

William Harvey's Lectures on anatomy to the London College of Physicians, 1616

A curious passage from his treatment of the skin

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Harvey's appreciation of the skin

Harvey's treatment of the skin covers 6 folios; 9 folios if we include fat and the fleshy membrane below the fat

This compares to 14 folios on the guts and 18 folios on the heart

And to the following treatments of the skin in comparable English texts of the period :

- 3 pages in Banister's 124 page treatise *The Historie of Man* (1578);
- 6 pages in Helkiah Crooke's 947 page work *Mikrokosmographia* (1615).

Notes

1. Harvey's insertion of a commentary on the skin probably took place on the first morning of the three day anatomy. Given that the anatomy would have followed the traditional format of the three bellies – lower belly, thorax and heart, and finally head and brain – it is all the more surprising that Harvey spent a proportionally lengthy period (perhaps an entire morning) on the skin.
2. Taking folio counts as a definitive measure of implied importance is indicative only, since word counts in Harvey's Lectures vary substantially across folios, as do word counts in the printed texts of Banister and Crooke, these comprising more words per page than Harvey's manuscript. It is reasonable to infer, however, that Harvey attached greater importance to the skin than Banister or Crooke.

The curious passage

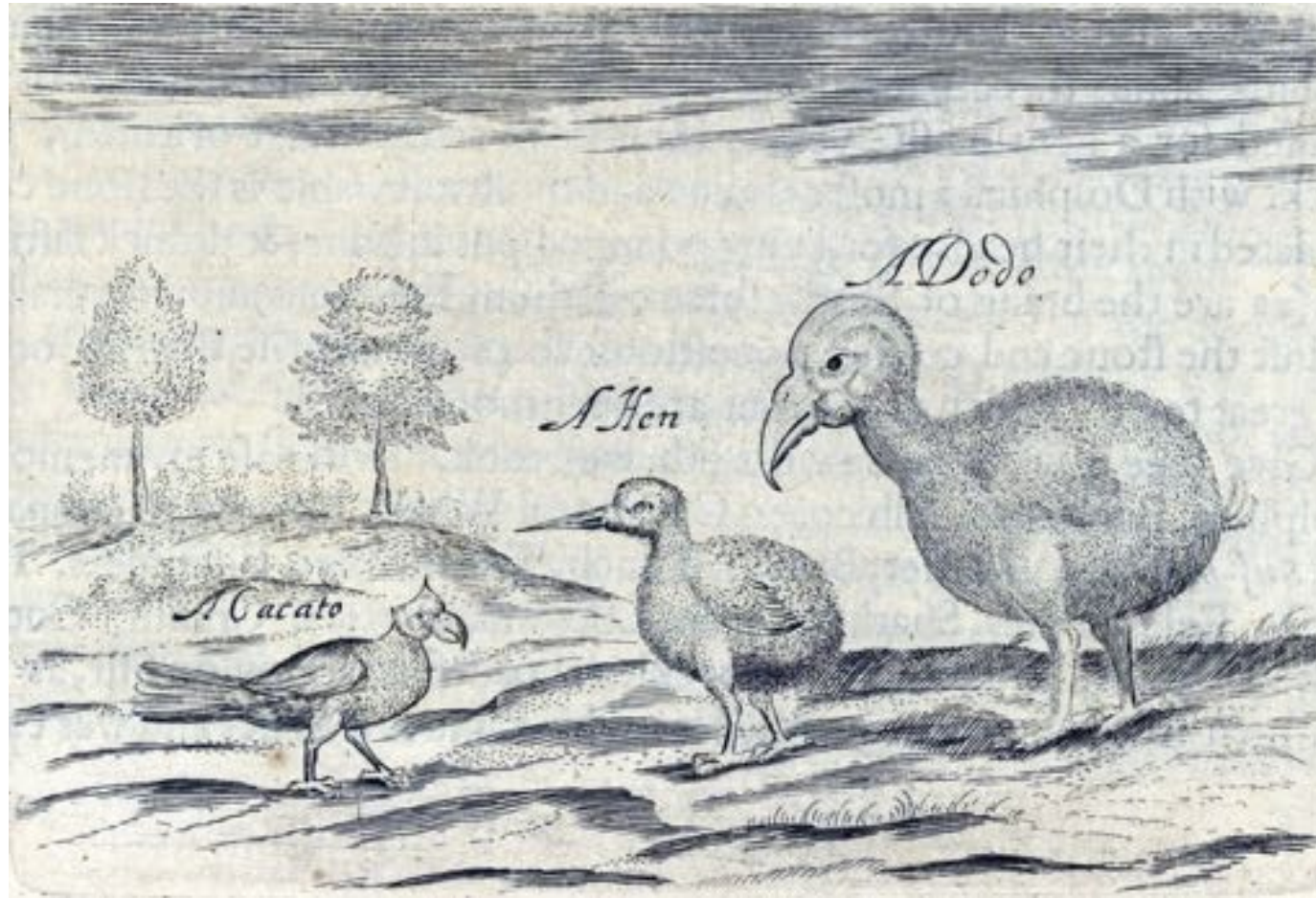
Quibusdam motu voluntario porcupin hedghog turkey coctoo ruff Bird in ye Ballat

