
Exploring At Second-Hand: Separating the Editor from the Traveller in Soeteboom's Version of Van West-Zanen's Sojourn in Mauritius in 1602.

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Abstract: Willem van West-Zanen's account of visiting Mauritius with Hans Schuurmans's fleet of five ships on their return journey from Java to Amsterdam in 1602, is translated in full for the first time. Numerous Dodos were caught and eaten by the crews, as was much other wildlife.

Introduction

Between 1598 and 1611 Dutch visitors to Mauritius left numerous quite detailed accounts of the island, some published at the time (e.g. Anon 1601), others in later compilations (e.g. Commelin 1646, Soeteboom 1648) and still others that remained in manuscript until relatively recently (Keuning 1938-51, Moree 2001, Hume & Winters 2015). Soeteboom's version of van West-Zanen's account, translated here into English in full for the first time¹, is a typical example, illustrating several of the ways in which both travellers' attitudes and editors' ethics differ from those pertaining today. The wanton and often wasteful attitude to wildlife is readily seen in the narrative, less obvious to the casual reader are the editorial interpolations and inaccuracies in the illustrations. The translation is by Beentje, commentary and identifications of biota by Cheke. Words missing or omitted in the original text are supplied in square brackets, while explanatory expansions by the authors are indicated by asterisks (also in square brackets).

While we may quail at the slaughter of endemic island wildlife, it should be remembered that in the 17th century sailors often spent weeks or months at sea, and regularly ran out of fresh food. Due to this poor nutrition, scurvy was the curse of mariners, and it is not surprising that once on land they took advantage of whatever meat, fish and edible vegetation that presented itself. The Dutch East India company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

or VOC) did not release livestock on the island until 1606 (Cheke 1987, Moree 1998, Cheke & Hume 2008), so earlier visitors had to hunt the native wildlife – birds, tortoises, turtles, dugongs and fish. This account is the only one that mentions actual numbers of dodos caught and eaten or salted – around 50 are specifically mentioned by van West-Zanen, but probably many others were caught by the crews of the other four ships during the 2½ months of their stay.

As Ben van Wissen (1995) so aptly put it "at that time copyright or author's rights ... did not exist; people simply borrowed, pirated or stuck in bits at will, with or without acknowledging their sources, just as long as the result was tasteful and saleable". Soeteboom was taking advantage of the popularity of the major anthology of Dutch journeys published two years earlier (Commelin 1646), and seeing that West-Zanen's account was as interesting as those in the compilation, published it as a free-standing booklet with an excessively long and pretentious title. However in the style of the time, and as noted by Strickland (1848), he embellished West-Zanen's narrative with descriptions taken from the *Tweede Boek* (anon. 1601) and Commelin's anthology, together with musings of his own about animals from classical, medieval and renaissance writings.

Soeteboom's book also contains woodcuts supposedly depicting events described by West-Zanen. As the ones illustrating the stay at Mauritius are only two of a very few Dutch 17th century illustrations of the island, they have been widely reproduced, but little examined. Figure 2 has four panels, showing, respectively, (1) ships at anchor in Mauritius, (2) some large birds being killed, (3) a marine animal being captured, and (4) the slaughter of parrots, with an explanatory verse. Panel 1 shows ships in a very

1 The passages pertaining to Dodos were Englished by Strickland (1848); his version differs in some respects from that given here.



Figure1. Sailors killing penguins on an island in the Straits of Magellan; from Commelin (1646) – compare with the left middle panel of Figure2.

standard mountain-fringed bay, which could be anywhere, the large numbers of stylised palms being perhaps the only nod to the real Mauritius – though the whole scene is somewhat similar to an equivalent (but more accurate) engraving in the *Tweede Boek*. The second panel shows what appear to be penguins standing around waiting patiently to be killed. The text alerts us that these are supposed to be Dodos, the penguin being taken from an illustration adjacent to a real Dodo in one of several possible sources then in circulation, all based on Clusius's *Exotica* (1605), as more fully discussed by den Hengst (2003), Hume (2006) and Parish (2013: 164); indeed the scene seems to have been lifted almost directly, as Hume (2006) suggested, from a woodcut in a book published two years earlier that included a description (de Waerd't's account) of killing real penguins in the Straits of Magellan in near-Antarctic South America (Commelin 1646; see Figure1²). The animal in panel 3 is evidently intended to be a Dugong or sea-cow, but has acquired the horns evidently necessary in Soeteboom's mind (or his artist's) to make it a 'cow'. As the text gives no description of the easily-killed parrots (panel 4), apart from their being 'grey', the pale faces and longish

tails are derived either from imagination or an unnamed source, since the cognate van der Hagen passage (below) is equally reticent on their appearance. In the background larger birds are being beaten to death, perhaps more Dodos. Figure 3, less often reproduced, shows the sailors in generally more constructive activities, in three panels. In panel 1 men on the right catch tortoises or turtles, while on the left two others stalk an anachronistic goat on a cliff – a species not released until 1606 (above). Panel 2 shows work with barrels and planks, while panel 3 is a scene of great activity – *inter alia* the preacher with an audience, the smithy in full activity, a palm being tapped for toddy, fish being hauled up in a net, and a lone hunter in the background shooting at unseen game. The figures are placed in the translation in the same positions as in Soeteboom's original text.

