

Picturing the Wind

On the Interweaving of Religious, Mythological and Natural History Knowledge in Dutch Copper Engraving (c. 1600)¹

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Wind is a natural phenomenon that can be mediated and modelled in the visual arts in various ways (see fig. 1).² At the same time, the history of representations of wind is closely linked to the history of both meteorology and technology.³ Since antiquity, the question has been how invisible bodies (*corpora caeca*), to borrow Lucretius's formulation, can be made visible. For the properties of wind – incorporeality, immateriality and transparency – pose a challenge for every kind of visual culture. In the final analysis, wind can only be depicted symbolically or phenomenologically through its effects on the visible world. Art historians distinguish between three ways in which wind can be visualized to deal with the impossibility of depiction: in ancient art, there is evidence of wind being represented as a personification or mythological figure as early as the 5th century BCE. The second possibility involves depicting the effects of wind on animate and inanimate nature, while the third relies on emblematic symbols.⁴

In the early modern period, attempts were often made to convey the complexity of natural phenomena in a characteristically anthropocentric manner by means of an allegorical image or, according to Aby Warburg's reading of the 'Nympha', by linking them to the expression of psychic forces.⁵ But the artifice

¹ I would like to thank Joshua Crone for the translation of this text.

² For a general introduction to the subject of depictions of wind, see NOVA, ALESSANDRO, *Das Buch des Windes. Das Unsichtbare sichtbar machen*, Munich 2007; and the articles in ID./MICHALSKY, TANJA (eds.), *Wind und Wetter. Die Ikonologie der Atmosphäre*, Venice 2009 (*Studia e ricerche* 5). See also OBRIST, BARBARA, *Wind diagrams and medieval cosmology*, in: *Speculum* 72 (1997), p. 33–84. On specific winds and what they mean, see BAIER, THOMAS (ed.), *Der neue Georges: ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, vol. 2: I–Z, col. 3443, under *Oriens*, under *Meridies*, col. 3065, under *Occidens*, col. 3366, under *Septentrio*, col. 4357–4358. For a larger theoretical context, see BÖHME, GERNOT/BÖHME, HARTMUT (eds.), *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Elemente*, Munich 1996.

³ NOVA, *Buch des Windes* (cf. n. 2), p. 31.

⁴ Evidence and differentiations in RAFF, THOMAS, *Die Ikonografie der mittelalterlichen Windpersonifikation*, in: *Aachener Kunstblätter* 48 (1979), p. 71–218; NEUSER, KORA, *Anemoi. Studien zur Darstellung der Winde und Windgottheiten in der Antike*, Rome 1982; and NOVA, *Buch des Windes* (cf. n. 2).

⁵ Cf. BAERT, BARBARA, *Nymph. Motif, phantom, paradigm, affect. A contribution to the*



Fig. 1: Boeotian, Skyphos with Odysseus and Boreas, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (G249).

of nonrepresentationalism and graphical abstraction is also what awakens an epistemological interest in the viewer and lends the wind a powerful symbolic charge, as in Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of a deluge or storm (see fig. 2). According to my thesis, it is through the dissolution of forms that the transfer of complex bodies of knowledge first becomes possible in early modern pictures of wind. This essay will examine a paradigmatic case in seeking to determine how different religious, mythological and scientific discourses intertwine to make the complexity of the natural phenomenon representable in an artistic image. The case in question is a four-part cycle of copper engravings by Johann Sadeler after Maarten de Vos, in which the four cardinal directions and four main winds are visualized and an attempt is made to arrange them in terms of a biblical, world-historical line of reasoning (see fig. 3).⁶ As was standard practice

study of Aby Warburg (1866–1929), in: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen Jaarboek (2012), p. 47–92.

⁶ HOLLSTEIN, FRIEDRICH WILHELM HEINRICH, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts: ca. 1450–1700*, 72 vols., Amsterdam 1949 – present, here vol. 21 (1980), p. 167–168, no. 513–516; *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 105 vols., ed. by Walter L. Strauss, New York 1978 – present, here vol. 70 (2003), part 3, p. 61–66, no. 472–475. Researchers are unaware of the existence of the Hamburg copy. For more details on the prints in Hamburg, see SEDDIG, SARAH, Johann Sadeler I. nach Maarten de Vos. Die vier Winde, in: Iris Wenderholm (ed.), *Manier, Mythos und Moral. Niederländische Druckgraphik um 1600 in den Beständen der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg*, exhibition catalogue (Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek 2014), Petersberg 2014, cat. 8, p. 114–123. An interesting study of the period in question can be found in SCHREURS, ANNA, *Mythologie und Naturkunde, Die Winde als Götter bei Joachim von Sandrart*, in: Nova/Michalsky (eds.), *Wind und Wetter* (cf. n. 2), p. 147–161, 333–344.



