



The *Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes* and the French *Mentalité*: How the French Mindset was Exhibited in France's Oldest Zoo

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Abstract

The Jardin des Plantes Ménagerie, a public zoo formed during the French Revolution, reflected French rationalist thought and policy through its display of new and foreign animals. Established in 1795 on the grounds of the Parisian botanical gardens that once belonged to King Louis XVI, it not only reflected the power of the new state, it made the state's goals of scientific advancement relatable to the public. The best scholarly minds of the period conducted their research at the Menagerie, contributing to the Menagerie's reputation as a site of learning. As a public, state-run site, the location also housed the living diplomatic gifts from foreign rulers and the animalian wartime spoils from Napoleonic conquests. This display of French power and scientific prowess was done so as to inspire public imagination in art and culture through novel animals such as the giraffe. In later decades, the Menagerie declined in prominence, particularly during the Prussian siege of Paris from 1870 to 1871, when many of the animals were killed to provide food to the people. Some of the decline, however, could also be attributed to the rise of other scientific zoos around Europe modeled after the Jardin des Plantes Ménagerie.

“Thousands of Parisians already know more about this marvel of the deserts than was ever known by Pliny, Aristotle, and Buffon.”¹ This was the introduction given in *Le journal des débats*, a daily Parisian newspaper, to the first giraffe to arrive in Europe. The giraffe reached its final destination, the *Jardin des Plantes Ménagerie*, in 1827, where it would set trends and remain for almost two decades. This crown jewel of the *Jardin des Plantes* represented the Menagerie’s goals quite well. In contrast to its precursors, this state-run, fully public zoo endeavored to enlighten the public and present a rational, secular view of scientific progress to be celebrated throughout France. It was established by notable enlightenment scholars such as Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, who walked with the giraffe to Paris. The Menagerie’s reputation was enhanced by figures like Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, whose evolutionary theories are even today referred to using a giraffe. The Menagerie became a symbol and a tool of the secular state by housing the imagination of the people and the animals of the world.

The founding of the Menagerie during the French Revolution resulted from a number of factors, including the dissolution of the Versailles Menagerie and the wish of naturalists at the *Jardin des Plantes* to house live animals. The Menagerie celebrated great acclaim from its birth in 1795 through the first half of the nineteenth century. Its role as an influential teacher and icon of the French secular state shaped early evolutionary thought and displayed the power of the new state. During its height in prestige and popularity, the Menagerie epitomized major trends in French political and scientific thought that prevailed from the time of the Revolution until the Second Empire.

The Versailles Menagerie and the *Jardin du Roi*

Constructed in the 1660s by French royalty, the Versailles Menagerie was a place of leisure, power, and opulence. Exotic animals such as a rhinoceros, a camel, several antelopes, and, most notably, a lion, lounged in well-placed enclosures perfect for displaying the might of the French crown.² When these and other rare animals died, they were transported to another of the king’s holdings: the *Jardin du Roi*, a physic garden and center of medical research in Paris.³ There they would be dissected and documented by scientists under the king’s employ.⁴ The findings of these naturalists, published in a gold-decorated book titled *Histoire naturelle des animaux*, became a sign of kingly favor given as a royal gift. These discoveries also linked the crown to scientific power and prestige.

1 “Paris, 4 Juillet.” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (July 5 1827): 2–3. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4359101/f2.item.r=1827+07+04>.

2 John Simons, “How the King of Beasts Became a Republican: A Lion in the French Revolution,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2020): 1–3, <https://doi.org/doi:Gale> Document Number: GALE|A651884044.

3 Physick gardens were botanical gardens that specifically grew medicinal herbs for use in apothecaries and medical research. Often, they housed plants that were not easy to locate in the surrounding areas. A physic garden like the *Jardin du Roi* that was royally owned would boast of greater amenities, like a research staff composed of top natural historians and a herbarium.

4 Anita Guerrini, “Perrault, Buffon and the Natural History of Animals,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 66, no. 4 (2012): 1–4, 393–409, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2012.0044>.

Buffon

A scientist of particular note at the *Jardin du Roi* was its director in the mid-1700s, the popular Georges Louis-LeClerc, *Comte de Buffon*. He edited the *Histoire Naturelle*, incorporating modern touches by departing into a more Enlightenment-ordered, secular style.⁵ His edition became popular and more accessible to the public than the original printing. The book's depictions of rare or exotic animals also held appeal, since they showed animals such as the chameleon that the populace seldom or never saw.