Willem van West-Zanen, skipper with the VOC, who had been to Mauritius before on van Neck's expedition in 1598, left Bantam in Java on 11 April 1602, with five ships under the overall command of Admiral Hans Schuurmans³. According to Soeteboom they travelled via the Sunda Strait

- 2 Commelin's compilation contains numerous illustrated accounts of voyages, all paginated separately. De Waerd't's voyage immediately follows the reprinted *Tweede Boeck*, the second Dutch voyage to the East Indies (van Neck & van Warwijk's 1598 trip, including Mauritius). Soeteboom's artist seems to have focussed in on the pictures, and seeing one of people slaughtering flightless birds, picked that to copy while ignoring both text and context. We have followed Commelin's spelling, but de Waerd't is often spelt 'de Weert' (e.g. Hume 2006, Parish 2013).
- 3 The ships were (Moree 1998) the *Amsterdam*, *Hoorn*, *Groene Leeuw*, *Zwarte Leeuw* and the *Bruyn-vis/Enkhuizen* (see below)

(April 14), passing reefs and rocks⁴ 'towards the great islands of Madagascar' on the 17th, and the St. Brandon (=Cargados Carajos) atolls on the 19th, reaching Mauritius on April 22nd. What follows is a direct translation into English of the black-letter ('gothic') Dutch text published in 1648 (Soeteboom 1648), with evident editorial interpolations (notably classical or literary references) italicised. An unexplained curiosity is that Soeteboom's text gives West-Zanen's ship as the *Bruyn-Vis*, whereas the VOC records have the *Bruyn-Vis* replaced by the *Enkhuizen* (Moree 1998). As these are clearly not different readings of the same name, and the VOC records are contemporary with the sailing dates (Bruijn & others 1979-87), it appears that West-Zanen or Soeteboom had some reason for changing the ship's name, or that *Bruyn-Vis/Bruinvis* ('porpoise', literally 'brown fish') was a nickname for the *Enkhuizen*. The VOC website (www.vocsite.nl) gives *Bruinvis* as an alternative name for the yacht⁵ *Enkhuizen*. In addition the date of the flotilla's arrival in Mauritius is given by Soeteboom as 23 April (the itinerary given is impossibly fast from Bantam), whereas the VOC records (no doubt more accurate!) have the ships leaving Bantam on *May* 11 (not April) and arriving in Mauritius on *June* 22 (Bruijn *et al.* 1979-87, Moree 1998); the departure date (September 8) is the same in both accounts. Their next stop was St. Helena, en route back to Texel.

**Translation of Soeteboom's text on Mauritius:
Arriving⁶ at the Island of Cerne now Mauritius**

This island is about 20 leagues⁷ in the round, has a beautiful

harbour, and is the best possible place to re-victual; 50 ships could moor therein, but [it] has a foul ground, bad for the ropes:

it is a country with high mountains. The mountains mostly covered with trees (but wild [ones]), with some palmetto⁸ trees, but these much better and more beautiful in the valleys; the mountains are so high that they are usually covered in cloud, sometimes there is also such mist that one can hardly see: it is usually stony soil, but still very fertile for wild trees, standing very dense, so one can hardly go through; the wood of these trees is as good ebony as one can find anywhere, black as pitch, and smooth as ivory; we brought three pieces to Holland as samples. The Sea is extremely rich in fish, and also the rivers; there are beautiful valleys in the country, with scattered clay soils, useful for building; the birds (that are very common) are of many kinds⁹: doves, parrots, Indian ravens, sparrowhawks, falcons, thrushes, owls, swallows, and many small winged-creatures; white and black herons, geese, ducks, dodos, tortoises/turtles, sea-cows [*dugongs]. As this is a place as friendly to replenish as St Helena's island on the return [journey], therefore these 5 Ships stayed on this Island of Mauritius 2 months, to do some carpentry, and get fresh [food] for the crew.

THE 14TH CHAPTER¹⁰

Thanks-giving prayers: [then] started hunting and fishing. Which fishes there are; Sea-cows killed. The cabin-crew of the *Garnier* forgiven¹¹. Story of venomous fishes and

4 In addition to '*riffen of klippen*', van West-Zanen or his editor redundantly also used '*Baixos, Abrolhos*' Portuguese words for banks and reefs widely adopted by mariners in the 17th century; van West-Zanen is not referring to locations that include the word Abrolhos on modern maps (Houtman Abrolhos off western Australia, Abrolhos Bank off Brazil).

5 The VOC's *jachts* (whence the English term 'yacht'), later called *pinas* (pinnace), "were square stern ships, three-masted and with square sails. They were much used by the Company, particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century" (Bruijn *et al.* (1979-87, vol.1).

6 Soeteboom has '*Inwerp van't Eylandt de Cerne...*' followed by the description. *Inwerpen* and *werp-* words in both 17/18thC (Sewel 1766) and modern Dutch refer to breaking and throwing, but also getting or casting into something, so it appears that the meaning may be 'casting [ourselves] into Mauritius', although what immediately follows is a description of the island not the details of arrival. Our guess is that these terms are cognate with the English sailing term 'to warp', casting an anchor to haul a becalmed boat forward on the rope, hence the heading could be read as 'Warping [ourselves] into Mauritius' – i.e. arriving. However later on the text has a heading '*Inwerp vande palm-bomen*', again followed by a description, which suggests the word may have also meant simply 'description', and left no trace of this usage in dictionaries!

7 The text uses '*mijl*' which can refer to miles or leagues, and here must mean Dutch marine leagues of 5.7km. Since the van Neck expedition, and other contemporary published sources (e.g. Clusius; see Parish 2013: 108) gave the circumferential figure as 30 *mijlen* (more or less correct), this is an egregious error by West-Zanen or Soeteboom.