Fig. 2: Leonardo da Vinci, Storm, Windsor Castle, Royal Library.



Fig. 3: Johann Sadeler after Maarten de Vos, Oriens, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.

in the years around 1600, this is accomplished with the help of allegorical representations in which figures borrowed from ancient mythology serve as personifications of complex conceptual notions. This cycle is therefore highly relevant to questions concerning religious knowledge on the boundaries of various discourses, since it provides a paradigmatic example of how different areas of

knowledge are interwoven and put to productive use. As this essay will attempt to demonstrate, thematic complexity can only be represented with the aid of different visual traditions. The central insight here is that this approach leads at the same time to a reassessment of traditional areas of knowledge. The process by which mythological and scientific knowledge is transformed and utilized in an overall Christian context takes place on both a pictorial level and on the level of inscriptions and coordinated image captions, which closely interact and contribute to a new semantization of the natural phenomenon.⁷

1. The Adaptive Potential of Copper Engraving

What makes the medium of graphic printmaking unique is that it enables bodies of knowledge not only to be arranged and disseminated,⁸ but also to be adapted later on, for example under changing denominational conditions. The *Five Senses* cycle by Adrian Collaert after Maarten de Vos is paradigmatic of this capacity: in the first edition, the page devoted to *Visus* (see fig. 4) features a stippled depiction of God, whereas in the fourth edition the image has been replaced by the name of God written in the Hebrew alphabet (see fig. 5). These changes can be attributed to the third publisher of the series, Claes Jansz Visscher of Amsterdam, a Calvinist engraver, draughtsman and leading publisher who was a member of the reformed church and a prominent representative of Calvinism.⁹ Whereas the Antwerpian artists and publishers of the first two versions clearly had no objection to representing God in human form, Visscher's denominational convictions led him to have the anthropomorphic depictions removed and replaced by the Hebrew letters אֲדֹנָי (Hebrew: 'adonai', transl. 'my lord'). This later intervention serves as an excellent illustration of the potential of graphic printmaking and of how well the medium lends itself to adaptation under different denominational conditions.

This essay will focus on the *Four Winds* cycle by Johann Sadeler I after Maarten de Vos as an example of religious knowledge on the boundaries of different discourses (see fig. 6). It is a highly complex work encumbered with nu-

⁷ The following text is a modified version of the essay by WENDERHOLM, IRIS, *Bildordnung und Bilddetail. Zum Verständnis von Naturbildern in der Druckgraphik der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: Id. (ed.), *Manier, Mythos und Moral* (cf. n. 6), p. 14–23.

⁸ For more information on graphic printmaking practices, see BRAKENSIEK, STEPHAN, *Vom 'Theatrum mundi' zum 'Cabinet des Estampes'. Das Sammeln von Druckgraphik in Deutschland 1565–1821*, Hildesheim 2003; and BRAKENSIEK, STEPHAN, *Kennerschaft aus Kassetten. Die Loseblattsammlung als offenes Modell zur nutzbringenden Organisation einer Graphiksammlung in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: Id. / Michel Polfer (eds.), *Graphik als Spiegel der Malerei. Meisterwerke der Reproduktionsgraphik 1500–1830*, Milan 2009, p. 33–47.

⁹ Cf. THUMM, LISA, *Adriaen Collaert nach Maarten de Vos. Die fünf Sinne*, in: Wenderholm (ed.), *Manier, Mythos und Moral* (cf. n. 6), cat. 19, p. 200–210.



Fig. 4: Adrian Collaert after Maarten de Vos, Visus (Five Senses cycle, 1st edition), Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.



Fig. 5: Adrian Collaert after Maarten de Vos, Visus (Five Senses cycle, 4th edition), Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.



