

The German painter Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart (ca. 1630-1703) and some still unregistered images of the extinct dodo, *Raphus cucullatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves, Columbiformes)

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Abstract. Extinct in the seventeenth century, the famous dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) remains almost unknown, and reliable historical accounts of its biology are rare. Neither are taxidermized specimens housed in collections, with the available material limited to osteological samples and some scarce mummified remains. Such a gap would make the representations of dodos in ancient paintings, books and drawings fundamental to reconstructing the true aspect of this bird in life. Indeed, there is a clear effort to list all the images of *Raphus cucullatus* found in various works of art and manuscripts, a task carried out at least since the mid-nineteenth century. In this sense, it is noteworthy the discovery of four seventeenth-century pictures depicting dodos that would have escaped the scrutiny of the experts. Portraying no less than seven individuals, all these compositions are attributed to the German painter Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart (ca. 1630-1703) or his circle. Roughly speaking, the general appearance of the figured birds differs little from that observed in various works by artists such as Roelandt Savery, Jan Savery and Gilles d'Hondecoeter.

Key-Words. Dodo; *Raphus cucullatus*; Columbiformes; Extinct Birds; Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart; Painting; 17th century; History of Zoology; Animals in the Art.

Resumo. Extinto no século XVII, o célebre dodô (*Raphus cucullatus*) permanece quase desconhecido, sendo raros os relatos históricos confiáveis acerca de sua biologia. Tampouco existem espécimens taxidermizados depositados em coleções, estando o material disponível limitado a testemunhos osteológicos e alguns escassos restos mumificados. Semelhante lacuna tornaria a representação de dodôs em antigos quadros, livros e desenhos fundamental para reconstruir o verdadeiro aspecto dessa ave em vida. Com efeito, haveria um claro esforço para arrolar todas as imagens de *Raphus cucullatus* encontradas em obras de arte e manuscritos diversos, tarefa levada a cabo pelo menos desde meados do século XIX. Nesse sentido, causa grande surpresa a descoberta de quatro telas seiscentistas figurando dodôs que teriam escapado ao escrutínio dos especialistas. Retratando nada menos de sete indivíduos, todas essas composições são atribuídas ao pintor alemão Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart (ca. 1630-1703) ou ao seu círculo. Grosso modo, o aspecto geral dos exemplares em questão pouco difere daquele observado em vários trabalhos de artistas como Roelandt Savery, Jan Savery e Gilles d'Hondecoeter.

Palavras-Chave. Dodô; *Raphus cucullatus*; Columbiformes; Aves Extintas; Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart; Pintura; Século XVII; História da Zoologia; Animais nas Artes.

INTRODUCTION

After being discovered by the Dutch in Mauritius during 1598, the dodo, *Raphus cucullatus* (Linnaeus, 1758), would only have survived for about 90 years, disappearing around 1688 due to slaughter for

food, environmental changes resulting from human occupation and the introduction of predators such as cats, pigs and monkeys¹. This disastrous trajectory would make the dodo the perfect example of a fulminant extinction promoted by anthropic action, which turned it into an extremely popular icon.

¹ Estimates of the date of extinction of *Raphus cucullatus* are controversial and usually range from 1630 to 1693. For reference purposes only, we follow Parish's (2013) suggestion that the species would probably have survived at least until 1688.



Figure 1. Detail showing some of the animals portrayed by Carl Ruthart in “Ulysses at the Palace of Circe” (1667), a work developed in partnership with Wilhelm Schubert van Ehrenberg. J.P. Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 2. Detail from Carl Ruthart’s “The Cave of Circe” (1666), showing an exemplar of *Raphus cucullatus* alongside a white pelican (photo F. Bruckmann, AG München). In the right highlight, the plate published by Biedermann (1898) reproducing a specular version of the original painting. Belonging to the Dresden Königliche Gemäldegalerie, this work was to be destroyed during the February 1945 bombing.



Figure 3. "Adam naming the Animals" by Carl Ruthart (1686). Courtesy of the Speed Art Museum, Louisville.



Figure 4. Detail from Carl Ruthart's "Adam naming the Animals" (1686), showing a specimen of *Raphus cucullatus* near rhinoceroses, unicorns, cas-sowaries, and a white pelican. Courtesy of the Speed Art Museum, Louisville.

Having called attention since the seventeenth century, the unusual appearance of the dodos would constitute a powerful attraction capable of reinforcing a fame destined to grow more and more over time. Irrespective of any other consideration, *Raphus cucullatus* would be the subject of an impressive number of publications de-

voted to the most diverse aspects, including bold speculations about its biology (e.g., Temple, 1977)².