8 We use here the somewhat obsolete English term 'palme(t)to' (see Herbert 1634, who gave a full description) to translate the original '*palmitas*', equivalent to the French *palmiste*, meaning a generally slender palm, often with an edible cabbage.

9 The original Dutch reads: *Duyven/Papegaven/Indische-Ravens/Sparwers/Valken/Lijsters/Vlen* [i.e. *Ulen*]/ *Swaluwen/en mingten van't kleyn gevlegelt goet; witte en swarte Reygers/Gansen/Eent-vogels/Dod-aarsen/Schil-padden/Koeyen vander zee*. Aboriginal Mauritius had, *inter alia*, in the same order, 4 pigeon/dove species, 2 small parrots, one large parrot (the 'Indian raven', or Raven Parrot *Lophopsittacus mauritianus*), a harrier *Circus maillardi* (? the 'sparrowhawk'), a kestrel *Falco punctatus* (the 'falcon'), a black bulbul *Hypsipetes olivaceus* ('thrush'), an owl *Mascarenotus sauzieri*, a swallow *Phedina borbonica* and a swift *Aerodramus francicae* ('swallows'), and several small passerines ('small winged-creatures'). There were at least three herons (though 'white & black' ones would have been Dimorphic Egrets *Egretta dimorpha*), a sheldgoose *Alopochen mauritianus*, a duck *Anas theodori*, Dodo *Raphus cucullatus*, 2 species of giant tortoise and probably three species of nesting sea-turtles, and finally Dugongs *Dugong dugon* in the lagoon (Cheke & Hume 2008, updated by Hume 2013).

10 Each chapter begins with a summary, shown here in bold type.

11 This event is billed in the chapter heading, but does not appear in the text.

birds. The country walked, again, and how we judged it; The signs there of Moluccas-sailors. And more practice of hunting, fishing, and catch.

Before the crew landed, being on the 23rd¹² all together on board the Admiral's [ship] to hear the thanksgiving prayer which the Preacher had composed after our recent [good] fortune, together with the beneficial offerings of this happy Island, set in the sea by the Lord and ordained to the refreshment of the sea-farers that are on this long voyage: they praised God that they had come so far.

[They] then landed to hunt and to fish. The decision was made by the overseers to build some dwellings, and to stay there a while, so the people could be refreshed; which [people] hardly did anything else for the next four days, [other] than being steadily busy with the catching of enough fish to feed the whole ship, as many with seine-nets as with hooks; as there is almost a complete circle of rocks [*i.e. reefs] around the Island, somewhat off-shore, that has oysters, crabs and eels. Many things could be got there; part of the crew went on a bird-hunt, grabbing as many birds as they wished, all caught by hand, such that it was a joy to see. Especially tame are the grey parrots¹³; if one catches one and makes it cry out, soon hundreds come to fly around ones' ears, and can be hit to the ground with small sticks. So tame also are the pigeons and turtle-

doves¹⁴ that [they] can easily be grabbed. The Fish¹⁵ they caught were rays, mullets, flat-fish like bream, little salmon, stone-bream, *Carvados* [*not identified], and a type of black fish that known as Jan Evertsz¹⁶, and more such. Among the fish they caught there were eel and bass¹⁷; the eels are very fat there, and some of these are a fathom long¹⁸ and the thickness of a man's leg: *this time that they were there, so Jovius tells us, they were at their best; [it] was good food for the sailors, and quite wanted.* The bream also, not a few [of] these were well-fed [upon]; *the sea-bream Galen holds for very good*¹⁹. *In Italy they have the prize [-fish; not identified], it is a fish that refreshes the food and improves upon vegetables.* The surfeit of fish that the sailors and the officers caught for sport was so large that a day was not sufficient to eat all they had caught. [They] threw the excess overboard, choosing what seemed nicest and most pleasant. It happened once on the 10th of the Hay-month [*July]²⁰ that Willem['s boat] was lying at the east-end with 4 or 5 of his sailors to go fishing with hooks, that he in a very short time brought with him more than a hundred *stuer*²¹ of which the majority were over 2 feet long²². *It was also found what Plinius tells of: that the Fish in the Indies are very large: when Willem lay off this Island with Admiral van Nek*²³ they caught a ray so large that a crew had enough for two meals. Our men shot with harpoons when 3 sea-cows were visible, *just like in the figure*²⁴, *this sea-monster is called this name as her snout is not dissimilar to those of*

NB: Soeteboom's editorial additions to West-Zanen's text are given in italics

12 'April' according to Soeteboom, June according to the VOC.

13 *Psittacula bensoni*; this passage about abusing grey parrots and the tameness of pigeons is clearly cognate with Steven van der Hagen's account from 1607 (Commelin 1646, Barnwell 1948), hence Soeteboom probably enhanced a simpler version by West-Zanen with the van der Hagen version.

14 *Alectroenas nitidissima*, *Nesoenas mayeri*; two other pigeons *N.cicur* and *Columba thiriouxi* (Hume 2011) are known from subfossil material, but, notwithstanding assertions that *N.cicur* survived until c1730 (Hume 2011, erroneously citing Cheke & Hume 2008; Hume 2013, 2017), due to a lack of descriptions it is unclear if either or both were still present when humans first arrived in Mauritius (see time-line of *N.picturata* in Cheke & Hume 2008 p.372, showing the first positive sighting around 1800; at the time *N.cicur* bones were thought to be from *picturata*).

15 The Dutch original has: "*Rocchen, Hardars, platte Visschen als Braassemen, Salmonetten, Steen-brasemen, Carvados* [? a Portuguese name], *ook seeker swarte Visshen diese Jan Evertsz*". Given the large number of species of marine fish in Mauritius, it is probably not possible to identify these varieties.