Fig. 6: Johann Sadeler after Maarten de Vos, Meridies,
Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.

merous problems of interpretation.¹⁰ Centrally, the work features a pictorial element that serves to illustrate how religious knowledge is used and ultimately transformed for humanistic discourse. This is especially evident on the page de-

¹⁰ For more on the cycle, see WENDERHOLM, *Bildordnung und Bilddetail* (cf. n. 7); and SEDDIG, *Die vier Winde* (cf. n. 6).

picting the cardinal direction of south (*Meridies*) and Auster, the South Wind. The time of day represented on the page is noon. The right edge of the image is dominated by a bewildering tangle of forms and figures. It is all but impossible to detect any coherent meaning here. Clouds, water and thunderbolts can be seen on this page along with reptiles, amphibians and insects. From a formal standpoint, what unfolds here is a chaotic interplay of forms and graphical lines, a design that reminds the viewer unequivocally that they are dealing with a work of graphic printmaking together with its specific artistic qualities and representational possibilities. Formlessness is obviously an artistic challenge and is not tied to *mimesis*. In what follows, I will explore how representational problems are handled in a new way in the medium of the picture when dealing with a traditional allegorical iconographic subject, namely the four winds. The main question is: how can the artist visualize not only wind, but also the volatility of natural forces, perhaps even their negativity, without resorting solely to a conventional allegorical system of references? Another question to be examined is whether printmaking offers genuine visual means for depicting chaotic processes and intangible forces. The essay will also attempt to determine what meaning can be attributed to a visual detail that derives from a Christian context.

2. The Flood and the South Wind: The Graphic Challenge of Depicting Wind

Leonardo da Vinci occupies a central place in the history of the development of graphic conventions that primarily involve grasping the phenomenon by means of abstract signs and treating wind in a differentiated way in the form of vortexes, swirls and streams.¹¹ The high degree of differentiation can also be demonstrated by a quote connected with his *Deluge* drawings, in which Leonardo discusses differences between phenomena observed during a storm, and how they should be represented in terms of the complexity of their effects on the environment. "Let the dark and gloomy air be seen buffeted by the rush of contrary winds and dense from the continued rain mingled with hail and bearing hither and thither an infinite number of branches torn from the trees and mixed with numberless leaves."¹²

¹¹ NOVA, ALESSANDRO, Il vortice del fenomeno atmosferico e il grido metaforico. Le 'Tempeste' di Leonardo e il 'Piramo e Tisba' del Poussin, in: Id. / Michalsky (eds.), *Wind und Wetter* (cf. n. 2), p. 53–66, 311–321.

¹² Windsor, Royal Library, 12665^v (RICHTER, JEAN PAUL [ed.], *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, London 1883, 2 vols., here vol. 1, 608, p. 306–307); see NOVA, *Buch des Windes* (cf. n. 2), p. 77. For more information see FARAGO, CLAIRE J., *Wind and weather in Leonardo da Vinci's abridged treatise on painting*, in: Nova/Michalsky (eds.), *Wind und Wetter* (cf. n. 2), p. 25–52, 305–310.

Johann Sadeler divides the four pages of his cycle based on the model of quaternity in that he always applies the same design principle in correlating cardinal directions, winds, times of day, stages of human life and mythological references. He even uses the four parts of the world to differentiate his classification system, although interestingly enough his model is based on the ancient concept of the world, a vision that excludes America. Each of the prints is accompanied by an eight-line caption.

The print entitled *Oriens* depicts the goddess of dawn, Aurora, who follows Apeliotes, the personification of the East wind (see fig. 3, p. 204). He is represented as a young man scattering flower buds and blossoms across a river landscape in the lower half of the drawing. Thanks to the inscription within the print, it can be identified as the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates, the setting of the story of Nabath, who took possession of this geographical region together with his brothers, as reported in the Bible and Ovid. *Oriens*, the title of the print, therefore refers simultaneously to the east as a cardinal direction and a part of the world, to the land of the rising sun and to morning as the time of day. *Occidens*, the west, is placed by Johann Sadeler above the Pindus mountain and river, with Parnassus in the foreground on the right side of the picture and the city of Delphi in the distance (see fig. 7). The landscape is populated by Apollo and the muses, with Pegasus at the source of the Hippocrene as a symbol of poetry. And on the left side there are the three graces and the Horae, the latter representing the seasons. Flora, the goddess of flowers and spring, is followed over the band of clouds by Zephyr, the personification of the West Wind, as the caption indicates. She is scattering flowers on the earth. The page entitled *Septentrio*, north, shows Boreas, the personification of the North Wind, as he carries off Orithya (see fig. 8). Semantically loaded with the visual topos of female abduction, which is characterized by the turbulent force of the wind, Boreas is personified as an old man, *senex*, who bears the connotation of winter. Heavy torrents of rain and lightning bolts fall on the narrative scene in the lower half of the print, which is set on the Aegean Sea.

