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The Netherlands

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Smith, P.J.; Trijp, D. van; Moss, A.; Smith P.J.; Egmond, F.

### **Citation**

Smith, P. J., Trijp, D. van, & Moss, A. (2024). François de Meyer's Fish Travelogue (1698). In F. Egmond (Ed.), *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* (pp. 523-553). Leiden-Boston: Brill. doi:10.1163/9789004681187\_019

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3677321>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# François de Meyer's Fish Travelogue (1698)

*Paul J. Smith, Didi van Trijp and Alan Moss*

## 1 Introduction

The Dutch National Archives in The Hague houses a special travelogue in manuscript form. It concerns an account written in French of a sea voyage from France to La Martinique from 11 September 1698 to 5 December 1698.<sup>1</sup> Consisting of 24 pages, the manuscript contains 8 coloured drawings of sea creatures. Judging by the consistent handwriting, text written around drawings and only copying errors, this manuscript is most likely a final version, of which we do not have any rough drafts. Nothing is known about the author, a certain 'François d[e] Meyer', except his name, which he himself gives once,<sup>2</sup> and some sparse, circumstantial information he reveals about himself. One can even question his family name, 'de Meyer': its spelling cannot be interpreted unambiguously. We will therefore refer to him in this article by his first name, 'François'. The travelogue is particularly special because of the coloured drawings of marine creatures it contains, and the information that François provides about these as well as about animals that are not depicted. The anonymity of the author, and the fact that it straddles the boundaries between what we tend to see as separate genres – the travel diary and the natural historical account – may be why the manuscript has been scarcely studied by historians. Additionally, the journal is part of the Delprat family archives, which have very little to do with natural history. The travelogue is surrounded by genealogical documents, private letters, copied sermons, and a more haphazard variety of papers of the Delprat family, mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries. Because of this

- 1 Meyer François de, *Reisjournaal van François de Meyer, opvarende op het schip l'Aigle onder bevel van François Dubois naar Martinique*. 1698–1699. Ms. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Collectie 349 Familie Delprat, toegang 2.21.183.16, inv.nr. 106a. The manuscript's pages measure 20 × 15 cm. The cover is probably original and contains draft notes on the inside (calculations and scribbles in pencil by a later hand). The manuscript is part of a miscellaneous section, presumably collected by members of the Delprat family. The relationship with the Delprat family and the Delprat family archive is not clear. Unfortunately, the genealogical papers in the family archive (inv. numbers 1–2, 5 and 7) do not provide an answer. A critical edition of this travelogue, which besides the natural history aspects also discusses the ceremonial aspects of maritime customs, is in preparation.
- 2 Nationaal Archief (hereafter: NA), Delprat 106a, 1.

archival context, and the fact that the family archive has only been at the Dutch National Archives since 1980, it has not been the focus of scholars of early modern maritime life.<sup>3</sup>

In this article we want to present and analyse François's drawings and descriptions of marine life. His travelogue offers a fascinating insight into how an individual that appears to have received little formal training in the study of nature observed and documented the animals that he encountered during his voyage. In presenting François's drawings and descriptions we will primarily keep the chronological order of the travelogue, because the drawings and descriptions of marine fauna are strongly intertwined with this narrative, showing a progressive argumentative development. Secondly, we will further interpret the natural historical material, as well as the possible sources and the way the material was presented. Before going into the drawings and descriptions, however, it is important that we briefly present this manuscript from a historical, palaeographic, and linguistic perspective.

## 2 Context

François's travelogue provides the following information about the ship in its opening lines. The ship is called L'Aigle and the captain's name is François du Bois. In passing, François gives more information further on: the ship has 9 guns, 36 crew members,<sup>4</sup> and 19 passengers (who remain unnamed).<sup>5</sup> More information about this ship can be found at the French Archives Nationales. In an archival record dated 19 May 1702,<sup>6</sup> the ship is referred to as a 'flute', a popular type of sailing vessel with three masts and a broad belly, mostly used for freight transport. In the service of the French king, L'Aigle carried out assignments in the Caribbean around 1700, such as the transport of provisions and materials to the post in Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe and La Martinique had been part of the French colonial empire since 1635. At the beginning of the 18th century, both islands had a number of sugar cane plantations, cultivated by enslaved people. The captain of L'Aigle is mentioned once in this archive document: 'Desbois', corresponding to the name 'Du Bois' given by François.

3 The sole reference that we found in secondary literature is Davids K, *Global Ocean of Knowledge, 1600–1860: Globalization and Maritime Knowledge* (London: 2020) 68.

4 Apart from the captain, one crew member is three times briefly mentioned: a certain 'Des Rivee' [?].

5 NA Delprat 106a, 8. These numbers indicate that this ship is not identical to the warship L'Aigle, which was active at the same time: that ship had 100 guns and 34 crew members in peacetime.

6 19 mai 1702; Cote de communication: COL C8 A 14 fol. 114.

About this Du Bois, François mentions in passing, towards the end of the report, that he is a sailor with 30 years of experience in the Caribbean.