16 This may be the blackbelly rosefish *Helicolenus dactylopterus* still known in South Africa as *jacopever* – or something like it: "It got its peculiar name from the name of a hideously pockmarked Dutch sailor (Jakob Evertsz) that the fish was named after in jest" [https://www.aquarium.co.za/species/entry/jacopever].

17 '*Aal en Baars*' in the original, though the next phrase uses the alternative *paling* for eel. It is unclear if these were marine eels (morays) or freshwater species, also, in Mauritius, very large (up to 2m, Staub 1993).

18 Dutch *vadem* = 1.7 metre

19 'Jovius' may be the renaissance Italian historian and predate Paolo Giovio (1483- 1552); Galen is the eminent Roman medical writer, *florat* 170 CE.

20 '*Hoy-maant*', equated to July in a marginal note, modern *hooimaand*; it appears that Soeteboom's inexplicably revised dating slipped up here!

21 Possibly error for *steur* = sturgeon, though true sturgeons are freshwater fish and absent from Indian Ocean islands.

22 The Dutch or Amsterdam *voet* was 28.3 cm long (www.sizes.com/units)

23 On the *Tweede Schipvaart* (second [Dutch] fleet) in 1598; van Neck led the expedition but did not himself visit Mauritius (Moree 1998). Soeteboom spells the famous admiral 'van Nek' rather than 'van Neck' throughout.

24 To the end of this paragraph, bar the last bit about the head-stone, this passage (although appearing original) closely follows van der Hagen's 1607 account published earlier (Commelin 1646, Barnwell 1948, see note 21), and has thus had substantial editorial intervention. Several Mauritian fish are toxic if eaten (Jones 1956).

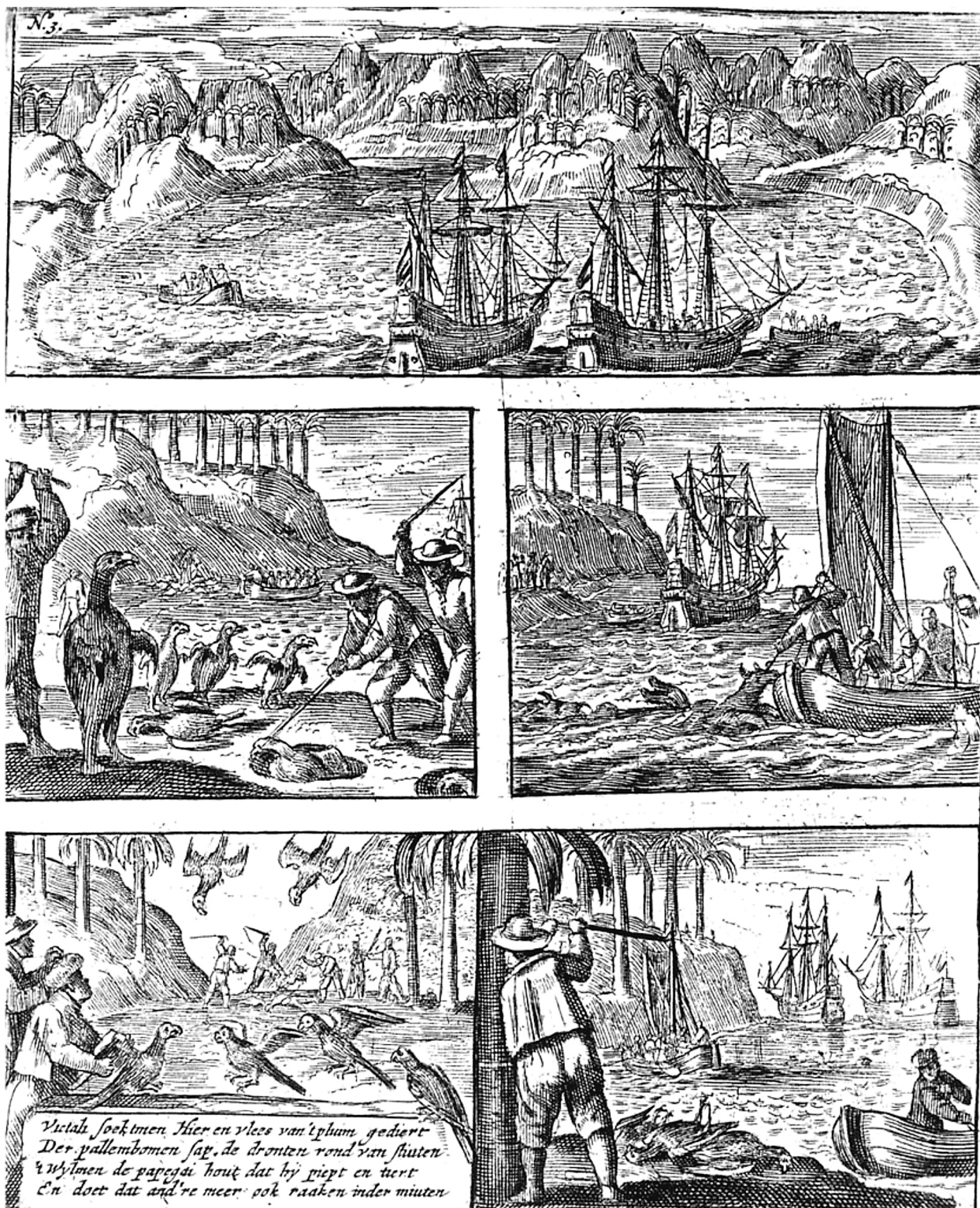


Figure 2. The short text bottom left reads "For food the seamen seek the flesh of feathered birds, the sap of palm trees, dodos with round rump, while the parrot being held pipes and screeches, and causes others to join the mutiny." Strickland (1848) rendered this more freely, matching the rhyming verse of the original: "For food the seamen hunt the flesh of feathered fowl, They tap the Palms, the round-sterned Dodos they destroy, The Parrot's life they spare that he may scream and howl, And thus his fellows to imprisonment decoy".

