familiar spatial context.

The painting of the turkey belonged to a different documentary order, but one whose aesthetic predilections were, however, already being shaped during the first few years of Jahangir's reign. Mansur's ca. 1610 painting of a hen (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) with chicks is a case in point (figure 8).[31] Although a relatively prosaic subject in comparison to the extraordinary animals that the artist would soon paint, the painting offers an indication of the experiments that were unfolding in the imperial atelier in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The hen is depicted in side profile with wings outstretched and plumage painted with great care. Yet, unlike the ca. 1612 painting of the turkey, the hen and her chicks are grounded in space. Despite eschewing his earlier practice of incorporating defined landforms such as hills and waterbodies as background, Mansur placed the hen in a swath of dark green pigment that gradually fades into the horizon to create a sense of depth and recession (see figure 2). Mansur had already

[30] Chris Feare and Adrian Craig, *Starlings and Mynas* (London: Christopher Helm, 1998), 177–79.
[31] Although a number of single-page paintings of birds, for instance a ca. 1585–90 woodpecker (Sotheby's, London, October 6, 2015, lot 7), have been attributed to Mansur, only a few carry his signature. Along with the painting of the hen, paintings before 1612 signed by the artist that depict birds include folios in the ca. 1594–95 *Baburnama*, a ca. 1600 painting of a man with a falcon (Musée Guimet, Paris), a ca. 1605 folio in a *Diwan* of Nawa'i (Royal Library, Windsor; RLIN 100503, f. 449a), and a ca. 1610 painting of squirrels in a chinar tree (British Library, London; Johnson Album 1, f.30), among others. In each instance, birds are depicted in landscapes.

mobilized a similar painterly strategy in human portraiture (figure 9). In a ca. 1605–06 portrait of a musician, Mansur had, for instance, placed the figure in a landscape demarcated solely by washes of pigment offset by flowering plants that terminated with the sky in the top margin—a technique that would become characteristic of the artist's signature style.[32] Even as the musician was the primary subject of the painting, the human figure was framed by two birds, who appear to be responding to the melodious sound emitting from the instrument. Nevertheless, rather than attributing this particular innovation of placing figures against monochromatic backgrounds solely to Mansur, we may see this representational strategy as part of a broader late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century turn to what the art historian Stuart C. Welch has described as the "deliberately soul-searching naturalism in Islamic or Indian portraiture."[33]

By the time Mansur painted his turkey around 1612, attempts to delineate a landscape as the background setting was completely abandoned, even though the sky in the top margin was still defined with bold brushstrokes. We will never know why Mansur deliberately effaced context, that is, the landscape, to underscore the bodily presence of the bird. But something was certainly afoot. Discussing the artist's oeuvre, the art historian Som P. Verma had remarked: "This boldness seems to have developed in

[32] Mansur had used a similar technique in other portraits as well, for example a ca. 1600 painting of a courtier in a garden (private collection; published in Das, *Wonders of Nature*, 51).
[33] Stuart Cary Welch, "Prince Danyal" in *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India*, eds. Stuart Cary Welch et. al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 115. A number of 1590s portraits of Mughal courtiers by artists such as Manohar depict figures against flat monochromatic background (for example, a ca. 1595 portrait of prince Danyal, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; 55.121.10.32) or framed by flowering trees in the same manner as Mansur's portrait of the musician (for example, a ca. 1590 portrait of Man Singh I, Metropolitan Museum of Art; 1982.174).

Mansur's work after 1612."[34] Perhaps, Mansur's painting was a pictorial response to European nature studies that were circulating in Mughal India. Much like the turkey in Aldrovandi's *Ornithologiæ*, Mansur's bird is presented in side profile with only a hint of vegetation in the immediate foreground. Or, perhaps, Mansur had never encountered Aldrovandi's book and the painting was a logical conclusion of Mansur's own creative experiments that had commenced with the 1590s *Baburnama*.