The narrative goal is furthered by another medium: The Latin captions are ornate verses with numerous allusions that reference ancient poetry, namely the works of Ovid. They are not intended for laypeople, who would presumably have problems deciphering even the visuals. Rather, they are quite clearly directed towards humanistic and clerical circles. It is striking that the verses are neither descriptive nor ekphrastic. On the contrary, they are designed to complement the images in that they refer to the myth, yet their language emphasizes qualities and phenomena that the picture is unable to represent. In the case of the *Oriens* print, the caption conjures up the coldness of the dew, the softness of the grass, the scent of spring, and the colour of the flowers, such that the combination of text and images could in some sense be said to have synaesthetic aspirations:



Fig. 7: Johann Sadeler after Maarten de Vos, Occidens, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.



Fig. 8: Johann Sadeler after Maarten de Vos, Septentrio, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg.

As Eurus, fleeing before Aurora, / Harries with winds the kingdoms of the East that lie beneath the rising sun, / So the gentle sport of sweet smelling spring / Dyes the fields clothed in coloured blossoms and motley grass.

The foolish daughter of Pallas strides forth in her purple robe, / Aurora, shimmering in the heavens with her rose red hair. / She follows the young man, leaving gray Tithonus behind; / And she sprinkles the tender grasses with chilling dew.¹³

3. *Parva* and Plagues

The *Meridies* print offers a highly complex view of nature that invokes different representational conventions and explanatory models (see fig. 6, p.207). On a cloud bank in the middle of the image, Ops is approaching from the left with agricultural and building tools. She is following Auster, the rainy South Wind. Naked and bearded, Auster is represented as a grown man. Ops, by contrast, is responsible for fertility and the harvest as a deity. Her mural crown shows that she has merged with the mythological figure of Cybele. When he depicts the winds with human faces and as full-body figures, Johann Sadeler draws on the visual tradition of antiquity, which envisages the winds as personifications or mythological figures. Ancient representational conventions are seldom employed in medieval art, where the winds are rarely depicted as whole figures and hardly ever as mythological figures. The turning point in the development of anthropomorphic representation can be found in Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* with the depiction of Zephyrus.¹⁴

The ambivalences in Sadeler's conception of nature are made clear through the merging of the two mythological figures: On the one hand the subject is the fertility of the earth, while on the other hand the work also addresses the threat posed to that fertility by too much rain, in other words, by abundance. The rainy wind can have a positive effect on the harvest; without it, the harvest would suffer from too long a drought. On the other hand, it destroys the harvest when it rains down on the earth too fiercely and long. The artist therefore invokes the archaic figures of the West and South Winds, whose wildness and unmanageability had already been noted as far back as the *Odyssey*. In this context it is important to bear in mind that the winds were assigned demonic traits in the Middle Ages;

¹³ The caption reads: *Eurus ab Aurora fugiens dum flatibus urget, / Regna sub ortivo Nabathaea iacentia sole. / Pubentes vario et flore et gramine campos / Pingit odoriferi mollis Lascivia Veris. Rosida punice<o> Pallanteas exit amictu, / Et roseis caelo fulgens Aurora capillis / Insequitur iuvenem, cano Tithone relicto: / Graminaque argenti perfundit mollia rore.*

I would like to thank Alexander Estis for the transcription and the first German translation. The English translation is based on the German one.

¹⁴ With the exception of a miniature by Liberale da Verona, this is the first time in modern painting that wind is once again represented as a personification together with its effects. Wind is given a face with individual physiognomic characteristics. Cf. NOVA, *Buch des Windes* (cf. n. 2), p. 87–93.

their depiction as dragon heads is a prime example. This negative potential stems from an older religious discourse and is invoked here by depicting wind as a human head with the wings of a bat in the upper right corner, reminding us that bats are a sign of night and of the demonic.