Buffon broke with well-established tradition by removing the praise of ancient scholars, such as Galen, and by organizing animals into categories (local and exotic, domesticated and wild). The latter was a step towards the systematic approach taken today. While not Linnaean in style, this arrangement still departed from the Thomistic⁶ form of medieval bestiaries. It had more horizontal links relating types of animals than previous Aristotelian methods would have listed with their focus on the great chain of being. It also included, following the pattern of the original royal publishing, scientific, anatomical depictions not welcomed in past eras. In the past, the interior of the body was considered a purposely-hidden mystery. Even more dramatically, his aim was to turn the endeavor into a natural history of the entire world and not just of animals.⁷ Within that work, some of the first glimpses of deep time⁸ and transformism (a pre-Darwinian term for evolution) came to the public's eyes in a way not considered for centuries.⁹ Buffon considered the earth to have been roughly 70,000 rather than the biblical 7,000 years old. His proposition was that the globe was the result of cooled debris flung from the sun and trapped in orbit after a violent collision with a comet.¹⁰ He also believed animal types (at what one would now generally call the family level)¹¹ had arisen from spontaneous generation¹² at deep sea vents and to have diverged in appearance and behavior as they migrated further from their source of origin across varied landscapes.

While obviously not entirely in line with modern evolutionary thought on the topic, these views were nonetheless an important intermediary step in that direction, popularized by an acclaimed and influential scientist in the decades leading up to France's secular era. It is also notable that this scholar of repute who turned the *Jardin du Roi* into a natural historical museum¹³ also expressed a

5 Guerrini, 6–15.

6 Referring to Thomas Aquinas, who synthesized Aristotelian theory with Church doctrine.

7 He died before he completed this goal and one year before the Revolution, however.

8 As in thousands, millions, or billions of years, rather than under 10,000 years of age, being attributed to the age of the earth or the universe.

9 Some ancient Greek philosophers had come up with ideas of global change and progress similar to evolution, and they, along with some other cultures, held to an older age or eternal state of the earth.

10 "Old Earth, Ancient Life: Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte De Buffon." *Understanding Evolution*. Accessed February 8, 2021, https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/0_0_0/history_06.

11 For example, the cat family Felidae, which includes lions, leopards, and the housecat.

12 This is the Enlightenment idea that life could spring from inorganic matter (that maggots were not insect offspring, but arose from old meat, or that gnats formed out of dust).

13 Guerrini, "Perrault and Buffon," 9.

desire for a menagerie at that Parisian site to aid scientific study—a desire shared by his colleagues.¹⁴

Public Opinion

The popularity of Buffon and his fellow scholars did not, however, translate to the menagerie at Versailles, then only useful to the scientists after its inhabitants had died and could be dissected in Paris. While Buffon was being praised in popular literature for his work, even a century later, as “*l’immortel Buffon . . . ce célèbre historien de la nature*,”¹⁵ the menagerie at Versailles was coming under increasing fire leading up to the Revolution. As the people living near the palace were facing famine and starvation, it was rumored that not only the king but also the animals were feasting and were, in some cases, even fed wine.¹⁶ Even without such glaring blemishes, the idea of a private amusement like the menagerie being maintained by taxation, while the common man struggled to pay what was levied, garnered the site no favors.

The *Jardin du Roi*, on the other hand, managed to avoid some of those criticisms through the scholars’ early alignment with the revolutionaries.¹⁷ While the scholars were supported by the king, they nevertheless rather successfully distanced themselves from his actual and perceived follies, both philosophically and geographically. Like Rousseau, who had in fact been a botanist, they exalted nature and aligned themselves with his values in their study of the world. If primal nature was the ideal, they revealed its secrets, and men like Buffon even detached its origins from what was claimed by the Church. Their skillful maneuvering to be seen as sympathetic to Rousseau’s cause allowed them to survive and even grow during the darkest points of the Revolution.

