

Circulation of images and graphic practices in Renaissance natural history: the example of Conrad Gessner

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Summary

Conrad Gessner's *Historia animalium* is a compilation of information from a variety of sources: friends, correspondents, books, broadsides, drawings, as well as his own experience. The recent discovery of a cache of drawings at Amsterdam originally belonging to Gessner has added a new dimension for research into the role of images in Gessner's study of nature. In this paper, we examine the drawings that were the basis of the images in the volume of fishes. We uncovered several cases where there were multiple copies of the same *drawing* of a fish (rather than multiple drawings of the same *fish*), which problematizes the notion of unique "original" copies and their copies. While we still know very little about the actual mechanism of, or people involved in, commissioning or generating copies of drawings, their very existence suggests that the images functioned as an important medium in the circulation of knowledge in the early modern period.

Keywords: Visual History of Science, Natural History, Conrad Gessner, Illustrations, Copying, Information exchange

Introduction

Conrad Gessner's *Historia animalium* is well known as a compilation of information from a variety of sources such as his correspondents as well as printed works. Indeed, Gessner frequently refers to his sources in the *Histo-*

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