But the whole lower half of the engraving is where Johann Sadeler takes Botticelli's pictorial invention further. Africa, together with the Nile, is depicted as the land of the south in the lower part of the image. The activities of the humans and animals follow the long-established conventions of Africa iconography.¹⁵ On the right, the mountain is named *Montes lunae*, enabling it to be identified as the Rwenzori Mountains in Central Africa, which had long been referred to by the former name in Ptolemy's ancient geography.¹⁶

The scene depicted in the sky appears more interesting. Naked people with raised or folded hands race over clouds towards a group of temples that bear the label *Secreta Deorum*, secrets of the gods. The smaller wing buildings are tellingly veiled. Without question, we are dealing here with a representation of the veiled image at Sais, which both Plutarch and Plato describe independently of each other.¹⁷ It was interpreted as an image of Isis as far back as antiquity and was held to be a symbol of the secrets and the mysteriousness of nature. Because the image at Sais was located in Egypt, it makes sense that it would appear on a copper engraving of the south which stands for Africa. More significantly, Ops was synonymous with the earth and nature goddess and Isis was considered her daughter. But the presence of the image is still more significant in light of the meaning attached to the engraving. For the print also seeks to depict mysterious natural processes that awaken man's explicit interest in gaining knowledge of nature. The added visual information showing that the Milky Way crosses the heavenly zone may also refer to mankind's holistic interest in nature and the cosmos. The specific mythological reference to the Milky Way can be understood in terms of its origin story, which ascribes it to milk squirted from the breast of Juno, the mother of the gods. As such, it serves as another reference to fertile and overabundant nature.

¹⁵ For a general introduction see POESCHEL, SABINE, *Studien zur Ikonographie der Erdteile in der Kunst des 16.–18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1985.

¹⁶ Sebastian Münster can serve as a source from that period. In his *Cosmographia* he writes: 'Where [the Nile] takes its first source. Then many believe it flows directly from the south through the Orient in Egypt and springs pristinely from the snow in the mountains known as Montes Lune.' Qtd. in Münster, Sebastian, *Cosmographia. Oder Beschreibung der gantzen Welt* [...], Basel 1628 (EA 1552), vol. 4, ch. 32, p. 1656.

¹⁷ For a general introduction, see ASSMANN, JAN, *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais*. Schillers Ballade und ihre griechischen und ägyptischen Hintergründe, Stuttgart 1999. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 271 f., also for an explanation of the mistaken interpretation of the veiling of the image, which derives from the inscription on the sitting statue of Athena as preserved in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*: 'I am everything that was, is, and will be; and no mortal has ever lifted my veil.' According to Assmann, the garment mentioned here (*peplos*) had been translated as veil (*velum*) since the Renaissance.

Furthermore, the caption identifies the figure at the upper left edge of the engraving as a phoenix, a legendary bird described in ancient mythology as arising from the ashes of Osiris, son of Ops. Native to Egypt, the phoenix came to symbolize immortality in Christianity. Osiris and Isis are the two children of Ops or Cybele, and they refer to the reproductive power of nature in the image when their myths are alluded to and they appear in transmuted form: as a phoenix and as the image at Sais.

The personification of Auster is especially interesting in this context. By no means does the wind have only positive characteristics – on the contrary, the ambivalences are contained in the caption! On the one hand, it stands for beneficent, prolific nature, which manifests itself primarily in the productiveness of the harvest. On the other hand, an excess of wind and its primary effect, rain, is harmful to mankind. For a flood of rain unleashes scourges, destroys harvests, and spreads pests. Not only is this context invoked through the bat-winged head of the wind, but it may also have informed the decision to depict the wind with its rain machine (an ancient clepsydra¹⁸) and to add snakes, scorpions, frogs, dragonflies (locusts are clearly meant here) and beetles. Typical of the time, the images of these pests range from empirical descriptions of nature to the persistent presence of fanciful notions. The dragonfly, for example, recalls the precision of the depictions of nature in Georg Hoefnagel's *Archetypa* (1592), which presents the insect world in compositions that are frequently symmetrical, thereby invoking the perfection of creation in small things and drawing the attention of his contemporaries to 'new' objects (insects and vermin).¹⁹ This clearly distinguishes Johann Sadeler's depiction of the wind Auster from that of, say, Jost Amman, in which nonspecific particles appear in the clouds.

The viewer is initially surprised to find dragon-like monsters alongside precisely drawn animals in Sadeler. This is commonplace in the natural history of the late 16th century, however, because the *historia monstrorum* is part of natural history, and the existence of these creatures, attested by biblical and ancient authorities, has not yet been rendered obsolete by zoological empiricism, as demonstrated by, for example, Ulisse Aldrovandi's inclusion of these monsters in his large-scale study for a *Historia naturalis*.²⁰

¹⁸ I would like to thank Jörg Robert for pointing out the correct name of the object.