Although unlikely, yet another source might have been representations of plants and animals in illustrated pharmacopoeias and cosmographies circulating across the Islamic world, including a few produced in the Deccan region in south India in the late sixteenth century. In a ca. 1570 adaptation of Zakariya ibn Muhammad al-Qazvini's (1202–83) widely-copied *Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existing Things* ('Aja'ib al-Makhluqat va ghara'ib al-mawjudat; ca. 1270), we see a winged horse, representing the angels of the fourth heaven, in profile without any contextual elements or landscape in the background (figure 10). This system of depiction that can be traced to illustrated Arabic manuscripts on medicine, mechanics, and cosmology that were produced in vast numbers from the fourteenth century onwards.[35] But, as the art historian Ebba Koch notes: "In the Islamic world natural history illustration, of elementary importance in the early periods, had, by the time of Jahangir, lost its life and scientific

[34] Verma, *Mughal Painters*, 261.
[35] For late medieval Arabic books, see Eva R. Hoffman, "The Beginnings of the Illustrated Arabic Book: An Intersection between Art and Scholarship," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 37–52, Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), and Stefano Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Painting: A Study of the Ilkhanid London Qazvīnī* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). For the LACMA folio, see Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Painting: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 317–9.

relevance, perpetuated in stereotyped illustrations of classical works of science […].”[36] Thus, we will never know whether Mansur indeed turned to European or Arabic systems of representation unless new archives are discovered. But certainly, the portrait of the turkey was a decisive turning point in the artist’s long career that spanned the reigns of both Akbar and Jahangir. The sudden appearance of the bird in the court did not, of course, set Mughal painting on a new course. Rather, the arrival of the bird catalyzed artistic experiments that were already occurring in the court.

Nevertheless, unlike late medieval pharmacological texts, the technique of presenting an isolated animal against a blank background was, at least in sixteenth-century Europe, representative of an emergent “specimen logic,” a form of ecological imperialism that turned “nature into object by decontextualizing select creatures and items—that is, by removing them from their habitats, environments, and settings.”[37] Thus, it is within the context of early modern humanist natural history and global bioprospecting that Aldrovandi’s woodblock of the turkey functioned as a specimen of Americas’ avifauna. It is also within this system of the scientific study of the natural world that the bird came to allegorically signify Europe’s “claim over the Americas.”[38] The bird, however, had a very different career in both China and India. In Asia, the bird was not embedded within the discourses of ecological imperialism that marked Europe’s interest in the Americas. Instead, the turkey was indicative of an increasing awareness of the Americas that was external to the logic of eco-colonial domination. Along with

[36] Koch, “Jahangir as Francis Bacon’s Ideal of the King,” 299.
[37] Neri, *The Insect and the Image*, 14.
[38] Markey, *Imagining the Americas*, 27.

acquiring a turkey in 1612, Jahangir had, for instance, started cultivating pineapples in Agra with plants obtained from the Portuguese; the American fruit also starts appearing in mid-seventeenth-century textiles.[39] Nonetheless, the biocultural effects of the Columbian Exchange in India was rooted in a very different conceptual register; a *picture ecology* that was epistemically unlike the imperialist ambitions of European seaborne colonialism, even though the Mughals enthusiastically acquired objects, plants, and animals from diverse parts of the world. Rather than a seaborne empire, historians propose that the Mughals were a "sea-conscious" empire.[40] Thus, one would need to go beyond the totalizing aesthetic arrangements of European expansionism to comprehend the blank background in Mansur's painting of the turkey, despite formal similarities to European nature studies.

Rather than seeing Mansur's painting as solely conveying allegorical or emblematic meaning, we might instead take seriously the irreducible presence of the bird in the court. That the act of seeing an animal is inevitably a reciprocal relationship, a dynamic and entangled complex of differential action, has already been explored in a range of disciplines.[41] As the philosopher Brian Massumi reminds us: "Animal metacommunication is efficacious. It does, and induces doing, flush with its performance, directly, in the immediacy of its gestures' execution."[42] The turkey, one could contend

[39] See Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 24, 206, for the cultivation of pineapples. Examples of pineapples in textiles include a coverlet from Golconda (National Museum, New Delhi; 48.7/103).
[40] Manya Rathore "'Floating Political Rhetoric' in the Indian Ocean: Situating the Portuguese in the Mughal Foreign Politics," in *The Indian Ocean in the Making of Early Modern India*, ed. Pius Malekandathil (New Delhi: Manohar, 2016), 250.
[41] See, for instance, Marc Bekoff and John A. Byer, eds. *Animal Play: Evolutionary, Comparative, and Ecological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[42] Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us*, 20.

following this line of reasoning, was above all itself, performing its self. "Sometimes when it displays itself during mating," Jahangir had observed, "it spreads its tail and its other feathers like a peacock and dances. Its head, neck, and wattle constantly change color. When it is mating they are as red as can be—you would think it had all been set with coral."[43] When the turkey was performing before the observing Mansur and Jahangir, surely the artist and his patron were implicated in spite of the ostensible primacy of activity on one side of the human-animal continuum. Mansur's painting could then perhaps be read as an intersubjective transcript of that interspecies continuum, functioning—against its own epistemological intention—as a trace of the animal's presence.