The place of departure is 'Chef debois', according to François: this is Chef de Baie, a small coastal town near La Rochelle, known in the 17th century as 'Chedebois'. The exact location of arrival at La Martinique is not given. The duration of the journey is explicitly given in the closing sentence of the report: 'le 5 a 10 heure du matin nous arivame [...] ala martinique dieu mersij aprais quatre vaingt sinc jours de traversee'<sup>7</sup> (On 5 [December] at 10 o'clock in the morning we arrived [...] at La Martinique – thank God – after a crossing of 58 days). Although thanking God and Holy Providence for returning home unscathed after a long journey is a common trope in travel literature, this almost sounds like a sigh of relief. In fact, it probably is: François twice quotes the captain, who stated that he had never had so much delay in his long career due to the weather conditions (storm, headwind, and calm).

As mentioned, nothing is known with certainty about the identity of François. However, some indirect information about his person and his working methods can be obtained from his spelling, use of language, and areas of interest. First, we are dealing here with a travelogue, in which the journey is tracked from day to day. The travel report is built up from diary notes and sketches that were made on the spot. The voyage report has a logbook-like precision: not only is each day mentioned, but also, for each day, the wind directions and other weather conditions and events the people on board have to deal with are mentioned very precisely, down to the hour. And François furthermore notes all the ships that L'Aigle encounters along the way, which are mentioned sometimes very briefly, if the ship remains far away, sometimes more extensively if there is actual contact or a threat, such as the encounters with an English warship and a Turkish pirate.<sup>8</sup> In this precise recording of the circumstances of the journey, it resembles the general structure of early modern travel diaries.<sup>9</sup>

The manuscript includes eight coloured drawings. While some (Dutch) travel manuscripts often contain doodles of far-away sights or cut-out engravings from printed travel guides, the level of detail and use of colour here are exceedingly rare. It is remarkable that these illustrations only concern sea animals. A number of other interesting things are described but not depicted; the

7 NA Delprat 106a, 24.

8 NA Delprat 106a, 8.

9 Most early modern travelogues were not solely meant as personal souvenirs. While François could have used this paper memento to later reminisce about a past adventure in the far-away Caribbean in the comfort of his own study, family and friends would most likely have perused his journal as well, marvelling at the author's depiction of maritime life.

only exception is a hailstone, drawn in the same ink in which the manuscript is written.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to precisely reconstruct how the coloured illustrations were made. It seems that a part of them was made as ink-wash, a technique in which the lines of the drawing are made with ink and subsequently coloured in with that same ink in diluted form. The lines of the drawings and their colourization seem similar, executed in brownish hues. Certain drawings, however (notably those of the dolphin fish and the bonito), include brighter shades of green, yellow, and blue. This can indicate that watercolour was also used. That in some cases a rather thick layer of paint or varnish was applied can be inferred from the drawing of the triggerfish, which shows clear signs of what art historians call craquelure. Regardless of the materials used, almost all the drawings are placed prominently across of the page, with the text written around them.

This brings us to the handwriting, spelling, and language of François. The handwriting has indeed been put into the net with obvious care, but was done so in an untrained hand. There are times when writing fatigue seems to have set in, as can be seen in certain spots in the handwriting, in word repetitions, strikethroughs, and insertions of forgotten words (in our quotes we will reflect these corrections to the extent possible). The spelling is phonetic and with scarce and inconsequent interpunction – which makes a precise reading of the text very difficult at times. Sometimes words clump together ('lonnesoroit'<sup>11</sup> should be read as *l'on ne saurait*, or 'saizelle'<sup>12</sup> as *ses ailes*, for example); sometimes they fall apart: *Guadeloupe* is written as 'garde.loupe'<sup>13</sup> and *parfaitement* as 'par faitte mant'.<sup>14</sup> The spelling is also often inconsistent: the spellings 'devand' and 'devent' (for *devant*) can coexist in one sentence.<sup>15</sup> There are also many confusions: 'destentions'<sup>16</sup> or 'dixtaintions'<sup>17</sup> for *distinction*, 'un faitivement'<sup>18</sup> for *effectivement*, or 'en larope'<sup>19</sup> or 'en leuoppe'<sup>20</sup> for *en l'Europe*. For this reason we will add, where necessary, a transcription in modern French in brackets, for a good understanding of the text.

10 'qui estoit comme des zeufe [= œufs] caree comme celle ceij' (egg size, square, as pictured here). NA Delprat 106a, 11.

11 NA Delprat 106a, 4.

12 NA Delprat 106a, 16.

13 NA Delprat 106a, 1.

14 NA Delprat 106a, 4.

15 NA Delprat 106a, 12.

16 NA Delprat 106a, 5.

17 NA Delprat 106a, 6.

18 NA Delprat 106a, 16.

19 NA Delprat 106a, 16.

20 NA Delprat 106a, 6.

The use of language is usually grammatically correct but stylistically unpolished – often with endless paratactical constructions, based on the excessive use of the coordinating conjunction “et” (for the sake of readability, we have not always adopted these paratactic sentence constructions in our English translation). Sometimes, however, we are dealing with fairly complicated hypotactic sentence structures (using the *participe présent*, and concessional clauses). Certain words he uses come from the dialect of the Ile de France. The vocabulary furthermore contains many dialecticisms, especially when it comes to technical subjects, such as tools (‘foinne’, ‘fisson’ – types of harpoon), parts of the ship, or names of birds and fish – as in the designation of ‘basquette’ (wagtail), ‘paille enceus’ (tropicbird) and ‘touil’ (Breton for ‘dog-fish’). Some of these words we have only found in 19th-century dialect dictionaries, as we shall see. Remarkable is the verb tense used in the travelogue: this is almost consistently the *passé défini* (also called *passé simple*) – a verb tense that, unlike present-day French, in which the *passé défini* has a literary connotation, was commonly used in the 17th century in narrative reporting. The *passé défini* has the function of indicating that it is a completed narration of events that took place in a past that is usually recent.