Symbolism

Taking the side of the revolutionaries was a savvy move on the part of the scholars. The Versailles menagerie, with its iron ties to royal powers, was a minefield of symbolic meaning. To revolutionaries, it was a perfect microcosm of regal excess. For them the tiger, seen as a cruel and cowardly foil to the lion,¹⁸ was Marie Antoinette,¹⁹ and the lion’s kingly symbolism was subject to passionately pushed revision. A zoologist of the era, wishing to correct a misunderstanding in nature, stated that the lion was not a king of beasts because other animals

14 Vincent Thomas, “Jardin des Plantes: Fauna.” France Today, November 3, 2017, https://www.francetoday.com/culture/parks-gardens/jardin_des_plantes_fauna/.

15 Clara Filleul de Pétigny, in “Le Jardin des plantes,” (Paris, France: A. Maugars, 1844), 12. Translation: “The immortal Buffon . . . this celebrated natural historian.”

16 R. W. Burkhardt, “A Man and His Menagerie,” *Natural History* 110, no. 1 (2001): 2, <https://doi.org/00280712>. It was rumored that the dromedary drank six bottles of wine daily.

17 John T. O’Connor, review of E. C. Spary, “Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution,” *Utopian Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 223–25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20718527>.

18 Th. Lally, *Le Jardin des plantes. Le lion, le tigre, le loup, l’ours blanc, l’orang-outang, le bison ou buffle d’Amérique* (Paris: Hachette et C, 1875).

19 Simons, “Republican King of Beasts,” 5, 7.

avoided it instead of flattering it. This was taken as meaning that the royalty of France likewise had no validity. If the king of beasts was a lone forest hunter who ate rather than protected his subordinates, why should the king of men be served by the citizens upon whom he likewise preyed?²⁰

This unsightly portrayal ran counter to the intended role of the Versailles menagerie. Fierce and strange animals kept enclosed in leisurely areas made a very visual display of kingly power, stability, wealth, and ability. There had even been, at one time, animal fights at Versailles to display the state's strength.²¹ That memory as well as the previously mentioned symbolism were subverted by Rousseau's belief in the inherent goodness of primitive man and beast. In that light, Rousseau's followers viewed the animal fights as a compelling argument against the establishment of the monarchy, which turned even the goodness of animals into bloodshed and tyranny.²²

Revolution

With this unfavorable symbolism in mind, it is unsurprising that the menageries around France fared poorly. The inhabitants of some were killed and sometimes eaten, while others were released into the surrounding areas.²³ This fact created much concern among the Parisian scientists. The killing of the animals in particular was called, by one *Jardin du Roi* scholar, a "crime against science."²⁴ By this point, the *Jardin* had been renamed the *Jardin des Plantes*, a title more in line with the new Rousseauian self-identification of the scientists.²⁵ Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the director of the *Jardin* in the early years of the Revolution before the Menagerie's establishment, argued that a menagerie could have republican value: it would permit the observation of animals as they lived and not just when they were dead, aid in species acclimatization and crossbreeding, and provide a space to receive the exotic animals that were frequently given as gifts from African and Asian nations.²⁶

This concept in many ways changed the trajectories of menageries. For one, it made them public—a strange notion in that era. It also made the primary focus of the menagerie scientific and not idyllic. This still showed the power of the state, since science was, in the age of Enlightenment as well as today, a type of wealth itself, but it was a more practical display. The scientific resources at the *Jardin des Plantes* and the newly founded Natural History Museum at the same location were an attempt to centralize scientific power in France and elevate the nation's status above that of other European nations.²⁷ Adding a menagerie,

20 Paula Lee, (2005). "Death of a King," *Raritan* 24(3), Winter, 31–50.

21 Simons, "Republican King of Beasts," 6.

22 Lee, "Death of a King," 11.

23 Simons, "Republican King of Beasts," 5.

24 Thomas, "Jardin des Plantes: Fauna."

25 Burkhardt, "Man and His Menagerie," 2.

26 Burkhardt, "Man and His Menagerie," 1–2.

27 Elise S. Lipkowitz, "Seized Natural-History Collections and the Redefinition of Scientific Cosmopolitanism in the Era of the French Revolution," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 47, no. 1 (March 26, 2013): 15–41, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007087413000010>.

which the *Jardin* then lacked, would be a sensible step towards the desired French dominance in that regard.