*cows*²⁵. [They] weighed at a guess 500 or 600 pounds²⁶, 10, 12 and 14 feet long: while the body is similar to that of fish, [the meat] is undistinguishable from veal, sweet in taste and very fat, a thickness of 1½ fingers of blubber to keep her dry, and eat from the sea-floor the greens that grow thereon²⁷; when they are shot the sailors let them swim away on the rope [*attached to the harpoon] (*similar to the fish at the North Cape and Spitsbergen*) until they are tired; they have a stone in their head that is held as very medicinal.

On the 27th all the senior officers who were eating in the cabin of the sub-Admiral's ship were struck by a severe illness that hit them in all their members and made them weak throughout. It was thought they were poisoned, [but] did not know where it came from, [although] suspected it came from a fish not unlike the carp; then they became better again. *Those going to the Moluccas in the Autumn-month and staying here [i.e. Mauritius] for a while underwent similar [experiences], because when they caught and ate fish there, they became sick as if they had swallowed poison, which [sickness] upon taking oil and vinegar ceased. Therefore they called the area where they lay the Poisonous corner, and it keeps that name till this day; and the anchorage is called the Moluccan Roadstead, at which site there is a lot of fish. Because of this befalling them we will speak a little of poisonous birds and fish: the suspicion that they harboured towards the afore-mentioned fish was later disproved, as the diary²⁸[of] Stevens vander Hagen²⁹ notes, because they who lay here as well, did not eat the same [meal] and still fell ill. Some suspect this is caused by the red-tailed pigeon³⁰; that may be true, and it may not be, as they³¹ ate the same and found it good food; still, it is said there is a kind of fish rather similar to the stone-bream, red in colour, that is so poisonous and unhealthy, that whoever eats it goes mad from the pain³²; this lasts a few days and then ends. Also it is said of a fish, easily a [hand] span big,*

*roundish, grey in colour, skin and shape like a small ray, that is often caught in the seine-nets; which fish, [when] in all innocence touched, gives every member a shock, even [in] the knees. When one steps upon it when shod, one feels as if hiccupping. It is thought this is the fish mentioned by Gesner named the Torpedo³³, and which has such a shape, that it is reckoned very poisonous, and has to be killed quickly and thrown away. Whether it [*the poisoning episode] is a change of bad air ([in a place] where even the sick get well) or the fault of the fish we will let others judge.*

The 28th both Captains, Willem van West-Zanen and Jan Pietersz., on orders of Schuurmans, were sent eastwards to see if there was an opening or passage, as [they] had suggested that from a high vantage point they had seen what might be a passage. They went there, and found the same as was suggested, broad and deep enough to sail in. In the meantime Willem, a quartermaster, died, and they came back on board [on] the 30th, having been busy with that for 1–2 days, and brought all kinds of good information. Ten days later the Admiral sent off two boats to circumnavigate the island, and see how the facts were; they had to take good account of all things. [They] were away for nine days, [and] found the same circled by a stone-bank [*coral reef], at the east [only] a small reef ran to the Sea, but from the west a large reef³⁴. In the middle of the reef lay a small islet, and in the north of the same was a stone-bank that came close to the shore, so that no boat could land through the surf, as the sea threw up high. In the stone-bank they spotted an opening so wide that a ship could easily sail through; through this the ships could sail to replenish. The Moluccas-expedition under Wolfert Harmansz named the roadstead and area here³⁵. They [*the two boats] came to a place where the books and writings of the Moluccas expedition were found, that they had left there for ships coming after [them]; also Wolfert Harmansz had planted some Coconut trees on this Island

25 This is a direct quote from van der Hagen (Barnwell 1948); the usual reason given for calling dugongs 'sea cows' is that they graze on sea-grass and taste like beef.

26 The Amsterdam pound was 494.09 grams (www.sizes.com/units), thus 247-296kg; an excellent guess, the average dugong weighs 250-300kg (Reynolds & Odell 1991).

27 Dugongs graze on sea-grass beds (Reynolds & Odell 1991).

28 The dutch is '*dag-tafel*' ('day-table'), but appears in context to mean day-book.

29 Van de Hagen's voyage was in 1607 (Commelin 1646, Barnwell 1948, Moree 1998), so this part is clearly an editorial addition.

30 Two Mauritian pigeons had red(dish) tails, but van der Hagen (Barnwell 1948) said the alleged culprits had red bodies as well as tails, and indeed during later times (18thC onwards) it was the Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* that gained notoriety for being toxic at certain times of year (see Jones 1987, Cheke & Hume 2008).

31 'They' here, from van der Hagen's account are some of those who fell ill and later ate pigeons again

32 Possibly the decoy scorpionfish *Iracundus signifer* (Lieske & Myers 1994).

33 Konrad von Gesner (1516-1565), the 'German Pliny' (in fact Swiss), was a pioneer taxonomist whose *Historia animalium* [5 vols. 1551-1587] is considered the starting point for European zoology (e.g. Hays 1973). Gesner's '*torpedo*' was an electric ray *Torpedo torpedo*; the only electric ray in Mauritius is *T.fuscomaculata* (ex *T.marmorata*), locally 'trembleur' (Baissac 1965, Lieske & Miners 1994).