Harvey, *Praelectiones*, 11v

In some animals the skin can be freely moved porcupine hedgehog turkey cockatoo ruff bird in the ballad

ibid., 45

First record of the cockatoo in English texts, 1638



“In this Ile* are sundry other birds...Cacatoes (Birds like Parrats, fierce, and indomitable: and may be properly so called from the Greeke $\chi\alpha\chi\omicron\nu\nu$ proceeding from an euill egge)...”

*Mauritius

Herbert's account as problematic

The etymology of the term *cockatoo* is Malay not Greek

- no evidence of ancient or classical Greek encounters in southern Africa
- the acknowledged origin of the word is Malay, from *kaka-tua*, imitating the sound of the bird, as was accepted in Asia and Europe at the time

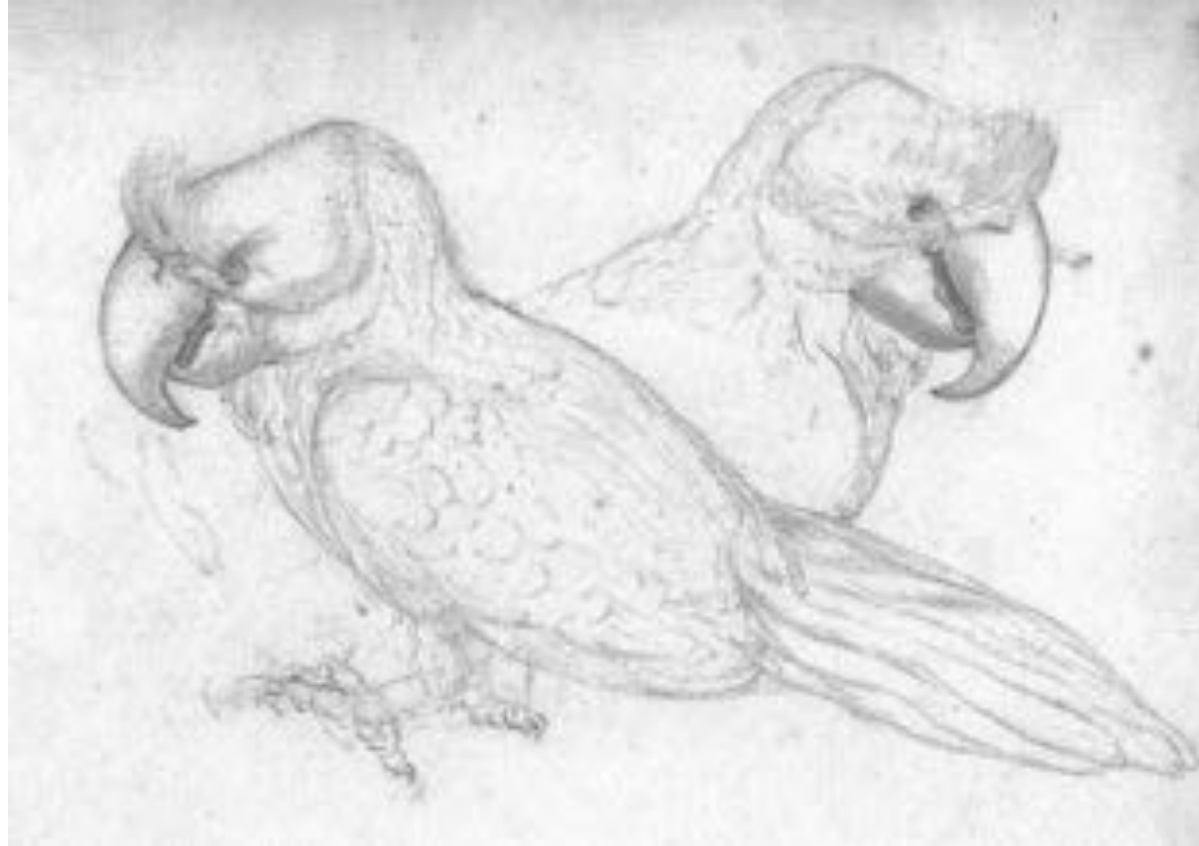
Imitative words in Latin were in use at the time. Thomas Elyot (1542) has the verb *cacabo,-are*, meaning *to make the sound of a partridge*. Perhaps Herbert was offering his own erudite etymology.