The Founding of the Menagerie

The Menagerie, which was officially established as a part of the *Jardin des Plantes* in 1795, received its inhabitants through several means. The animals at Versailles who had survived some poor conditions since the onset of the Revolution were relocated to Paris. The rhinoceros had suffered an injury and perished before the trip, an antelope died in transit, but the prime display, the lion, was safely moved to Paris where it and some of the other creatures would remain at the Menagerie.²⁸ Many of the residents also came from the Paris streets when performing animals were banned and escorted, along with their trainers, to the *Jardin des Plantes*.²⁹ Animal shows were considered too crude and inhumane, and therefore a polar bear, civet, monkey, and panther were deposited by the police one morning for the surprised *Jardin* professors to deal with. More animals, liberated in similar fashion, would arrive soon thereafter. With their trainers hired on for their knowledge as caretakers (and as compensation for a lost livelihood in the case of animal performers), the Menagerie received an unexpected kick start. This inclusion of performing animals and their handlers gave the Menagerie an element of amusement and entertainment, even during the Revolution. This was the beginning of the Menagerie's golden years, which would last until around the 1860s.

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck

One notable professor at the *Jardin* was Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. A professor of botany, he took a step beyond Buffon, arguing for evolution through acquired characteristics. An animal that grew stronger, taller, or faster in its own lifetime could, according to Lamarck, pass such traits on to its offspring, thus causing evolution. A horse trained to be strong could pass the characteristic of strength to its offspring, which would have a higher strength baseline than other horses. Lamarck became a professor in 1793, not long after the death of Buffon, and taught his theory to smaller groups during that period.³⁰ It is likely that the strange animals present at the menagerie influenced his ideas, seeing that they were so different from the animals known in Europe until that time. How did the hyena come to exist in Africa but not anywhere else, and why was it so uniquely built? His views incorporated new finds about the fossil record regarding extinction and replacement of species. He influenced notable evolutionary figures like Joseph Hooker, Thomas Huxley, and Charles Lyell, all friends of

28 Simons, "Republican King of Beasts," 5–7.

29 Burkhardt, "Man and His Menagerie," 2.

30 Andrés Galera, "The Impact of Lamarck's Theory of Evolution Before Darwin's Theory," *Journal of the History of Biology* 50, no. 1 (February 11, 2016): 53–70, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10739-015-9432-5>. 10–11.

Darwin.³¹ His arguments sought to explain a conundrum that others were having trouble answering at that time. While somewhat obscure today, he was a leading figure of evolutionary thought in the period before Darwin.

Vulgarisation

One of the reasons the Menagerie became so prominent was the French concept of “*vulgarisation*”—the popularization of scholarly ideas among a general audience so that they receive wider appreciation. For example, in the print below, most animals are showcased as they would be presented in the Menagerie, but near the bottom of the page is an interesting image of an orangutan.³² It sits in an almost human fashion, clutching a stick like a staff, looking very little like the actual animal it represents. Its almost-human proportions and posture point to a common belief at the time, held by figures such as Lamarck, that orangutans were perhaps the closest thing to a missing link between humans and apes.³³ About thirty five years after this print was made, the fossilized skullcap, thigh, and teeth of Java Man, called *Homo erectus*, were discovered on the island of Java, where orangutans lived at the time. Orangutans were also touted for their social abilities and intelligence, like the ability to open doors to interact with people, so Java was naturally seen as a promising location to look for such fossils.³⁴ One could see the orangutan, this assumed mixture of man and beast, at the Menagerie, of course. The print of the human-ish ape above points to the draw of this notion, which was *vulgarization* of the most controversial sort: to propose to the masses what it meant to be almost human. The Church, of course, had some issues with the proposed natural origin of mankind, and soon-coming depictions of ape-men in a similar vein would aid in the scientific racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the appeal of constant progress and ability to describe humanity in largely material terms was already taking root.

Lamarck’s theories of evolution benefited from “*vulgarisation*” at the Menagerie in other ways, as well. The most popular example of his ideas, the giraffe stretching its neck to reach the highest leaves, echoes the utter fascination with the animal in France after the Menagerie’s giraffe entered the country. Any theory linked to the giraffe was bound to gain more traction by association.

31 Galera, 8–10.

32 *Animaux divers du jardin des plantes [Print, 1854]*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6938164f.r=Animaux%20divers%20du%20Jardin%20des%20plantes?rk=21459;2> (accessed March 3, 2021).