Conceivably, it was the strangeness of a bird from elsewhere whose neck turned as red as coral that necessitated a new artistic language that could transcend context and belonging. Unlike animals such as monkeys (the god Hanuman) and serpents (*nagas* or semidivine human-serpent beings in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism), who were both agents and had agency within Indo-Islamic cultures, the turkey did not belong to an interspecies topography enunciated through mythopoetic narratives of shape-shifting creatures or the figurative prominence of animals such as horses and elephants in courtly cultures.[44] The turkey thus found itself in a state of double alterity or a specific relationship of subalternity, unable to speak from this othered position. For not only was

[43] Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 133.
[44] For a broad survey, see Alexandra van der Geer, *Animals in Stone: Indian Mammals Sculptured through Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For courtly practices, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) and Jagjeet Lally, "Empires and Equines: The Horse in Art and Exchange in South Asia, ca. 1600–ca. 1850," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015): 96–116, among others.

it the irreducible other, that is, the nonhuman, but its unbelongingness excluded it from interspecies affiliations that marked Mughal interactions with other more recognizable animal species. It was perhaps this double alterity that did not find recognition within established visual repertories of the Mughal court; Mansur's hen—despite the banality of the subject—could, after all, be easily placed within an imperial culture of Jahangir's endowments to the poor and the court's culinary habits.[45]

The turkey, in contrast, was forever from elsewhere, persistently conspicuous in its difference. In 1755, the British lexicographer Samuel Johnson had described the bird as "a large domestic fowl brought from Turkey" in his influential dictionary of the English language.[46] In Turkey, however, the same bird was known as *hind*, after Hindustan or India, where the bird was believed to have originated. Most parts of Europe, too, associated the bird with India.[47] In Italian, the bird is often described as a *gallo d'India* while it is known as the *poule d'Inde* in French, *calecutische hahn* in German, and *kalkoen* in Dutch, by way of implying that the bird originated in Calicut in south India. Accordingly, even though the turkey was from the Americas, Aldrovandi had described the bird as *gallopavo*, an early Spanish word for chicken-peacock, and depicted a sheaf of Asian rice to indicate the Indian provenance of the bird. Aldrovandi was not the only one to make this error; he was merely echoing a nomenclature already used by the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner in his 1551 *Historiæ animalium*, one of the most

[45] Jahangir's gifting of chicken to the poor is noted in Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 193. For the consumption of chicken in Mughal India, see Satya P. Sangar, *Food and Drinks in Mughal India* (New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1999).
[46] Samuel Johnson, "Turkey," *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. II (London: W. Strahan for J. and P. Knapton, et al., 1755), not paginated.
[47] For the etymology of the word, see Dan Jurafsky, *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014), Chapter 6.

popular European natural histories of this time.[48] While Gessner had erroneously proposed that the turkey and the guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*), an African bird that had been reintroduced in Europe in the fifteenth century, were identical, by 1758, Carl Linnaeus' binomial nomenclature had authoritatively designated the bird as *Meleagris gallopavo* or a guinea fowl-chicken-peacock.[49] *Peru*, the name adopted in both Mughal India and China based on the Portuguese term for the turkey, was, in contrast, perhaps the most appropriate in this context of a chronic misnaming and misrepresentation, since the name referred to the Spanish Viceroyalty of Perú.[50] Despite the error in locating the bird as originating in Perú rather than in New Spain, the natural habitat of the turkey, the designation *peru* articulated an incipient seventeenth-century cognizance of the circuits that connected the Americas to Asia beyond Europe's global colonial aspirations. Perhaps it was this intractable foreignness—unlike other privileged animals such as monkeys, horses, and elephants who were already embedded within narratives of interspecies kinship—that impeded Mansur from being able to visualize a suitable landscape in which the turkey could be placed.

Mansur's ca. 1612 painting of the turkey was only one of the many unusual animals that the artist would paint over his long career. Even a cursory analysis of Mansur's paintings of exotic and foreign animals such as zebras, dodos, and gyrfalcons in Jahangir's menagerie indicate that the animals were affected by an increasing decontextualization in the artist's hand. Thus, while the turkey gently hovered over a

[48] Gesner, *Historiæ Animalium*, 464
[49] Caroli Linnæi, *Systema Naturæ per Regna Tria Naturæ, Secundum Classes, Ordines, Genera, Species, cum Characteribus, Differentiis, Synonymis, Locis*, ed. 10, vol. 1 (Holmiæ: Impensis Direct. Laurentii Salvii, 1758), 156–7.
[50] The turkey is described as a *peru* in Verbiest's map.