### 3 Marine Life: A Chronological Presentation

Let us present François's attention to marine fauna in chronological order. From this chronological perspective, it is remarkable that during the first days of the voyage, no attention is paid to marine fauna. Perhaps François, as a landlubber, had to acclimate to life at sea. Be that as it may, it is not until 16 December, five days after departure, that marine life is mentioned – and then it suddenly explodes. At 6 AM gannets (*Morus bassanus*) are spotted: ‘Le 16 a 6 heures du matin nous vimme plusieurs oiseau qu lon nomme foux.’<sup>21</sup> (On 16 September at 6 AM we saw several birds called gannets).

At 10 AM he sees a wagtail (*Motacilla spec.*):

sur les 10 heures il viens serepoze un peti oizeaud sur nos vergue qui ne me fu pas unconnut / lon le nome en France Basquette autre ment pipis<sup>22</sup>

At 10 o'clock there came on our yards a small bird, which was not unknown to me. In France he is called ‘basquette’, also called ‘pipis’.

21 NA Delprat 106a, 2.

22 NA Delprat 106a, 3.

At 3 PM something strange happens:

sur les 3 heure apres midi il luij eut [= il y eut] un de nos pijon qui prit la penne [= peine] de prendre la lavollee pour san nalle [la volée pour s'en aller] mais il ne peutpas fairre sans comparaizon comme la colombe de larche qui sapuya sur le roche pour prendre de louriers [= des lauriers] pour faire son nique [= nid ?] car celuy la sapuija sur les lamme deaux et si notre capitainne navoit pas ueut pitiee de luy qui fit maittre le navire ala cap pour luij donner secours et qui mit sa chaloupe aleaud pour le souvee [= sauver] je crois quil lestoit noiers.<sup>23</sup>

at 3 o'clock in the afternoon one of our pigeons made an attempt to fly away, but he did not succeed in imitating the pigeon of the Ark [of Noah], which landed upon a rock and plucked laurel to make a nest. This pigeon, however, landed on the waves, and if our captain had not pitied him and let the ship change course to help him and lower the lifeboat into the water to save him, he would have, I think, drowned.

The captain's rescue is remarkable: is it 'pitiee', as François suggests, or is it more superstition (pigeons on a ship bring good luck), based on the biblical story of Noah's Ark? Equally remarkable is François's personal attention given to the pigeon, and especially to the wagtail – although the phenomenon of tired land birds perching on ships is quite common, there are only a few other early modern travelogues in which attention would be paid to such a small and everyday bird.<sup>24</sup>

From this moment on, François focuses on the sea creatures. It begins with a 'marsouin', which is not only described but also depicted, along with the harpoon used to capture the animal [Fig. 18.1]. By the way, the illustration makes it clear that this is not a 'marsouin' (a porpoise) but a dolphin, probably the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), which is pelagic and has an average weight of 75 kilograms.

Du 17 a 6o lieux enmer a 7 heure du soir un de nos contremaitre nomme des vive monta sur la vergue de sivadiere et prit un dard fait en fleche il darda un marsouin qui pezoit 15o lb [= livres] Et nous le mimme a notre