33 Galera, “Impact of Lamarck’s Theory,” 11.

34 Lally, *Le lion, le tigre*, 31.



Animaux Divers Du Jardin Des Plantes

Many of the early keepers had once owned the animals for performances, so it would be expected that there was also some dramatic flair at the Menagerie. At least one of the bears in the bear pit, known as Martin, would dance, climb trees, and wave his arms in exchange for bread tossed by small boys.³⁵ Other keepers were themselves foreign, having been sent to care for animals from their homeland, and because of that were themselves “exotic” and a draw to

³⁵ Th. Lally, *Le Jardin des plantes. L'ours brun, l'éléphant, le léopard, le chameau ou dromadaire, le kangourou, le zèbre.* (Paris, Hachette et C, 1875), 13–14.

the Menagerie alongside their charges.³⁶ Some citizens were given public praise for their gifting of rare and foreign creatures to the Menagerie, associating even more the idea of fearless exploration with the animals available to be seen.³⁷ The draw of spectacle, fame, and exoticism heightened the appeal of the Menagerie and the science, reason, and the state it represented, as well. Churches had no real lions, and the former regime had kept them to themselves, away from the public eye. This new Menagerie of the state, with its lions, was open to all.

Napoleon's Influence

Another reason the Menagerie had such esteem was due to the conquests of Napoleon. His comprehensive military campaigns brought back worldwide treasures,³⁸ including lions, camels, and large birds.³⁹ The French colonization of parts of Africa meant that the Menagerie never lacked lions, despite the rather high mortality rate of animals in zoos at that time.⁴⁰

Napoleon's European campaigns also bore fruit. Private scientific collections were considered fair game, and French scientists would often accompany troops to collect plunder.⁴¹ One of the most notable acquisitions of this sort was the private collection of the Dutch ruler, which was claimed under the guise of liberating a collection and bringing it to Paris, where it could be viewed publicly along with many other scientific treasures, aiding research. Despite post-war requests made in 1815, it was never returned, although some animals which the French had multiples of were offered as a consolation.⁴²

This aggressive collecting by scientists backed by the imperial state allowed the Menagerie to remain the leader among scientific (or any other kind of) zoos. If the Dutch previously had elephants, the French currently had elephants. If camels fascinated the people, they could be acquired from the colonies. If a German scientist wished to study a species, he would find it at the *Jardin des Plantes*. Perhaps in honor of this primacy by conquest, one of the bridges leading to the Menagerie was named after a victory won by Napoleon.⁴³

36 Henry Gauguin, "Girafe Femelle," lithograph of the first giraffe of the Menagerie. Muséum national d'histoire naturelle. Paris, 1828.

37 "Museum d'histoire naturelle." *Le Constitutionnel*. November 25, 1864, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k650195q>.

38 There was even a French military pamphlet listing species desired at the Jardin, which regions they could be found in, and how to safely ship them, which was acquired and translated by the British to help their zoos catch up to the Menagerie: John Chichester, *Instructions for Collecting, Preserving, and Transporting Such Specimens of Natural History as Appertain to the Animal Kingdom* (Cheltenham: E. Matthews, 1826).

39 *Journal Des Débats Politiques Et Littéraires*. December 27, 1841, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k441159g>.

40 Katie Hornstein, "From Museum to Menagerie: Théodore Géricault and the Leonine Subject," *The Art Bulletin* 101, no. 1 (2019): 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2018.1504547>. The expected lifespan of a lion in zoos was two years, and cubs born in zoos would die before reaching adulthood.

41 Lipkowitz, "Seized natural-history collections," 21–22.

42 Lipkowitz, "Seized natural-history collections," 15–17.

43 De Pétigny, *Le Jardin des plantes*, 13.

Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier

The professor in charge of the Menagerie, who laid its ideological foundations, was Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. A notable scientist and professor of zoology, Saint-Hilaire studied several topics relating to evolution and defended evolution in debate against other famous scientists of the era such as Georges Cuvier. He was the sole leader of the Menagerie for roughly ten years, and remained a guiding influence over the Menagerie for several decades thereafter. The Menagerie was to him, however, apparently a nuisance. This is understandable, even aside from the time-consuming task of caring for so many animals. Personal issues among the staff also arose, to the point that the carnivore handler even plotted to kill one of his fellow employees.⁴⁴

Around the time that the attempted murder came to light, the Menagerie received its first superintendent, the brother of the renowned Georges Cuvier, Frédéric. A scientist in his own right, the younger Cuvier began his work in 1803. He not only developed ways of caring for the animals to extend their predicted short lifespan, but he also studied their intelligence, sought to acclimatize them to the Paris region, and even attempted to hybridize cows and bison.⁴⁵ So it can be seen that even the directors of the famous Menagerie were scientists who used its operation to further their academic pursuits. Between Buffon, Lamarck, Saint-Hilaire, and the Cuviers, the *Jardin des Plantes Ménagerie* was promoted by popular scholars, who helped its task of *vulgarisation* and elevated its status as a site of Enlightenment research.