Despite this marked interest, the virtual absence of grounded information about the habits of *Raphus cucullatus* should be acknowledged. Neither are there taxidermized specimens housed in collections, and the available material is limited to sub-fossil and recent osteological evidence, besides a few scanty mummified remains. Such a gap would make the representation of dodos in the iconography of the time fundamental to reconstruct the true aspect of this bird in life.

It should not cause surprise, therefore, that there is a clear interest in listing all the depictions of *Raphus cucullatus* found in ancient works of art, books and manuscripts, an effort observed at least since the mid-nineteenth century (e.g., Broderip, 1862; Fitzinger, 1848; Wood, 1927). From this point of view, the studies by Oudemans (1917), Hachisuka (1953), Carvalho (1989) and above all Parish (2012, 2013) turn out to be very complete, although occasional additions continue to come to light today (e.g., Lozoya, 2003, 2006; Hume *et al.*, 2006; Parish & Cheke, 2019). It is therefore pertinent to report the discovery of four seventeenth-century paintings with seven dodo

² A comprehensive list of the vast bibliography on *Raphus cucullatus* published between 1599 and 2013 is available in Parish (2012, 2013).



Figure 5. "The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark" by Carl Ruthart (ca. 1680). Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (photo bpk/Staatsgalerie Stuttgart).



Figure 6. Detail from Carl Ruthart's "The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark" (ca. 1680), showing two specimens of *Raphus cucullatus* climbing the boarding ramp with unicorns, rams, camels, and elephants. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (photo bpk/Staatsgalerie Stuttgart).

images that seem to have escaped the scrutiny of experts, all attributed or related to the German painter Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart.

THE WORKS EXAMINED

Born in Danzig (present-day Gdańsk, Poland) around 1630, Carl Borromäus Andreas Ruthart was working

twenty years later as an apprentice of Daniel Schultz "The Younger", who had achieved great success as a portraitist and author of animal and hunting compositions³. After visiting Rome between 1652 and 1659, Ruthart would spend the years 1663 and 1664 in Antwerp, joining St. Luke's "Liggeren" – the local guild of painters – as "Carlos Routtart". He traveled to Vienna between 1665 and 1667, serving Prince-electoral Karl Eusebius von Liechtenstein. He was in Venice in 1672 and then moved to Rome, where he took the habit of the celestines in the monastery of St. Eusebius, assuming the name of Friar Andrea. He spent his last days at L'Aquila in the convent of the Basilica of Santa Maria de Collemaggio, dying around 1703⁴.

Following the example of master Daniel Schultz, many of Carl Andreas Ruthart's paintings and studies are devoted to particular kind of mammals and birds, hunting scenes, and the so-called "animal fighting", a popular fashion in the seventeenth century⁵. As an excellent

³ See Sobecka (2017).

⁴ For the little that is known about the life and work of Carl Andreas Ruthart, see Bénézit (1999), Biermann (1914), Bocchi & Bocchi (2004), Gerson (1983), Klimt & Steppes (2000), Meijer (1990), Robouts & Lerijs (1864) and Thieme & Becker (1935).

⁵ By erasing the differences between matter and spirit and viewing the cosmos as an indissoluble unity governed by a complex web of vital influences and invisible spirits, neo-Platonism common in post-Renaissance Europe postulated that each part of the whole had a close connection with the others imposed by a series of hidden "sympathies" and "antipathies", a principle valid even for living organisms. One of the most immediate reflexes in the fine arts would be the popularization of paintings dedicated to fighting between animals seen as



Figure 7. Detail from Carl Ruthart's circle "The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark" (no author and date), showing two specimens of *Raphus cucullatus* climbing the boarding ramp along with unicorns, camels, rhinoceroses and elephants. Offered at public auction by Nagel Auktionen, Stuttgart, on 25 February 2015.

painter of different representatives of the fauna known at the time, Ruthart maintained a close partnership with other artists, the most notable example being the 1667 canvas known as "Ulysses at the Palace of Circe" developed with Wilhelm Schubert van Ehrenberg (Fig. 1). The stay in Antwerp may have favored such an approach by allowing contact with the work of Frans Snyders and others artists interested in themes related to the natural world, as well as facilitating eventual access to exotic beings brought to the city by the intense trade of curiosities coming from distant lands – something that could have included representations or even remains of *Raphus cucullatus* (Teixeira, 2011). This marked fascination would continue after Ruthart had embraced monastic life, for even his later sacred compositions often include several animals.