¹⁹ See for example VIGNAU-WILBERG, THEA (ed.), *Archetypa studiaeque patris Georgii Hoefnagelii: 1592. Natur, Dichtung und Wissenschaft in der Kunst um 1600*, exhibition catalogue (Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung), Munich 1994; and NERI, JANICE (ed.), *The insect and the image. Visualizing nature in early modern Europe, 1500–1700*, Minneapolis 2011. Marisa Bass is currently concerned with Joris Hoefnagel and his encyclopaedic inquiry into the natural world.

²⁰ Cf. the general ideas in WITTKOWER, RUDOLF, *Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 5 (1942), p. 159–197; and TORI, LUCA/STEINBRECHER, ALINE (eds.), *Tiere und Fabelwesen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*, exhibition catalogue (Swiss National Museum in Zürich), Geneva 2012.

Furthermore, in the early modern period the negative connotations of animals such as snakes, beetles, snails and insects were generally understood. Solely for the sake of comparison, one can consider how Frans Snyders and Rubens drew on Ovid's description of the transport of Medusa's head, whose blood bred pestilence in the desert sands (see fig. 9).²¹ The spectacular *Head of Medusa* is admittedly based on a story from Ovid, yet the painting develops its subject in encyclopaedic rather than narrative form: the mythological fantasy according to which blood dripping from Medusa's severed head engendered snakes in the desert sands during Perseus's flight across Libya is used in the painting to elaborate on a subject from the field of natural history. Rubens presents the head of Medusa as if discarded, and he develops it thematically with a meticulous depiction of snakes, scorpions and spiders that was probably executed by the animal painter Frans Snyders. A wealth of natural history knowledge went into depicting the individual species and their behaviour. The artistic image is of great importance here, since it enables natural subjects to be presented in a lifelike manner, linked with the ancient explanation of how they came into being.

Viewed in this light, the *Meridies* engraving, too, is engaged in a very lively debate concerning the visual representation of ugliness and loathing, one that pushes the possibilities of aesthetic illusion to their limits. The fact that the discourse on the ugliness of the deformed applies to amphibians, reptiles and insects conforms with their presumed place in the divine plan of creation, even if this plan was increasingly called into question in the 17th and 18th centuries. In this sense, even the *parva* were seen as worthy subjects for paintings and theories, for example in Friedrich Christian Lesser's *Insekto-Theologie, oder Versuch wie ein Mensch durch Betrachtung der Insekten zur Erkenntnis Gottes gelangt* (Leipzig 1738). In Sadeler, however, it is abundantly clear that the negative connotations predominate when the details of the image are viewed as a whole, and that this negativity provides important visual cues for a strictly biblical reading. One can therefore speak of the updating of a religious discourse and its adaption to a field at the interface of natural history and mythology.

4. Visual Organization

The meaning of the printed graphic can only be determined in its entirety when the organization of the image is considered: captioned *Meridies*, the print takes as its subject the wind and the cardinal direction associated with it, the south. This direction, in turn, is associated with Africa, as the part of the earth located

²¹ On the Viennese painting see BÜTTNER, NILS/HEINEN, ULRICH (eds.), Peter Paul Rubens. Barocke Leidenschaften, exhibition catalogue (Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum), Munich 2004, p. 222–225, cat. no. 44 (Ulrich Heinen).



Fig. 9: Frans Snyders and Peter Paul Rubens, Head of Medusa, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

in the south. At the same time, the topos of Africa is linked to everything that the ancient authors, the Bible and modern natural history contain in the way of knowledge. But above all, Africa is topically linked to Egypt. In other words, the wind-related knowledge represented in the painting is primarily knowledge related to the topical conception of Egypt. This is a common procedure given that one is dealing here with an encyclopaedic arrangement of natural images, one that connects and organizes traditional knowledge. According to my thesis, however, this arrangement is also linked to a biblical topos so that the negative effect of a natural force can be visualized. Johann Sadeler and Maarten de Vos are drawing on the biblical cipher of the Ten Plagues, as recorded in the Book of Exodus chapters 7 to 12.²² The text reports that Yahweh sent the afflictions, also known as the 'Plagues of Egypt', on the pharaoh in order to force him to release the Israelites.