23 NA Delprat 106a, 3.

24 Sloane Hans, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London, B.M. for the author: 1705–1725) 7.

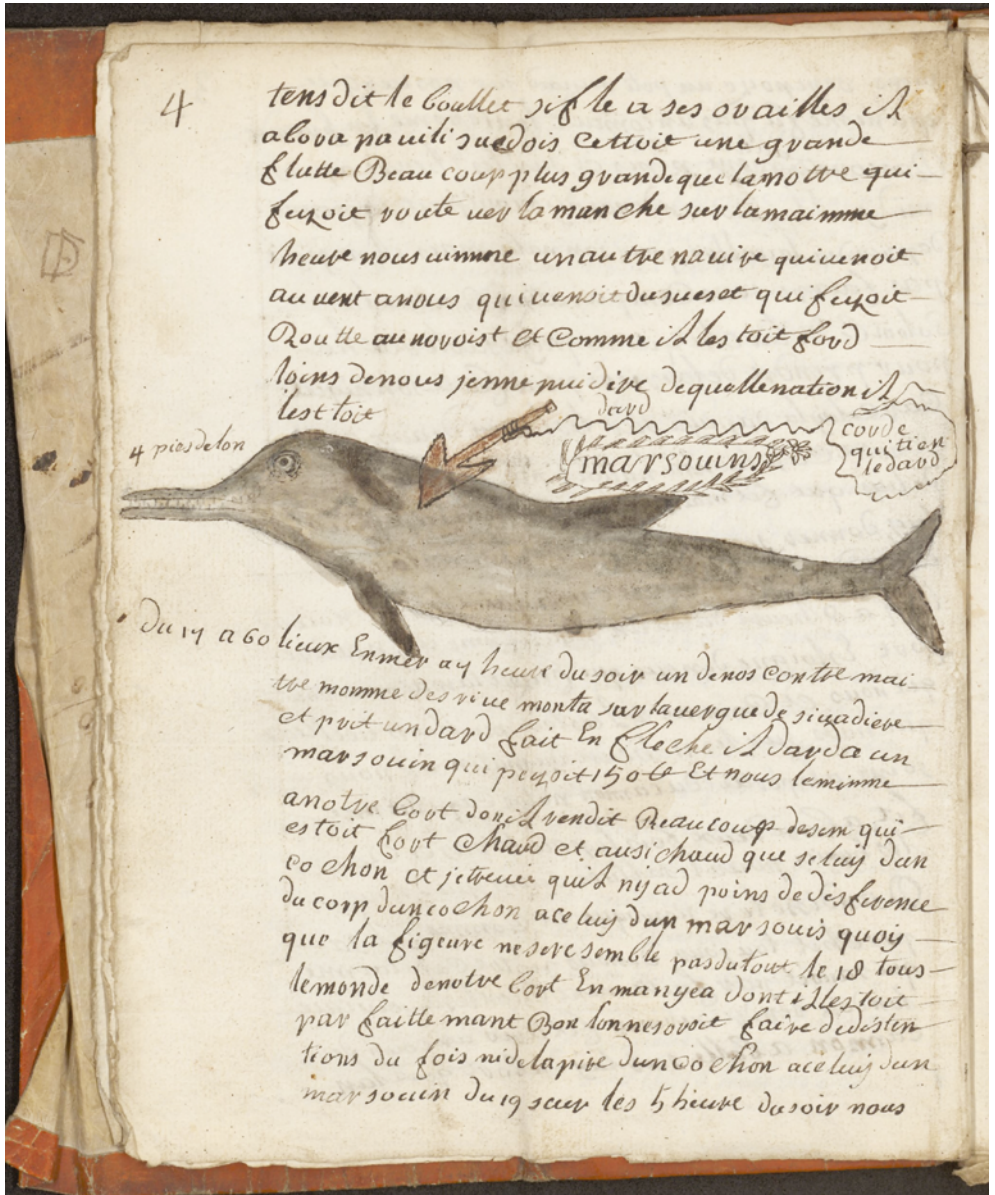


FIGURE 18.1 François de Meyer, Dolphin. Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 4



bort don il rendit beaucoup de sen qui estoit fort chaud et ausi chaud que se luy dun cochon et je treuvee quil nij ad poins de difference du corp dun cochon a celuy dun marsouin quoi que la figeure ne se ressemble pas du tout. Le 18 tous le monde de notre bort en manyea dont il lestoit par faite mant [= parfaitement] bon. lonnesoroit [= l'on ne saurait] faire de destentions [= distinction] du fois [= foi] ni de la pire<sup>25</sup> dun cochon a celuy dun marsouin.<sup>26</sup>

At 7 o'clock in the evening on 17 September, 60 miles from the coast, one of the commanders named Des Vives mounted the bowsprit, took an arrow-shaped harpoon, and speared a 150-pound dolphin. And we drew it on board, where it gave much blood, which was very warm, as warm as a pig's. And I found that there was little difference between the body of a dolphin and that of a pig, although they look very different in appearance. The 18th, everyone aboard ate the animal, which was particularly tasty. It is not possible to distinguish the liver or lungs of a pig from those of a dolphin.

On 19 September there are a number of large whales (of an indefinable species):

Du 19 scur les 5 heure du soir nous vimme quantite de poisson que lon nomme soufleurs quipassoit contre notre bord. Ce poisson est une fois plus gros quin beuf que nous ayeons en leurope il seroulle sur leaud comme le marsouin il se plonge dans leaud et quand il viens a fleurs deaud il gette la dune pique deaud par un trou quil la sur la tete et fait un soufle beaud coup plus fort que celuy dun beuf.<sup>27</sup>

On 19 September, about 5 o'clock in the evening, we saw a number of fish called "soufleurs" coming to our boat. This fish is twice the size of an ox we know in Europe. It swims in the water like a dolphin. It dives down and when it comes up it sprays a jet of water through a hole he has on its head, and it blows much harder than an ox.

25 A dialectical term for 'poumon' (lung). See Puichaud C., "Dictionnaire du patois du Bas-Gatinais (Suite)", *Revue de philologie française et provençale* 7 (1887) 100–137, here 120.

26 NA Delprat 106a, 4.

27 NA Delprat 106a, 5.

On 20 September, a species of dogfish is caught:

du 20 ilviens contre notre bort quantitte de poisson que lon nomme chins demer don je ne puis pas faire de dixtaintions dun chins demais a un touil<sup>28</sup> que nous manjon beaucoup a la Rochelle particueulierement notre capitainne voient le carmmme<sup>29</sup> mit sa yolle aleau luy et 2 matelot dedens et il prit 2 zin [?] et sans fut a la portee dans jet depierre de son bort et il lans prit 3 en peux de temp.<sup>30</sup>

On 20 September, a quantity of fish called “dogfish” arrived at our ship, which I cannot distinguish from a “touil” (kind of dogfish) that we eat a lot, especially in La Rochelle. When our captain saw this food [?], he launched his sloop, with him and two sailors in it, and he took two nets [?], and at a stone’s throw from the ship, he caught three in a short time.