Nor is the bird a cockatoo; it is a parrot, as was comprehended by Dutch travellers in Mauritius a generation before.

Notes

1. See Elyot, Thomas, *Bibliotheca Eliotae Eliotis librerie*, 1542.

The Broad-billed parrot



Note the similarity to Herbert's *cacatoe* in the beak, tail and tuft.

Source: Gelderland journal f66v in The journal of the flagship Gelderland, Julian Pender Hume in *Archives of natural history* 30(1): 13-27. 2003. (This journey dated to 1601).

The ruff bird (1)

Harvey's conception of the ruff-bird

The species of bird known in England as *ruff* or *ruffe* refers to a saltwater wader, perhaps the migratory sandpiper, whose usage in texts is dated to 1634. Its principal habitat is northern Europe and Asia; in England it is found only in East Anglia.

The origin of the name *ruff* in conjunction with birds is unclear but two theories have been proposed

- an OE word *hreoþ* describing the aggression of the male bird's display in courtship, or
- the ornate plumage reminiscent of the formal dress of a *ree* or *reeve*, that is an alderman.

Migratory sandpipers - males breeding



The ruff-bird

(2)

Harvey's manuscript suggests that he may not have had this or any specific species in mind when he refers to the ruff-bird

What Whitteridge and O'Malley transcribe as

Quibusdam motu voluntario porcupin hedghog turkey coctoo ruff Bird in ye Ballat

appears in the manuscript as

*Quibusdam motu voluntario
porcupin
Hedghog
turkey
coctoo ruff Bird in ye Ballat*

It is possible therefore that *ruff Bird in ye Ballat* is not a separate species exhibiting a free movement of skin (like the porcupine, hedgehog or turkey) but is meant as an identifier or an analogy to the unknown or lesser known *coctoo* identified by its "ruff-age", and by its presence in a ballad of the period.

The analogy of the ruff



Note: Harvey employs the analogy elsewhere in the Lectures when he compares the ileum (part of the small intestine) to an “unsett ruff” but the analogy is an imperfect one: the ileum in humans is long (up to 4 metres long) and fatty not fine. It is “unsett” however (that is to say informally arranged).

But a problem arises with situating the ruff-bird in ballads

Mentions of birds of the parrot and parakeet families

cockatoo none

parrot/parrat five

Mentions of English birds

partridge none

ruff none

Mentions of Harvey's animals

hedgehog none

porcupine none

turkey none

Mentions of *ruff* as an item of clothing eight (one 1586, others 1610-1624)

Source: University of California Santa Barbara *English Broadside Ballads Archive*. Covers the period 1300-1900. Contains approx. 8000 records representing ~76% of all known ballads of the period.

Notes

1. Mentions means prior to c.1650
2. Includes spelling variants such as cocktoo, coctu, parot, partrich, ruffe, and compounds such as ruff-bird etc.
3. Date means date of attested publication and are uncertain; performance dates may have preceded this.
4. This analysis is preliminary only.

Ballat* as the Italian word *ballatoio

An inspection of the original manuscript in The British Library reveals that the word *Ballat* spills over the right edge of the folio and into the spine, rendering its terminal letters unclear.

What appears is not *Ballat* but *Ballat* (...)

No English word of the period fits *Ballat*...but the Italian word *ballatoio* is given by Florio (1611) as meaning

Any broad and flat place,

Terrace or floore, a flat foote pace

So, what we might have in English translation is

cockatoo ruff bird in the terrace

the term *ruff bird* signifying not a designated species of bird but one furnished with a ruff or ruff-like plumage and observed not in nature or a menagerie but in a static setting such as a work of art.