landscape that its claws only just failed to grasp, the 1621 zebra from Abyssinia was presented against an entirely unmarked background (see figure 3). Yet, unlike sixteenth-century paintings of animals tethered to a stake—for instance, a ca. 1585 watercolor of a ram attributed to the artist Basawan (active ca. 1565–98)—the ground remains indistinct in Mansur's painting of the zebra; not a single clue betrays the animal's precise placement in the world.[51] The burden of precision or precise likeness rests entirely on the animal, whose intricate black and white stripes are sharply juxtaposed against the muted surface of the background. Rather than reading this transformation in Mansur's oeuvre merely as a signifier of human attitudes towards animals, we could reconsider the 1612 encounter between Mansur and the turkey from a perspective where we see the animal's presence as constitutive rather than emblematic. Linguistic misrecognitions aside, it was the strangeness of the animal confronting the artist that necessitated a new mode of visualizing ground and horizon in relation to the subject—one in which there was no context or background to place the bird. While Mansur, along with other artists such as Manohar (active ca. 1582–1624), had already commenced exploring these painterly questions by the 1590s, the arrival of the turkey in the court might have provoked a sharp shift in Mughal portraits of birds and animals.

Conclusions: After 1612

In the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, Mansur's painting of the turkey was emulated by a number of artists. Along with the representation of the bird in textiles and in the margins of manuscripts, there are at least four copies of Mansur's

[51] The painting of the ram is in the collection of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur (AG.1413).

painting; in each instance, the turkey is presented in side profile, floating against an indistinct background.[52] Mansur's painting also heralded a new style of depicting foreign animals in the Mughal atelier. By the early eighteenth century, this practice of presenting animals against monochromatic flat backdrops had spread to regional courts across India.[53] While we might turn to Arab pharmacopoeias, European natural histories, or Mansur's own experiments with pictorial form as possible antecedents to this new seventeenth-century visual arrangement, undoubtedly the turkey's impact on the development of Mughal painting was equivalently significant. Nevertheless, my reading of Mansur's painting of the turkey, I must admit, is capricious without empirical evidence—the bedrock of art history's Enlightenment roots. Yet, there is no turkey-archive that can offer verifiable insight into the fateful encounter between Mansur and the bird. There is, I must thus also admit, no real turkey in art history's archive. Our art historical archive is consequently limited to Mansur's painting and a few paragraphs penned by the emperor Jahangir in his memoirs. Thus, given the impossibility of other forms of archival retrieval, it is the 1612 painting that has to be pushed against its own anthropocentric limit to locate the crosshatchings of interspecies mediations. However, as a shadowy figure in history, as the one who left no trace otherwise, the turkey does not

[52] Seventeenth-century copies of Mansur's turkey are in the collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata (R210), the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum (AG.839), and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (PD.83-1948). An eighteenth-century copy is in the collection of the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad (C.S.III-333). The turkey was depicted in the margins of an early seventeenth-century Mughal *Yusuf va Zulaykha* (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin; I. 1986.125) and in the central medallion of a cotton textile (Metropolitan Museum of Art; 28.162.1). For the Berlin manuscript, see Jens Kröger, "On Mahmud B. Ishaq al-Shihabi's Manuscript of *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* of 964 (1557)," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 239–54.
[53] For instance, a seventeenth-century Mughal album in the collection of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum include paintings of an African elephant, a zebra, a turkey, and an ostrich, among other exotic animals, against flat monochromatic backgrounds. For a discussion of the album, see Asok K. Das, "Notes on an Aurangzeb Period Album of Bird and Animal Paintings," in *Indian Painting: Essays in Honour of Karl J. Khandalavala*, ed. B. N. Goswamy (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1995), 71–85.

allow for a liberal humanist recovery of an ethico-political subject called the animal.[54] Rather than offering liberatory narratives of agency, empowerment, or subjectivity, the 1612 painting, at its best, obfuscates Enlightenment species boundaries to make way for a porous art history, a more-than-human art history in which the other—animal or otherwise—dwells in difference. Does the turkey care for such an entangled art history? *Do turkeys enjoy thanksgiving*? Unlikely.

[54] As Cary Wolfe writes: "But a fundamental problem with the liberal humanist model is not so much what it wants as the price it pays for what it wants: that in its attempt to recognize the uniqueness of the other, it reinstates the normative model of subjectivity that it insists is the problem in the first place." Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 136–7.