What is striking here, as with the wagtail and other animals, is the attention to naming – we will come back to this in our analysis section. Here, too, the food aspect does not go unmentioned, both prior to the voyage, during François’s sojourn in La Rochelle, and the day after, as he pens: ‘Le 21 nous en mangimme dont il lestoit admirable.’<sup>31</sup> (We ate it on the 21st: it was delicious).

And the marine life observations keep coming in, that same day:

le maimme jours sur les 5 heures du soir il viens une quantitte de poisson contre notre bort que lon nome tons un de nos capittainne nomme des rivee prit un arpon fait en fasson dun fisson<sup>32</sup> de serpent. Il monta sur la vergue de sivadiere te [= et] tiralarpons sur le dos du poisson mais comme se poisson adextremment la peaud durre larpon faussa sur la peaud du poisson / se poisson est dumoins au sigros comme un mouton<sup>33</sup>

28 ‘toul’: Breton word for dogfish. See Danois E., “Les noms de quelques animaux et végétaux marins en dialecte de Léon”, *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest* 25:3 (1909) 548–555, here 555.

29 Probably ‘carne’, ‘viande’; cf. Puichaud C., “Dictionnaire du patois du Bas-Gatinais”, *Revue de philologie française et provençale* 7 (1887) 18–53, here 31.

30 NA Delprat 106a, 5.

31 NA Delprat 106a, 5.

32 ‘fisson’ is a dialectal term for spear. Cf. Puichaud, “Dictionnaire” 51. ‘Fisson de serpent’, meaning ‘serpent’s tongue’ or ‘serpent’s tooth’, is mentioned by Puichaud.

33 NA Delprat 106a, 5.

On the same day at 5 o'clock in the evening a quantity of fish called tuna arrived at our ship. One of our captains, named Des Riccée [?], picked up a harpoon shaped like a "fisson de serpent". He climbed on the bowsprit and threw the harpoon on the fish's back, but because this fish had a very hard back, the harpoon slipped on the fish's skin. This fish is at least as big as a sheep.

Then there is a long period of silence with regard to marine fauna, which is probably due to the weather conditions. François focuses on these conditions (waves as high as mountains, huge hailstorms, St. Elmo's fire), as well as on the impending approach of a Turkish pirate. It was not until 20 October 1698 that attention was again paid to fish, namely the albacore or white tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*), referred to here as 'Bounitte' [Fig. 18.2]:

Le 20 sur les 9 heure du matin il parut au devend de notre navire quantite de poissons que lon nomme Bounittes des le moment que nous heumme üeut notre capitainne prit unameson et semit sur lavergue de sivadiere dans le moment il lans pit [?] dix / cepoisson est ~~parfaitement bon~~<sup>34</sup>ford cour pezent 16 a 17 tt piece danlemoment quil fut pris / notre capitainne donna ordre dan fairre bouilly dons nous en manyamee tous et qui estoit par [inserted] faittement bon.<sup>35</sup>

At 9 o'clock in the morning on 20 October, a number of fish called "bounittes" appeared in front of our ship. As soon as we saw [these fish], our captain took some fishing bait and stood on the bowsprit. In no time he caught 10 of these fish. This fish ~~tastes excellent~~ is quite short, weighing 16 to 17 pounds each, at the time of catch. Our captain ordered it to be made into soup, which we all ate, and which tasted excellent.

Also, in this case there seems to be a concentration of marine life. On 21 October, it rains again, but after the rain has stopped, the crew sees a huge number of dolphins:

nous vimme venir soulevend une sigrande quantitte de marsouins que tout lequipage medij quil nans nauoit jamais üeu temps ensemble [= tout l'équipage me dit qu'il n'en avait jamais vu tant ensemble]<sup>36</sup>

34 Strikethrough in text.

35 NA Delprat 106a, 9.

36 NA Delprat 106a, 10.

Ceard Jesus lanuit du 13 au 14 nous humme 9  
 le uend mario feste desus quinoes semaitre ala  
 Cap lanuit et le jour don la main Estoit hote comme  
 les mon mais par comeur notre nauire ne boulet non  
 plus quins voche dont id lestoit fond le 14 a 8 heure du  
 matin leuend se leua encore plus fond ausus que jamais  
 a compaignie de momeud En momeud de grain qui nous fesoit  
 serue toute les uoille don nous humme oblige demaitre  
 alacap sur les 14 heure du soir A se boy ma des ouage  
 de toucotte avec deux tonnaire ce plaiie qui contenue  
 toute la nuit le 15 a 4 heure du matin le feux de st teumi  
 sa puiga encore sur la ponne delaginuelle da grand  
 mat et sur les uer que du piroquet pour la 2 queme fois  
 le 16 toujour uend contraire don nous humme oblige  
 demaitre alacap le 17 le 18 le 19 leuend uient auoient  
 du voit quinoes fit suivre notre route fond rouse-  
 ment  
 Bounnre de rpid selon



le 20 sur les 9 heure du matin A prant au deud  
 de notre nauire quantite de poisson que lon nomme  
 Bounnrites des le moment que nous humme ueut notre  
 Capitaine prit un ame son et seruit sur la uer de

FIGURE 18.2 François de Meyer, Albacore or white tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*). Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 9

we saw such a large number of dolphins under the wind that all the crew members told me they had never seen so many at once.