Notes:

1. Harvey spent the years 1598-1600 in Padua taking his MD and displays evidence in the Lectures of a familiarity with Italian.
2. The first attestation in an English text of the term *Ballata* meaning *A light song of Italian origin* is given by OED as 1762.
3. The English word *pace* is dated by OED to c.1300 and given as meaning, inter alia, *a route, a way; passage*.

The Annunciation, Carpaccio, 1504 Venice

If we take the Italian connection seriously and locate the ruff-bird in art or artefact, we discover at least three possible sources.

One is a painting of birds perched on a gallery-like structure by the celebrated artist Vittore Carpaccio, located in the *Albergo* of the fraternity of the Albanians in Venice.

Classification of these three birds is open to question however. Although possessing some similarities with the species they lack its distinguishing features such as the crest and the short curved beak. *Cohen (2008)* identifies them as doves, seemingly based on a symbolic fit rather than an ornithological justification.

There is also the problem of nomenclature. Could a railing such as we see here have been properly termed a *ballatoio*?



Two Venetian Ladies on a Balcony, Carpaccio, c. 1495, Venice

This portrait of two noble ladies seated on a balcony perhaps overlooking a lake has a better claim to be Harvey's source of the cockatoo. The bird shown here (centre left, below the peacock) is probably a lory, a species related to the cockatoo but lacking its moveable crest. Its ruff consists of frilly plumage around the neck.

There is an uncertainty of access however. How could Harvey have encountered this work since it is widely thought to have been a private commission for the Torella family? (Some scholars take the view that the work, which they claim was called *Two Courtesans*, was undertaken without a private commission – and hence may have been open to public view - but this is disputed.)



Madonna della Vittoria, Mantegna, 1495, Mantua

The most likely source may be this work by Mantegna.

The species perched in the gallery above the altar-piece to the Virgin's right has been identified as an Australian sulphur-crested cockatoo (*Dalton, 2012*). This depiction, she claims, is its first appearance in Europe.

One of the two birds seen to the left of the Virgin is possibly the red or Moluccan lory and is one of the oldest known images of this species in Europe (*Masseti, 2016*).

Whether Harvey encountered this work is uncertain. There is no evidence of him having travelled to Mantua while at Padua, though there is evidence in the Lectures of travel in the Veneto and Apulia.



How else might Harvey have known of these animals and works?

1. The presence of exotic birds and beasts in the courts of Europe during the renaissance and early modern period.
2. Harvey's association with the Earl of Arundel whose collection of paintings, antiquities, books and manuscripts would later rank in magnificence and scale as one of the greatest in Europe. With Arundel, one of the circle around Prince Henry, heir to the throne.
3. Arundel's visits to Padua in 1612, Mantua (with Inigo Jones) in 1613, returning to London in January 1615.
4. Harvey's interest in art in evidence while a member of Arundel's embassy to the Emperor in Vienna in 1636
 - commissioned by Charles I to acquire pictures for the royal collection
 - informal agent for the Earl and other patrons in England
5. Aubrey reported that Harvey travelled to Italy with Sir George Ent in 1649 but there is no known evidence in support of this claim nor of any centres of art or learning that they might have visited. Aubrey's claim may be founded on a knowledge of Harvey's interest in Italian society and its arts.

Knowledge of these works in the College

Reference to these works and to the use of the word *coctoo* suggests a familiarity with the works and the species in the College at that time, a possibility supported by the presence of a significant European connection in the College

- 15 of the 50 Fellows and Licentiates probably present at the time of the first Lecture had taken their MDs at Padua
- a further 9 had taken their MDs at Montpellier, Basle, Leiden etc.

Note: Attendance at the Lectures was restricted to Fellows, Licentiates and candidates for membership. According to College records the total number of possible living members in April 1616 was 65; of these 38 are known with certainty to have been alive at the time and a further 12 likely to have been alive based on date of birth.

The consequences of the cockatoo

Knowledge of the species current in England in the early 1600s and probably before.

Harvey's exploitation of the exotic as a pedagogical tool.

Note: For Harvey's attraction to the exotic as an investigative tool see Salter, *Configurations*, 25.4, 2017, esp. pp. 546-551.