34 East and west appear reversed here – the large reef (+ wide lagoon) is in the east, whereas it is much closer to the coast in the west.

35 Black River Bay; the islet was Ile aux Benitiers (Hume 2003, *contra* Barnwell 1955 who thought it was the adjacent Tamarin Bay).

to check if they would grow there; and now it was found these were already 2 feet high *and carried fruits*³⁶. From the writings that were deciphered they found out more about this Island.

From the start of the Flowering month³⁷ [*May] until the circumnavigation of the Island, to wit the 10th of the same, the ship's company were busy every day hunting birds and other animals (that they could find on the land), besides which they hardly stopped being busy with the seine-nets, hooks and other fishing [tackle]; four-footed animals, apart from cats³⁸, there are none; *our people have imported billy-goats, nanny-goats and pigs*³⁹. The herons showed themselves more untamed [*i.e. wild] than other birds [that] could be obtained here, as they flew up into dense tree-branches. They caught birds called by some *Dodaars*[*Dodos], by others *Dronten*. [They] received the name of *Wallich-Vogels* [*birds of loathing] in the time that Jacob van Nek was here, because when they were cooked for a long time they did not become tender, and stayed tough and hard, except for the breast and stomach that were very good; also because they had as many turtle-doves as they could get, [so] that they were fed up with the Dodos. *Their image is on the plate before*⁴⁰; *they have large heads and little combs thereupon, are without wings or tails, having only small winglets at their sides; behind,[just] four or five small feathers a bit higher than the others; have beaks and feet and usually in their stomach a stone the size of a fist*. They also surprised some turtles, of which kind both the sea and land kinds are common here and as fat as pigs: *the writers on nature tell of sea-turtles in which were found more than 400 eggs, that could carry along on their backs four or five men, whose shells can supply a seat for 10 men, and the body for half again as many a meal. Pliny tells us that in the Garamanten there are Men called Turtle-eaters, and with the shells cover their houses*⁴¹; *others make small boats thereof. Solinus*⁴² *tells of a people in the Indies that eats no other meat than that of turtles. With the meat of the turtles, and the goodness*

of their eggs our [people] knew to help themselves to that which brought very good refreshment.

THE 15TH CHAPTER.

Officers build houses on land, seemingly a new planting of people – their exercise in the same. Palms, and trees described. Dodos and tortoises/turtles⁴³ caught for food and for salting. Fresh water and wood brought to the ship. Hogeveen's good catch of game, and striking of the dwellings, further hunting; Ship-conclave, and departure of the ships.

Being busy all together, Willem and his merchant Hogeveen went on the 15th on land, like the others had done, to build his dwelling on a convenient site. [They] chose therefore a pleasant venue, [and] on the same day brought wood and other things, as well as hand-tools, and fell hastily to carpentry. Everywhere it was hewing, sawing and hammering, so that anyone watching from afar and without knowing, would assume that a new colony was being made - *but it was like the building of our earthly home, to be struck down again soon, as they had reason to say "We have no permanent city here, the future has our soul captive". They wished to settle here as little as the Tartar tribes that carry their tents in all quarters, without assuring their members to stay somewhere permanently; as they held steadily their home country, and the profit of their masters in their minds.*

On the 19th they started to roof the house, and finished on the 23rd, being busy with this for eight days. Some days later Hogeveen had his things brought ashore, for the house, amusing himself spending the idle days hunting and fishing. It was also good to see that the houses for the officers were so hastily⁴⁴ put together, and the crew had put little huts around those— fastened together with leaves from trees, and [with] tree trunks [set] as pillars before construction. These served for smiths, coopers, carpenters, and other sailors staying on land, and taking

36 2 feet high is about right for year-old coconuts, but they could not have carried fruit at this size, so that comment must have been interpolated from van der Hagen who wrote that 5 years later "the coconuts that Admiral Wolphart (Harmansz.) had planted there were already a fathom and a half high, even two fathoms, and were bearing fruit" (Barnwell 1948).

37 'Bloeymaandt' = modern *Bloeimaand*; date error again.

38 'Katten' is almost certainly a misprint for 'Ratten' (Cheke 1987, Cheke & Hume 2008); uppercase 'K' and 'R' in the black letter font used are very similar. There are no confirmed records of cats in Mauritius before 1709 (although they probably arrived in the 1680s; locs. cit.), whereas rats are known to have been present well before the arrival of the Dutch (Hume 2013: 228), and were reported as abundant by Matelief in 1606 (Barnwell 1948: 12).

39 This livestock was released in 1606-7, subsequent to van West-Zanen's visit (Cheke & Hume 2008).

40 The plate in fact shows penguins not dodos, as discussed in the introduction.

41 In fact Pliny tells of people in Taprobane (Ceylon/Sri Lanka) roofing their house with turtle shells (Healy 1991), and mentions the Garamantes (according to Pliny an African tribe) in various other contexts.

42 Caius Julius Solinus was a 3rd century Latin compiler of historical, geographical & natural curiosities, much of the latter plagiarised from Pliny (*Enc. Brit.* 11(25): 361, 1911).