It is likely that François sees a causal relationship here with the previously observed albacore tuna. After all, both dolphins and tuna prey on flying fish. At least one piece of this food chain seems clear to François, as can be seen with the next fish caught on 23 October, described and depicted by François, namely the pilot fish (*Naucrates ductor*), which helps the tuna to track down fish [Fig. 18.3]:<sup>37</sup>

sur les 10 heure du matin notre capitainne prit un poisson contre notre  
bort que lon nomme pilote / cest un poisson qui conduitte les bonnitte  
pour atrape les poisson volland

at 10 AM, our captain caught a fish called ‘pilot fish’ near our ship. This is a fish that directs the albacore to the flying fish to catch it.

A few days later, on 28 and 29 October 28, huge numbers of flying fish are observed over two days (‘nous vimme quantitte de poisson volland’).<sup>38</sup>

Something special is going on with the captured and depicted pilot fish. The size is very small (half a foot, as the legend states). It is not mentioned that several specimens are caught, from which, for example, soup can be cooked, as was the case with the albacore. The mention that it was the captain who caught this fish is also remarkable. After all, the captain and crew were just recovering from a terrible hail storm (‘plus ford que jamais’), which ravaged the ship from 3 AM. that same day. The storm was so violent that the captain ordered the carpenters to get the axes ready to cut down the mainmast – which fortunately proved unnecessary. In short, the captain probably had something else on his mind to catch such a small fish. Yet he did it – one has the impression that he did this especially for François.

The fact that the two are on good terms with each other is apparent from the moment the ship crosses the equator, on 30 October. At the traditional baptism of Neptune, the captain acts as godfather (parrain) of François: ‘le capitainne me fit lonneur daistre mon parain dont il medonna le nom de mariee gallande’<sup>39</sup> (The captain gave me the honour of being my godfather:

37 In addition to large sea creatures, this species also follows ships. Nowadays it is known that they do not guide the animals to their prey, but only swim along to eat the prey’s remains.