⁴⁴ Burkhardt, "Man and His Menagerie," 3. He soon became a former employee.

⁴⁵ Burkhardt, "Man and His Menagerie," 6. This attempt at hybridization failed, however, and both the calf and cow died in the process. He did not attempt something like that again.

The Giraffe



“À la girafe,” a style inspired by the giraffe that walked to the Menagerie ⁴⁶

The most famous inhabitant of the Menagerie would be its first giraffe, a gift from the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali. The giraffe sailed across the Mediterranean to France, where it walked, led by Saint-Hilaire, across the countryside and through towns from the coast until it reached Paris in 1827. The public spectacle of a large and bizarre creature walking through the local streets created a giraffe craze.⁴⁷ People wrote songs and skits about the giraffe,⁴⁸ styled their hair after it, made ties, dresses, and suits patterned after it, and even assigned place names like “*Rue de la Girafe*” to areas through which the giraffe walked.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Cesar Ojeda, *Coiffure à La Girafe*. October 28, 2011. Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/odisea2008/6288063425>.

⁴⁷ Gaugain, “Girafe femelle.”

⁴⁸ Mime la Comtesse d’Oglou, *Les Adieux de la girafe: Romance/paroles de Mme La Comtesse D’Oglou; Musique avec accompagnement de guitare* par Mariscotte, Bibliothèque National De France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1159091d.r=zarafa%20giraffe?rk=21459;2> (accessed March 3, 2021).

⁴⁹ Michael Allin, “Zarafa: A Giraffe’s True Story,” Essay. In *Zarafa*, Great Britain: Review, 1999.

The wildly successful advertising campaign aimed at promoting the giraffe is noteworthy because it was also a way to let the public participate in scientific progress. At least as far as giraffes were concerned, a general audience now knew more than previous generations of scholars.⁵⁰ By showcasing the giraffe and similar animals, such as anteaters, bison, lions, and ostriches, the Menagerie winningly proclaimed scientific rationalism to the common people in a way with which they could interact. The rather dull story of empiricism, providential chance, and materialism could still spark creativity and excitement when it was presented by the wide array of fantastical creatures that walked the paths of the Menagerie.

Acclimatization

One of the scientific fads in nineteenth-century France was acclimatization, or the naturalizing of foreign plants and animals to the French climate, which was seen as a form of “practical zoology.”⁵¹ The idea was linked to Lamarck’s theory of evolution—if traits acquired during a creature’s lifetime could be passed on, then eventually animals like antelope or kangaroos could be so adjusted to the French climate that they would provide food or services in the same way native livestock could. During that period, many saw the domestication and acclimatization of animals like zebras—the sturdier version of horses—as a future certainty, and the idea was promoted in Menagerie literature.⁵² The Menagerie was the obvious site at which acclimatization could take place, since it housed so many scientific experts and exotic animals already. On top of that, Frédéric Cuvier also wrote a treatise on the modification of domesticated animals that lent credibility to the practice, and had already studied what best helped foreign animals survive and thrive in the region. The son of Saint-Hilaire, Isodore Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, was also a boon in that area, since he studied under Cuvier when he worked at the Menagerie.⁵³

Acclimatization was not a net benefit to the Menagerie, however, since the younger Saint-Hilaire departed from the Menagerie in 1860 to found a rival institution, the *Jardin d’Acclimatation*. Established for the purpose of acclimatization, it was seen as less frivolous than the Menagerie, which benefited so much from the public entertainment it offered. The *Jardin d’Acclimatation*, too, had popular spectacles like elephant rides or dinners of exotic meats, but they were marketed as being in the vein of useful activities.⁵⁴ The meals and rides demonstrated at least the appearance of success—these foreign creatures were acclimatized and tamed enough that they could be eaten or used for labor. Because it was built on the faulty premise of Lamarckian evolution, the system

50 “Paris, 4 juillet.” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*.