43 In several places *schil-padden* is used without specifying whether land tortoises or marine turtles are involved.

44 *Haastig* is used in the original, but as this hardly matches 'good' earlier in the sentence, 'rapidly' may have been meant.

care of the ships' needs; *it seemed a Republic as the idlers (the sick excepted, or excused) were banned, because Religion was observed, and the voice of the Caller in the Desert heard. The smithy sent forth smoke, and the hammering brought forth the sound of anvils, the hoops were struck around the casks, and the Mountains were not left unwalked, nor remained the forests unvisited.* Here some were employed in bird-nesting, and almost every one of these came [back] carrying a bunch of pigeons. Catching and hauling aboard turtles was work as play - pleasure was taken in this. The Dodos with their round behinds, were allowed (as they [*the sailors] were well fed) to turn tail [*escape]⁴⁵. It was a very busy scene for all that could move. The fish that had lived peacefully for several years were chased in the deepest pools of water, and hauled on land in heaps, that were, in surfeit, more wasted than eaten.

On land there stood not many good trees, nor herbs, as all were wild-growing (since no people lived there), nevertheless some palmettos, as well as palm-trees were found, much sought by the sailors for their fruits and sap for refreshment. As the palmettos, of which there are many similar kinds, grow like coconut-trees, *from the trunk of a tree full of thorns the fruit comes forth not unlike the banana and pineapple, sweet and golden yellow in colour*⁴⁶, at the top of the tree is a thick bunch, which when cut a heart is found, which is white and sweet like cabbage, and cut through is rather flaky⁴⁷. Of this they ate a salad, which not only tasted good, but was also very medicinal. Willem's people cut some of these down, and pleased their people much therewith.

Description⁴⁸ of the palm-trees.

The palm-trees on which the Coconuts grow, are thinly distributed mostly found growing on the SE side⁴⁹. *[It is the main tree of foodstuff of all the Indies, grows tall and steep, has the thickness of a [hand]-span, which habit is depicted in this plate [Figure3.]. [It has no branches; the leaves grow at the highest apex, and splay out like date-*

*trees. Beneath the leaves on the tree, the Coconuts grow close together, ten or twelve coupled in a bunch, and rarely alone. The inner nut is almost like an Ostrich egg. The fruit has much water inside, white, thin and soft, because the water the longer the coconut hangs on the tree, [it] grows and changes into white, which is the kernel, [and] has the taste almost like hazel-nuts, but sweeter. The ripe fruit has a good drink of water, being very clear, sweetish, and cool to drink; one can drink as much of this water as one wants, with no untoward effects. If one drills a hole in the tree and inserts a tap or tube, a juice trickles out sweeter than whey and tasting like sack*⁵⁰; *the same, exposed for some time to the Sun, changes to good vinegar. The Indians, and especially those of Iaccatra [*Jakarta] (as is told) make clean and good brandy called arack out of this very tree and its fruit. While not commonly found on the Island, [they] did the ship's company much good while they lay there.*

The 25th Willem and his sailors brought aboard some Dodos that were very fat; three or four were enough to give the whole crew a meal, and there even was some left over. Two turtles that they brought aboard for the next meal and had eaten, were enough for all. [The] ships' [onboard] food [supply] was very frugal, and it was calculated that on their journey not much would be left, but would rather run short. Thus every day they searched out food on land, so they would enjoy the ship's supply sparingly. They laid up smoked fish and salted Dodos, as well as tortoises, and other birds aboard, which measure later stood them in good stead. They were busy with this for some days yet and worked to bring them on board. On the 4th of the Harvest-month⁵¹ [*August] Willem's sailors brought 50 large Birds onto the *Bruyn-Vis*, of which 24 or 25 [were] Dodos, so large and heavy that per meal not [even] two could be eaten, and what was left was thrown in the salt. *The same as did previously the Strait of Magellan explorers Sebald de Waar*⁵², *and Olivier van Noort, who when food ran out salted the penguins that were common on the islands, which came in very useful for those people then. They found also here birds that are called Rabos de Forcados*⁵³

45 Strickland (1848) apparently misunderstood this sentence, rendering it as: "The Dodos, with their round sterns, (for they were well fattened,) were also obliged to turn tail".

46 This must be Soeteboom's most absurd interpolation, this description resembling no known palm, and certainly not derived from Mascarene observations!

47 The common lowland cabbage-palm in Mauritius was *Dictyosperma alba*, but *Acanthophoenix rubra* in the uplands is equally edible, and the fan-palm *Latania loddigesii* also has an edible heart.

48 *Inwerp* again.

49 Botanists dispute whether coconuts were native in Mauritius, but this and other early accounts report coconut trees already present, though few, in the south-east and particularly on 'Klappers eylanden' [=coconut islands] or (later) 'Ile(s) des [deux] cocos' (see Barnwell 1955); as mentioned in the account, others were also planted by Dutch mariners.

50 A dry wine popular in the 17th century

51 *Oegst-maandt* (modern *oogstmaand*), glossed *Augustus* in the margin.

52 Another spelling of de Waerd.

53 *Rabos forcados*, the Portuguese term for frigate-birds *Fregata* spp. was in general use by Dutch sailors in the early 17th century. The description here is suspiciously similar to that in the *Tweede Boek* (anon. 1601), and suggests editorial embellishment.



Figure 3. [this woodcut has no caption in the original publication; see comments in the introduction]

[*frigate-birds], as they have a tail shaped like a tailor's scissors; these were very tame, and when stretched [*i.e.* wings spread out] easily a fathom long, with a long beak; [they were] mostly black, except the breast which is white; these catch flying fish, [and] eat also the guts of fish and birds if they can only get them.