38 NA Delprat 106a, 11.

39 NA Delprat 106a, 11.



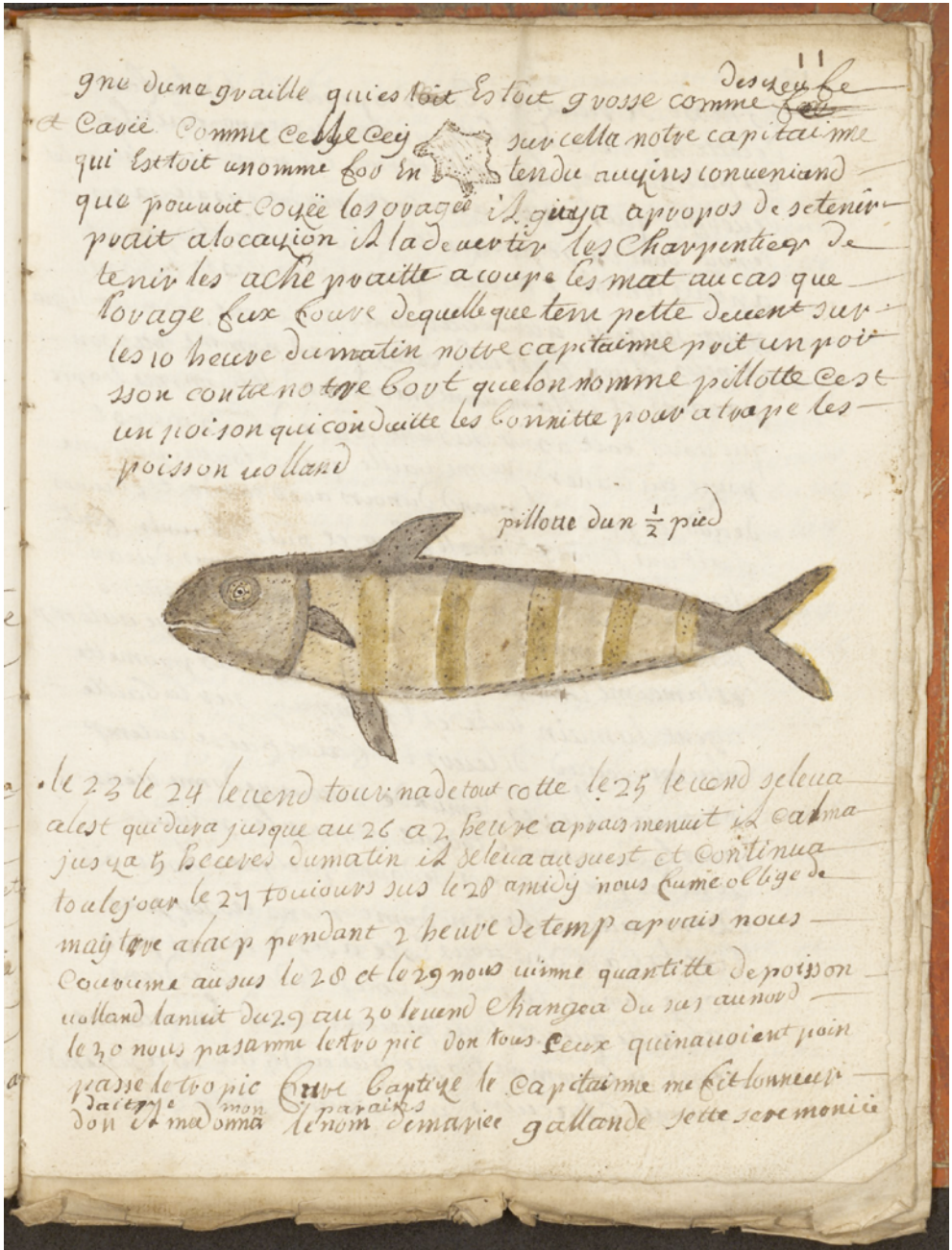


FIGURE 18.3 François de Meyer, Pilot fish (*Naucrates ductor*). Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 11

he baptized me with the name ‘mariee gallande’)<sup>40</sup> – which seems to be an example of transvestism, quite common in the baptismal ritual. Be that as it may, even at later moments one gets the impression that the fish was caught especially by the captain to be drawn and described by François.

After 29 October, things become a bit quieter in terms of observations. On 5 November at 10 AM a large whale appears: ‘a 10 heure du matin il viens contre notre bord un poisson que lon nomme souffleurs qui estoit extraimment gros’<sup>41</sup> (At 10 o’clock in the morning a huge fish called ‘souffleur’ arrives at the ship). And on 9 November the captain catches a ‘dorade’, a dolphin fish or mahi mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*). This is a large fish, which will no doubt be eaten (this is not mentioned), but of which François will have the time and opportunity to make a drawing and precise notes [Fig. 18.4]:

a 4 heure du soir notre capitainne prit une dorade avec un extrument de ferd que lonnome foinne [= foène, foëne] comme celle qui est represententee sur la tette de la dorade,/ ce poisson est dune beaute en chantee estemp dans leaud particulierement il nait pas malnomme zossi dorade par ce quil est beaud et bon et deplus il porte une fleur delis sur la taitte et il ad ce longueur 4 a 5 pid selon.<sup>42</sup>

At four o’clock in the morning our captain caught a dorado with an iron instrument called “foène”, as depicted here at the head of the dorado. This fish is of a mesmerizing beauty, especially in the water. It is not just called “dorado” because it is beautiful and tastes good. In addition, it has a lily flower on his head. It is about 4 to 5 feet tall.

François’s observations are indeed precise: he notices that the fish loses its beautiful colours as soon as it is out of the water. He takes the time to trace the harpoon used. Moreover, François seems to have talked to the captain or someone else about the lily on the head of the fish. A modern folklorist writes about this: ‘[Les marins] voient dans l’anatomie des poissons, des dessins qui nous échappent. Ils donnent au *jol* le nom de ‘poisson royal’ parce qu’il porte une fleur de lys sur la tête’<sup>43</sup> ([Sailors] see in the anatomy of fish designs that

40 ‘Marie-Galante’ is today the name of a Caribbean island, which was called ‘Maria Galanda’ by Columbus in 1493 (corruption of the Amerindian word ‘aulinagan’). In the 17th century, the island was still called ‘île de Saint-Louis’.

41 NA Delprat 106a, 13.

42 NA Delprat 106a, 14.

43 Herber J., “Le folklore de la mer (dans l’Hérault)”, *Folklore* 11.3 (1948) 43–48, here 43.



FIGURE 18.4 François de Meyer, Dolphin fish or mahi mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*). Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 15



escape us. They give the *jol* the name of ‘royal fish’ because it has a fleur-de-lis on its head).

How much François is focused on the marine fauna is apparent from the following long quote. It describes how on 13 November a tropicbird (*Phaethon spec.*)<sup>44</sup> is observed; for the next three days (14, 15, and 16 November) nothing is said except the wind direction; and on 17 November a frigatebird (*Fregata spec.*) is spotted.<sup>45</sup>

le 13 nous vimme un oiseau que lon nome paille enceus / et un faitivement [= effectivement] cetoizeaud nait pas mal nome paille enceus par cequil la une plume auderriere qui luij sert de ceüsee de la longueur dun pied et ½ selon / cetoizeau serd resinnal au navigateur pour leszille de lamerique et sinifiee que lon napproche de terre / [...] / le 17 nous vimme un oiseau que lon nomme gallere / cetoizeaud ne laisse point la terre que de 80 a 100 lieux / cela fit juge notre notre capitainne que nous aprochions deterre / cetoizeaud me re semble a legron que nous zavons en France ornij un paquet de plume quil lad dans le jabot quil luij fait faire une manière desprous degallere et sait pour sella que lon le nomme galere.<sup>46</sup>

On 13 November, we saw a bird called ‘paille enceus’ [straw-in-bottom], and indeed this bird is rightly called ‘paille enceus’ because it has a feather in its butt that serves as a tail, which is longer than one and a half feet. This bird serves as a sign to the navigator of the islands of America, and signifies that we came near land. [...] On 17 November, we saw a bird called ‘galley’ [frigate bird]. This bird never goes more than 80 to 100 miles offshore. That made our captain think we were approaching land. This bird resembles the heron we have in France, except that it has in its crop a package of feathers which it can swell like the prow of a galley, hence it is called ‘galley’.