51 Warwick Anderson, “Climates of Opinion: Acclimatization in Nineteenth-Century France and England.” *Victorian Studies* 35, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 135–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3828004>.

52 Lally, Th. *L’ours brun, l’éléphant*, 31–32.

53 Anderson, W. “Climates of Opinion,” 4–5, 9.

54 Anderson, 10–11.

was doomed to at least some measure of failure, but its initial breakthroughs gave the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* accolades in its founding era.⁵⁵

Decline

The competition from the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* in Paris and that from the other zoos that were being established across Europe contributed to the Menagerie's loss of status. It was no longer unique in its purpose, even in its own city. The lack of budget increases for the *Jardin des Plantes* over multiple years in the second half of the 1800s only paved the way for its fading from the forefront.⁵⁶ In some ways, the Menagerie was ruined by its own success. The idea of zoos as sites of science and knowledge that the Menagerie instituted was undercut by zoos that were *more* scientific and appeared *more* inherently useful. The zoos formed after the Menagerie were generally public and aided the gathering of scientific knowledge, so the Menagerie was not the only institution of its kind anymore. The private menagerie of luxury had faded from the forefront, and the public promoter of natural science had replaced it.

Another heavy blow suffered by the Menagerie was the Prussian siege of Paris from 1870–1871. At the onset of the siege, the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* animals moved onto the grounds of the *Jardin des Plantes*, and as the siege wore on, the animals from both the Menagerie and the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* were slaughtered to provide food for the starving Parisians.⁵⁷ A terse article written by staff at the Menagerie was smuggled out of Paris about one week before the siege ended. It stated that only the animals from the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* had been eaten, and that “fears expressed by some newspapers about the fate of [the valuable Menagerie animals] . . . are therefore unfounded,”⁵⁸ but the animals were eaten, nevertheless. Despite the article's attempt to put a positive spin on the situation (many animals may have died from poor conditions and lack of food, but that made room for valuable, hardier animals), the siege staggered the Menagerie and gave other sites the freedom to claim the top position.⁵⁹

55 Anderson, “Climates of Opinion,” 9–10. While some animals, such as the rabbits in Australia, can flourish in new climates, most are genetically limited to their own specific range of climates. Genetic theory and its limits on diversifying were, however, unknown at that time, and under Lamarck's inspiration, it was assumed that flora and fauna were infinitely malleable, given enough time to pass on acquired traits. The French had some measure of success, for example, purifying swamps by growing eucalyptus, but the trees eventually died during a cold winter and the project was a failure.

56 Claude Schnitter, “Le Développement du Muséum National d'histoire naturelle de Paris au cours de la seconde moitié du XIX siècle: « Se transformer ou périr »/The Development of the Paris Museum of Natural History During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: ‘Either Adapt or Perish’,” *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 49, no. 1 (1996): 53–98, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rhs.1996.1248>.

57 Anderson, “Climates of Opinion,” 11.

58 Staff of the *Jardin des plantes menagerie*, “On Lit dans le journal officiel,” *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, January 20, 1871, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4578504>.