According to the interpretation, this demonstrated the superiority of the Christian God over the Egyptian gods. The plagues, which had already been assigned a specific sequence by Augustine in the *Civitas Dei*, were also considered miraculous signs from God.²³ They were identified as blood-red water in the Nile, frogs, mosquitoes, biting flies, livestock disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and the death of the firstborn. Johann Sadeler depicts the biblical topos of the plagues of Egypt not in order to illustrate the corresponding passage in the Bible, but rather to represent the essence of a natural force. To this end, he activates the topos in a new context. He also succeeds in strengthening the topos and bringing it to life through graphical invention.

Johann Sadeler admittedly uses the iconographic raw material, but his selection is precise: he only depicts the plagues that come about or reach the earth due to wind and rain, namely, locusts, frogs, mosquitoes, hail, and possibly darkness and blood-red water in the Nile. These depictions are particularly interesting in that they reveal aspects of the wind Auster. Sadeler ignores the other plagues mentioned in the Bible, such as the death of the firstborn, livestock disease and boils. He appeals to the visual topos of the ten plagues, but he breaks it open and fragments it to align it with his new content and context. In this way, traditional biblical knowledge is adapted to the actual natural subject to be represented.

By confronting this engraving with a depiction from roughly the same period by Crispyn van de Passe the elder (see fig. 10), one can learn a few things from

²² Ex 7,14–12,33. Cf. for the visual tradition WEIMAR, PETER, s. v. Plagen, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 8 (1963), col. 546 f.

²³ In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine criticized the idea that the Egyptian plagues could be understood as symbols of Christian persecution and that each subsequent plague until the emergence of the Antichrist could be justified in this way (*Civ. Dei* XVIII, 53). On the plagues of Egypt see TREVISANATO, SIRO IGINO, *The Plagues of Egypt. Archaeology, History and Science Look at the Bible*, Piscataway, NJ 2005; LANG, BERNHARD., s. v. Natur, in: Manfred Görg et al. (eds.), *Neues Bibel-Lexikon*, vol. 2: H–N, Zürich 1995, esp. p. 907 f.; HORT, GRETA, *The Plagues of Egypt*, in: *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957), p. 84–103.



Fig. 10: Crispyn van de Passe, Auster, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

the print after Maarten de Vos about the encyclopaedic organization of natural history images: the organization is topical and knowledge of mythology, the Bible and natural history is revealed encyclopaedically and refers to the subject of the image. However, the traditional formula underlying the image also mixes with 'empirical' details that authenticate the knowledge.²⁴

At the same time, the plague depiction is visualized through more than mere 'iconographic' decoding. Not only is the chaotic process indicated through decipherable signs, it is also mediated visually through graphical structures; the lightning, too, appears as an autonomized form. The *Meridies* print could therefore be read as a reflection on the unrepresentable and chaotic, since these can only be expressed in autonomous form as opposed to iconographic or mimetic form.

In this way, Johann Sadeler draws on the approach devised by Leonardo da Vinci for representing the unique character of the wind, namely reproduction in the form of abstract graphic signs in black and white, as well as common graphic notations of the apocalypse and negative prophecies. Analogous to Leonardo's treatment, the copper engraving attempts to depict wind and its effects through a combination of personifications, phenomena and abstract signs, thereby resulting in an interweaving of visual codes.

Religious knowledge is renegotiated through visual organization. In the process, the adjustment of different fields of knowledge and heritage to new contexts initiates an intrapictorial discourse devoted to the subject of origins, destruction and reclamation – and in a figurative sense perhaps the stimulating power of civilization. Authors at the time viewed Africa as a place where the wild or primordial people of God lived. Furthermore, the subject of origins is taken up through the reference to *Montes lunae*, as the Nile was believed to originate in the Rwenzori Mountains. As a supplementary medium for mediating and establishing knowledge, the caption invokes the subject of destruction and protection:

As African Auster soars to heaven on dripping wings, / His grim face tinged black as pitch, / A din is raised and clouds pour forth from an overcast sky, / Thunder resounds and terrible thunderbolts flash beneath flames.