The presence of *Raphus cucullatus* in Carl Andreas Ruthart's works is not something new, as one of these birds appears in his "The Cave of Circe" formerly belonging to the Dresden Königliche Gemäldegalerie (see Parish, 2012, 2013; Lozoya, 2006). Dating from 1666, this 135 × 168 cm oil on canvas was destroyed during the devastating bombing of the city in February 1945 (Fig. 2)⁶. Even so, the present discovery of dodos in four

other works related to Ruthart is quite unexpected, giving the German artist a unusual importance in the universe of seventeenth-century painters who came to represent the species in question.

Constituting lot 46 offered at auction on March 27, 2007 by the Sotheby's branch in Amsterdam, the painting titled "Adam naming Animals" – a 138.5 × 179.5 cm oil – is signed and dated as "Carl Ruthart 1686". Coming from "a major Hanover private collection"⁷, this canvas includes a dodo in the background landscape of the lower left quadrant. Next to a small water mirror, the specimen tilts a little forward, being flanked by a few quadrupeds, two cassowaries, and a white pelican lying on the ground, an arrangement similar to that seen in the lost Dresden painting (Figs. 3 and 4). In December 2008, it became part of the collection of the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, USA⁸.

Registered at Ludwigsburg Castle since at least 1767, the "The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark" would be transferred to the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in 1926, occupying a prominent position in the institutional collection. Although not signed and dated, this 198 × 268 cm

⁶ "natural enemies", a practice sometimes extended to fights between individuals of the same species (Teixeira, 2002, 2006).

⁶ German sources often name this work "The cave of Circe" ("Die Höhle der Kirke"), although they sometimes use the title "Odysseus with his Companions transformed into Animals by Circe" ("Odysseus mit seinen in Tiere verwandelten Gefährten bei Circe"). Black-and-white

photographs of this missing painting can be seen in Ebert (1963), Lozoya (2006) and Parish (2013), while a colored plate published by Biedermann (1898) reproduces the specular image of the dodo and white pelican depicted side by side in this painting (Fig. 2).

⁷ For other details, see <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.46.html/2007/an-important-private-collection-from-hanover-am1020>.

⁸ See <https://artdaily.cc/news/26721/Speed-Art-Museum-Unveils-New-Acquisitions-In-Collecting-for-Kentucky#.XeOmV5NKjIU>.



Figure 8. "Nebuchadnezzar's madness" by Carl Ruthart (ca. 1680). Offered at public auction by Dorotheum, Vienna, on April 24, 2018.



Figure 9. Detail from Carl Ruthart's "Nebuchadnezzar's madness" (ca. 1680), showing two specimens of *Raphus cucullatus* wading through the shallow waters of a pond. Dorotheum, Vienna.

oil on canvas is considered a painting by Carl Andreas Ruthart completed around 1680⁹. Like other artists of the time, the author relies on the classic Genesis passage to portray an authentic multitude of animals being directed to the ark by Noah and his sons. In the background landscape of the upper left quadrant, a couple of dodos climb the boarding ramp in the company of quadrupeds such as unicorns, camels, and elephants (Figs. 5 and 6).



Figure 10. The "dronte", *Raphus cucullatus*. Drawing with no author or date offered for sale by Christie's, London, on July 9, 2009.

⁹ See Rave (2008).



Figure 11. From left to right, top to bottom: specimens of *Raphus cucullatus* depicted in Roelandt Savery's "Landscape with Animals" (ca. 1629), Carl Ruthart's "Nebuchadnezzar's madness" (ca. 1680), Roelandt Savery's "Landscape with Birds" (1628) and Carl Ruthart's "The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark" (ca. 1680). Zoological Society of London; Dorotheum, Vienna; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (photo bpk/Staatsgalerie Stuttgart).

On February 25, 2015, the Nagel Auktionen of Stuttgart offered for sale a 90 × 112 cm oil on canvas attributed to "Carl Borromeo Andreas Ruthart Studio". With no origin and date specified, this "The Entry of Animals into Noah's Ark" is just a smaller variant of the previous painting¹⁰. Like the original, two dodos can also be seen climbing the boarding ramp along with unicorns, camels, rhinoceroses and elephants. The painting is of much lower quality and much less detailed, reinforcing the assumption that it is the work of some follower or apprentice (Fig. 7).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that on April 24, 2018, the public auction in Vienna by Dorotheum included a magnificent 220 × 295 cm oil on canvas from an "aristocratic Southern Italian collection". Placed on sale under the title "Nebuchadnezzar's Madness", this composition dates back to around 1680 and is marked with the monogram "A.R.F." interpreted as "Andreas Ruthart fecit" – a ref-

erence to the name in Christ assumed by the German artist at the time of his affiliation with the celestines¹¹. The painting shows the wild and naked king of Babylon surrounded by a significant number of animals, among which are two *Raphus cucullatus* wading the shallow waters of a small pond alongside other birds, such as the inevitable cassowaries and white pelicans so often found in the Ruthart's arrangements (Figs. 8 and 9).