59 On lit dans le *Journal officiel*. *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 2.

Conclusion

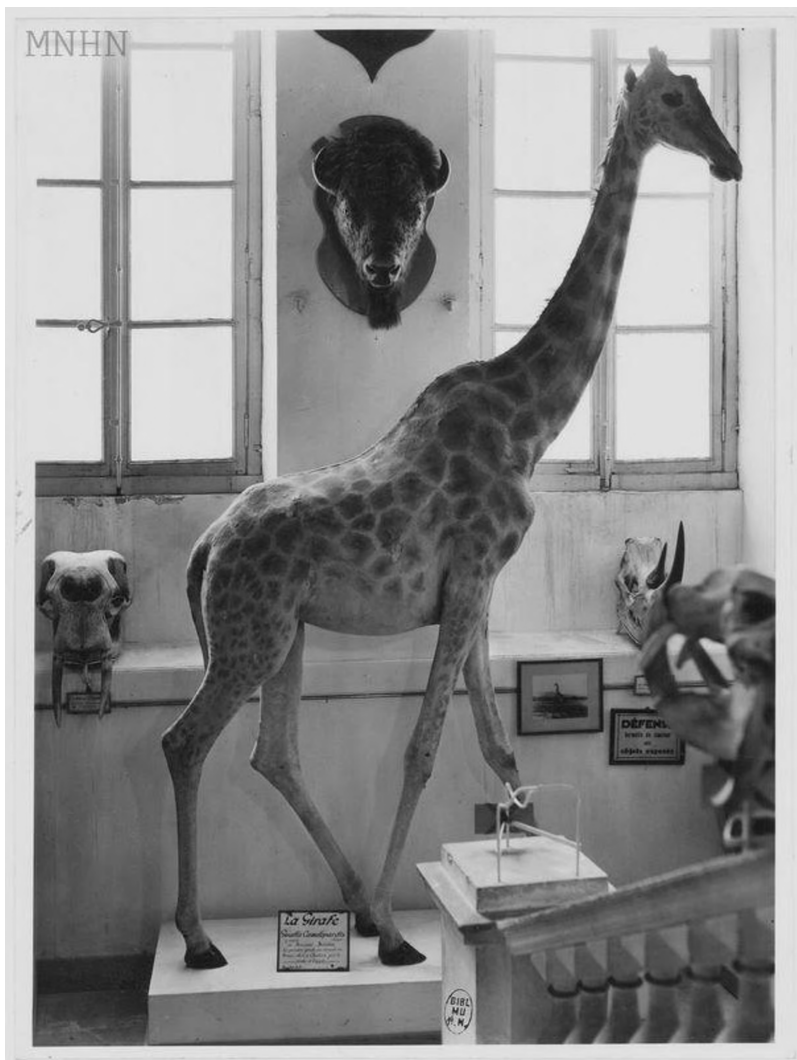
While the *Jardin des Plantes Ménagerie* may have lost its dominance as the nineteenth century drew to a close, its contributions to the nature of zoos, French rationalism and culture, and the French secular state should not be understated. The public, scientific zoos of today have roots in the Menagerie, which set the standard for what a modern zoo ought to look like. When research occurs in zoos, the Menagerie can be thanked for laying the scholarly foundations of that type of empirical study. Through *vulgarisation* that promoted influential evolutionary scientists and their rationalistic ideals, the French secular state received further underpinning. French culture became increasingly influenced by the rationalism and secularism central to the Enlightenment, buttressed by the symbol and tool that was the Menagerie. The French state benefited from the positive reputation of the Menagerie, which it owned, shaped, and furnished with many of the animals that captured the public's interest. But the Menagerie's impact extended well beyond French borders. Its decline could also be seen as its biggest success—the Menagerie was so popular and useful that zoos everywhere were established according to the same formula.

When the famous first giraffe died after residing for almost two decades in the Menagerie, it was preserved and displayed at the *Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de la Rochelle* on the coast of France.⁶⁰ The Menagerie, though certainly less prominent than in the past, still operates on the same grounds it originally occupied in the *Jardin des Plantes* and houses several rare and endangered species, such as snow leopards, continuing its mission of study and “*vulgarisation*.”⁶¹ *The Jardin d'Acclimatation*, however, no longer serves any educational purpose. It is now a mere amusement park.⁶²

60 « La Girafe Zarafa au musée d'histoire naturelle de la Rochelle », Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed April 9, 2021), https://bibliotheques.mnhn.fr/medias/detailstatic.aspx?instance=exploitation&rsc_base=ifd&rsc_docid=mnhn_ic4025.

61 “Collections, plantes et animaux,” Galeries, jardins, zoo--jardin des plantes, https://www.jardindesplantesdeparis.fr/fr/aller-plus-loin/collections-plantes-animaux-2714?combine=&field_taxon_tid=All&field_thematique_tid=All&nid_entityreference_filter=2765 (accessed May 1, 2021).

62 “Home: jardin d'acclimatation.” Le jardin d'acclimatation., <http://www.jardindacclimatation.fr/> (accessed May 1, 2021).



The Menagerie's giraffe, on display at the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de la Rochelle.⁶³

63 *La Girafe Zarafa*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://bibliotheques.mnhn.fr/medias/detailstatic.aspx?instance=exploitation&rsc_base=ifd&rsc_docid=mnhn_ic4025 (accessed March 1, 2021).

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