Finally it became time to carry fresh-water, firewood, poles for masts, and such-like from land to the ships, so that if a hasty departure became necessary, there would be no need for delay. The island supplies very sweet and fresh water through many streams (from the mountains) and rivers from the valleys, good to drink. [On] the 5th they

filled their barrels, and spent another 4 days bringing other things aboard. The next day Hogeveen (Willem's merchant) with four sailors left the tent equipped with sticks, nets, muskets and other tools [for] hunting, [and] ran up hills and mountain, walked through forest and valley, and caught in the three days they were out another half-hundred birds, among these easily 20 *Dronten* or *Dodos*, all of which they took to the ship[s] and salted. In this they were like the other people of the fleet, employed in birding and fishing, [and] further did not forget hewing wood to bring aboard, until on the 16th with a new moon it was not only cooler, but it also rained steadily, causing everyone to stay in their shelter; it took until the 19th before the weather improved.

Because of this [on] the 20th following, the merchant Hoogeveen, [and] similarly all ship's officers returned on board with their things; [they] had made their homes for little less than a month, and therefore were inhabitants of the Island of Mauritius.

Despite the removal they were still busy hunting and fishing, in order to obtain their food from the land; *it was here 'calf spare the hay [for] the winter is long'*. They counted on getting well-stocked for the journey to St.Helena, so caught yet many more birds, [and] besides the ones already mentioned, East-Indian ravens *of two or three colours, almost twice as large as Parrots, known to some as veld-hoenderen* [*field-hens]⁵⁴. Bats⁵⁵ also died in their nets; these fly here in large numbers, [and] have heads like *meyr-katten* [*meerkats]⁵⁶. [They] are amazingly large when compared to those of our country, and there do a lot of damage to fruit *as they do here [*in the Netherlands] to bacon*⁵⁷; when they can get at them, [they] bite the leaves and fruits from the trees. The Indians eat them and say they are as good a food as partridges; they bite viciously, and fight a lot amongst themselves.

This hunting and other pleasures lasted until the first of the Autumn-month⁵⁸ [*=September]: soon afterwards all the Captains were called on board the Admiral['s ship], [and] it was decided everyone should have their ship ready and fully set up to hoist sail at the first wind, as they thought they had stayed obtaining refreshments long enough, [and] were also afraid that it was likely that sooner or later some other untoward weather or wind could happen, especially the sudden attack or the fury of the oceans, that sometimes blow in this place; *this [*i.e. hurricanes/cyclones] is bad weather that announces itself with such unbelievable power, that Ships of several hundred lasten*⁵⁹ *would be deposited on land, [or] would be overturned at sea and*

torn apart, of which there have been several cases, though these 5 ships did not undergo such [an experience], but had only pleasant airs, good weather and wind.

As such had been decided, each brought on board all he had on land, raised sail, and tooled up to leave. The wind kept them back for three days, and caused them to remain until the seventh. After a change of wind the next morning their 5 Ships came to Admiral van Nek's pass, which was named after his sub-Admiral, called van Warwijk. Hereabouts instead of a beacon stood a tree on an islet; here the wind dropped and they needed to drop anchors; it did not improve in the afternoon either. While the wind increased, the breeze came from the sea and made them raise anchors and return through the pass, where they threw them [*anchors] out again the next day. Here they suffered much damage to the anchor cables because of a rough and foul bottom, and [they were] almost rasped to bits. In the morning of the 8th they passed through the opening and reached the sea⁶⁰.

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54 This passage is a garbled interpolation from the *Tweede Boek*, the only place where 'ravens of two or three colours' are so described; this bird was a large parrot, *Lophospittacus mauritianus*. Furthermore the *veld-hoen* was not another name for the parrot, but a completely different bird, the Red Hen *Aphanapteryx bonasia*, a flightless rail (Cheke & Hume 2008).

55 The large fruit-bats are species of flying-fox in the genus *Pteropus* (Cheke & Hume 2008); there were originally three species in Mauritius, but those caught were probably the largest (and still extant) Mauritian form *Pteropus niger*

56 This comparison was first used by Hendrik Jolinck in his log on the visit in 1598 (Keuning 1938-51), and reprised in a famous woodcut in the *Tweede Boek*, but cannot refer to the South African mongoose now commonly known as a meerkat (*Suricatta suricatta*), because that animal had not then been discovered. In Dutch of the period *meerkat* meant 'monkey' (Sewel 1766; *Historische woordenboeken op internet* [gtb.inl.nl]), though the etymology is obscure; the usage dates back to the 11-12th century: "A word apparently long popular in High and Low German for a kind of monkey with a tail (Vervet, *Cercopithecus*), which was regarded as an exotic type of cat" (gtb.inl.nl, our translation with Google's help); *meerkatze* is still used in German for types of monkey. Flying-fox faces are not much like monkeys, more like foxes (as the English name implies) or mustelids such as martens. It seems possible that since 'meer-kat' in Dutch literally implies 'lake/mere-cat', perhaps there was an alternative vernacular or colloquial usage referring to the obvious candidate the European Otter *Lutra lutra*, a large mustelid. Why *Suricatta* is called a meerkat is likewise a puzzle as it lives in deserts!

57 There is an old European myth that bats enter houses to eat fat, especially bacon! McCracken (1992) reproduced a woodcut from 1491 illustrating this belief, also citing experimental research that European bats, all insectivores, will starve rather than eat fat or bacon.

58 '*Herfst-maand*', still the same today; glossed *September* in the margin

59 A *last* was equivalent to 2 tons.

60 This confusing passage appears in fact to describe the events during the three days the wind held the fleet back, although it reads as if all the activity was compressed into the 7th of September!

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