DISCUSSION

Although they bear great resemblance to the specimens seen in the works of artists such as Roelandt Savery, Jan Savery, and Gilles d'Hondecoeter, at least four dodos figured by Ruthart himself have a longer beak. Very evident in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart's "The Entry of

10 For other details, see https://www.global-auctions.de/highlights_719.php.

11 For other details, see <https://www.dorotheum.com/en/15137130>.



Figure 12. From left to right, top to bottom: specimens of *Raphus cucullatus* depicted in the drawings attributed to Joris Joostensz Laerle (1601-1603), in the Ustad Mansur gouache (ca. 1625), in the study of Roelandt or Hans Savery II (before 1627) and in Cornelis Saftleven's painting (ca. 1638). Nationaal Archief, The Hague; Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg; Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, and Boijmans Museum, Rotterdam.

Animals into Noah's Ark" couple, this feature somewhat resembles the depictions of Ustad Mansur and Cornelis Saftleven, as well as the enigmatic watercolor of the "dronte" auctioned by Christie's, London, on 9 July 2009 (compare Figs. 6, 10 and 12)¹². Most individuals portrayed by the German painter appear to have dark gray plumage with brownish wings and tail and brown paws, but there is a couple of light gray color with yellow wings,

tail and paws, the same variation noted in the different works of Roelandt Savery (Fig. 11). Nevertheless, many of the seventeenth-century paintings show a remarkable convergence, a determining tendency to consecrate the iconic effigies of *Raphus cucullatus* found today in medals, stamps, coins, sculptures etc.¹³

In any case, Ruthart ranks among the few authors who would not be content to show *Raphus cucullatus* walking or holding a more passive posture, a prevalence

¹² For other details, see <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/dutch-school-17th-century-a-dodo-5224172-details.aspx>.

¹³ A good sample is available in Den Hengst (2003).

often interpreted as indication of figures based on other illustrations or remains of any kind. Indeed, one of the exemplars of “Nebuchadnezzar’s Madness” may be quenching its thirst or vocalizing, a noteworthy particularity comparable to the dodo scratching its beak with a paw belonging to Roelandt Savery’s “Landscape with animals” (ca. 1629) (Fig. 11)¹⁴.

Such exceptions, however, do not imply any contact with a captive bird, as only a very restricted list of originals is usually associated with live or newly slaughtered specimens of *Raphus cucullatus*, as is the case with drawings attributed to Joris Joostensz Laerle (1601-1603), Ustad Mansur’s gouache (ca. 1625), Cornelis Saftleven’s painting (ca. 1638)¹⁵, and the study credited to both Roelandt and Jan Savery II (before 1627) (Fig. 12)¹⁶. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that future research will continue to reveal still unknown images of dodos and that such discoveries may bring surprising news to light¹⁷.

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14 Ruthart's image does not allow for any definitive conclusion, including the fact that a brown pelican was depicted side by side in a similar posture. However, it is worth remembering that dodos might drink like other Columbiformes, which differ from the overwhelming majority of other birds in that they are able to keep their beak immersed and actively sip water thanks to throat contractions, a strategy quite different from the usual movements suggested in the present composition (MacLean, 1985). Although Lüttschwager (1959) raises the hypothesis of a relationship between dodos and rails (Rallidae), this proposal was rejected by the vast majority of authors (Cheke, 1985).

15 Unlike several other authors (e.g., Fuller, 2002; Hume, 2006; Hume & Cheke, 2004; Lozoya, 2006), Parish (2013) argues that Cornelis Saftleven's painting would not have been based on a live bird.

16 There is much debate about how many dodos arrived alive in Europe, as all estimates appear to be based on inconsistent arguments. Although some sources even propose a total of 15 individuals, the review by Parish (2013) suggests no more than five, one in Prague (ca. 1603), one in Amsterdam (1626), two probably in the Netherlands (before 1627), and the last in London (ca. 1638). There are also reliable reports of captives kept in Batavia – headquarters of the Dutch East India Company – in India and perhaps Japan.

17 Nevertheless, some works inspire certain cares. On June 21, 2015, for example, Wilkinson's Auctioneers of Yorkshire would put up for sale an alleged “17th century oil on canvas” in which “a woman hovering over a bare ground has in the background the figures of a lizard [i.e., a chameleon] and a dodo” (lot 441). This picture, however, is much to be desired and the estimated date of the painting is not yet fully established. Only a much more detailed examination could confirm the true identity of the strange bird portrayed, as well as resolve the other existing doubts. For more information, see <https://www.wilkinsons-auctioneers.co.uk/item-details/?ID=13148>.

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