²⁴ On authentication strategies, mnemonics and visual organizing principles see (from the extensive literature on the subject) SIEGEL, STEFFEN, *Im Wald des Wissens: Sichtbare Ordnungen der Enzyklopädie auf der Schwelle zwischen Kultur und Natur*, in: Christoph Marksches et al. (eds.), *Atlas der Weltbilder*, Berlin 2011, p. 280–293; HOFMEISTER, WERNFRIED (ed.), *Mittelalterliche Wissensspeicher. Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Verbreitung ausgewählten 'Orientierungswissens' im Spannungsfeld von Gelehrsamkeit und Illitertheit*, Frankfurt a. M. et al. 2009; STRASSER, GERHARD F., *Emblematik und Mnemonik der Frühen Neuzeit im Zusammenspiel. Johannes Buno und Johann Justus Winckelmann*, Wiesbaden 2000; BERNS, JÖRG JOCHEN/NEUBER, WOLFGANG (eds.), *Seelenmaschinen. Gattungstraditionen, Funktionen und Leistungsgrenzen der Mnemotechniken vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Moderne*, Vienna et al. 2000; and for a general introduction YATES, FRANCES A., *The Art of Memory*, Harmondsworth 1969.

Tower-garlanded Ops, mother of gods, follows apace with broad Breast, / Wrapped in a gown of green; / She entrusts the souls of the earthborn to the high heaven of the gods / And furnishes the Earth with tower-guarded cities.²⁵

5. Conclusions

To sum up, it can be said that the South Wind Auster is depicted in all his ambivalence, as a bringer of both blessings and ruin. The ruinous is mediated in decipherable and precisely outlined monsters that can be traced back to the biblical plagues, as I have endeavoured to show. The biblical topos of the calamity is emphasized through a declarification of graphic means, thereby invoking the chaotic and the imponderability of the force of nature. Precise hachures positioned side by side are crossed by irregular lines that have been left open, so that the impression of abstraction is created from the material constitution.

It could be argued that a unique feature of the cycle is that a schematically construed personification is not enough to achieve the representational goal. Instead, the depicted figures are presented as animated, as an embodied natural principle, as life-taking and life-giving. Of particular interest in this context is the question of how the religious discourse was handled aesthetically and animated in its iconography. It is especially important to emphasize that we are not dealing with a scientific illustration or a model, but with principles of nature translated into an artistic image that obeys its own laws. In this sense, the copper engraving series is understood here not as a source and a visualization of the history of science. Instead, it is treated in terms of its intrinsic aesthetic value and in relation to the relevance of pictorial impressions that emphasize the understanding of images of nature in the early modern period not one-sidedly as a means of furthering knowledge, but in terms of their independent constitution. To this, the insight should be added that traditions are of central importance, but that accumulated knowledge stores must nonetheless be adequately factored in if the constructed quality of pictorial expressions is to be grasped, especially in images with a natural history dimension.

What makes the copper engraving so revealing is that it demonstrates that the artists are interested in more than just a verified representation of nature in an allegorical and mimetic system of references. The pictorial solution reaches the

²⁵ The caption reads: *Evolat ut madidis coelo alis Africus Auster, / Terribilem picea tinctus caligine vultum, / Fit fragor, et denso funduntur ab Aethere nymbi, / Proveniunt tonitrus, atque horrida fulmina flammis.*

Hunc turrita Deum mater Ops pectoris ampli / Insequitur, viridi circumdata veste, Deorum / Terrigenas animas Coelo quae destinat alto, / Terrarumque Orbem turritis urbibus ornat.

I would like Alexander Estis for the transcription and the first German translation. The English translation is based on the German one.

limits of pictorial conventions when the processuality of nature and the power of nature in production and destruction is represented. This cannot succeed with the help of allegorical impressions alone. What is genuinely new in the image of nature obviously results from the elimination of borders between artistic means.

As I have shown, the way in which nature and its secrets are imagined in this cycle is hardly comprehensible without reference to the Bible. Consequently, it is only through the complex interweaving of natural history knowledge, mythological pictorial tradition and Christian iconography that natural phenomena could be visualized around 1600. Religious knowledge is presented here in its authoritative power that still works for the 17th century. It has the adaptability to retain even contents from very different sources. By the same token, it is clear that in the early modern period nature was understood to contain secrets that ultimately elude decipherment.

Wenderholm

1 – M. A. Tiverios, *Elliniki techni, archaia angeia* (1996), Fig. 77; 2 – Zöllner, Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci. 1452–1519. Zeichnungen und Skizzen*, Köln 2006, p. 134, Fig. 255; 3–8 – Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg; 9 – Seipel, Wilfried (Ed.), *Vom Mythos der Antike* (Exh. Cat. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien), Vienna 2008, p. 71; 10 – Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt, 1906–02–01)