These birds are described with the usual care – the information on naming these birds and their appearance (which is a sign of land nearby) comes from the captain or a member of the crew, and is supplemented by personal observation.

44 Tropicbirds have long extended tail feathers.

45 The Frigatebird, with an enormous red throat pouch, is indeed mainly found along coasts. It looks like a ‘proue de galère’ (bow of a galley).

46 NA Delprat 106a, 16.

On 18 November, a flying fish lands on the deck of the ship, which is copied by François [Fig. 18.5] and precisely described:

/ le 18 a 8 heure du soir il saute dans notre navire un poisson volland / ce poisson est de la grosseur dun meuillet qui ad 2 elle contre la taitte et il sord de leaud quend il les poursui de quelque poisson et il volle dumoins ausij loins comme une caille que nous aieons en larope / saizelle son de la manière de selle dune chauve sourit / laille na point de separation / elle ad le fon dune petite toile comme la petite peaud dunuefe<sup>47</sup>

On 18 November at 8 o'clock in the evening a flying fish jumps into our ship. This fish is the size of a mullet, and it has two wings on its head, and it jumps out of the water when chased by a fish, and it flies at least as far as a quail that we have in Europe. Its wings resemble those of a bat. The wing is not articulated, and is made of a thin membrane, like that of an egg.

We will return to this description, which is made up of a series of comparisons, in the analytical part of this article. For the moment, we only draw attention here to the comparison between the flight of the flying fish and that of a quail ('caille'): this could indicate that François lived in the countryside. One notes that this description is more precise than the preceding descriptions. This is a development that continues in the rest of the travelogue. The following description with drawing [Fig. 18.6] concerns a triggerfish, which is caught by the captain on 24 November:

le matin notre capitainne prit un poisson nomme vielles<sup>48</sup> de la longueur dun pide [inserted] / ce poisson a la peaud extraimmement dure et qui nat aucune escailles il la le fon de la peaud grize avec daistras desus croizoze qui luij fon faire une maniere descaille ressemblable a une pomme de pin et dans le fons de cette forme des caille il luy ad [= il y a] ad des petite piceure grosse comme des pointe despaingle qui luij rend la peaud rude comme du chagrin et de plus jay remarque a se poisson quil lat sur

47 NA Delprat 106a, 16.

48 'vieille' is the name for different types of fish. Judging by the illustration, this is a triggerfish (*Balistidae*), probably *Canthidermis sufflamen* (Ocean Triggerfish). Wikipedia gives the following concise description: 'As a protection against predators, triggerfish can erect the first two dorsal spines: The first (anterior) spine is locked in place by erection of the short second spine, and can be unlocked only by depressing the second, "trigger" spine, hence the family name "triggerfish".'



FIGURE 18.5 François de Meyer, Flying fish. Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 17



FIGURE 18.6 François de Meyer, Triggerfish. Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 19



le dos une manière de dard qui ad le dard [repeated word] fait comme la moitie de la patte dun chancre qui est piquee de petigrins et se dar ressemble aune baterie<sup>49</sup> de fuzi et je desfiee alomme defaire baisser **B** sans faire baisser **A** car cest une maniere de resord comme le chiens dun fusir et de le moment que vous touce **A B** se ebuche sur **A** et je nait jamais peux connaitre le resor de son dard dou proveemoit que lon ne pouvoit pas faire baisser **B** sans faire baisser **A** et sepandand touchan **A B** baisse fasillemt tou lelon de son dos<sup>50</sup>

In the morning our captain caught a fish called “vielles” that was about a foot long. This fish has an extremely hard skin without scales. It has grey skin with serrated stripes, which give it a kind of scales like those of a pinecone, and between those scales it has small spines, which make its skin like a donkey’s skin. In addition, I noticed about this fish that it has a kind of spine on its back, which resembles a half of a crab claw. This spine is covered with small grains, and it resembles the trigger of a rifle. I challenge anyone to lower **B** without lowering **A**, because it is a mechanism that works like the cock of a gun: as soon as you touch **A**, **B** is activated. I have not been able to find the spring mechanism of the spine that prevents one from lowering **B** without lowering **A**, and that when one touches **A**, **B** goes down easily all the way down the spine.

Compared to the description of the flying fish, François here goes even further into detail for the description. Moreover, François not only describes the fish, but he also tells how he investigates how the ‘trigger’ of the fish works. The triggerfish is small in size, inedible, and can even be poisonous. That is why it is probable that the captain took this fish out of the water especially for François.

On 26 November, a large group of dolphins appears again: ‘et sur les 10 heur du matin il viens une cantite demarsouins qui fire pluzieurs tour de notre navire pendand une demie heur de tem’ (and by 10 o’clock in the morning a quantity of ‘porpoises’ [dolphins] that swam around our ship for half an hour).

On 30 November, a ‘becunne’ or ‘le ceune’ (the spelling is uncertain) is caught. It appears from the description and the drawing that it is a barracuda [Fig. 18.7], whose usual abbreviated name “cuda” seems related to the name given by François:

a 6 heure du soir nous primme entre lille st alouisi et lille de st vainsent un poisson a la ligne nomme le cunne de la longueur de 3 pid de lon don

49 Upright pin of a 17th-century rifle struck by the battle cock.  
50 NA Delprat 106a, 18.

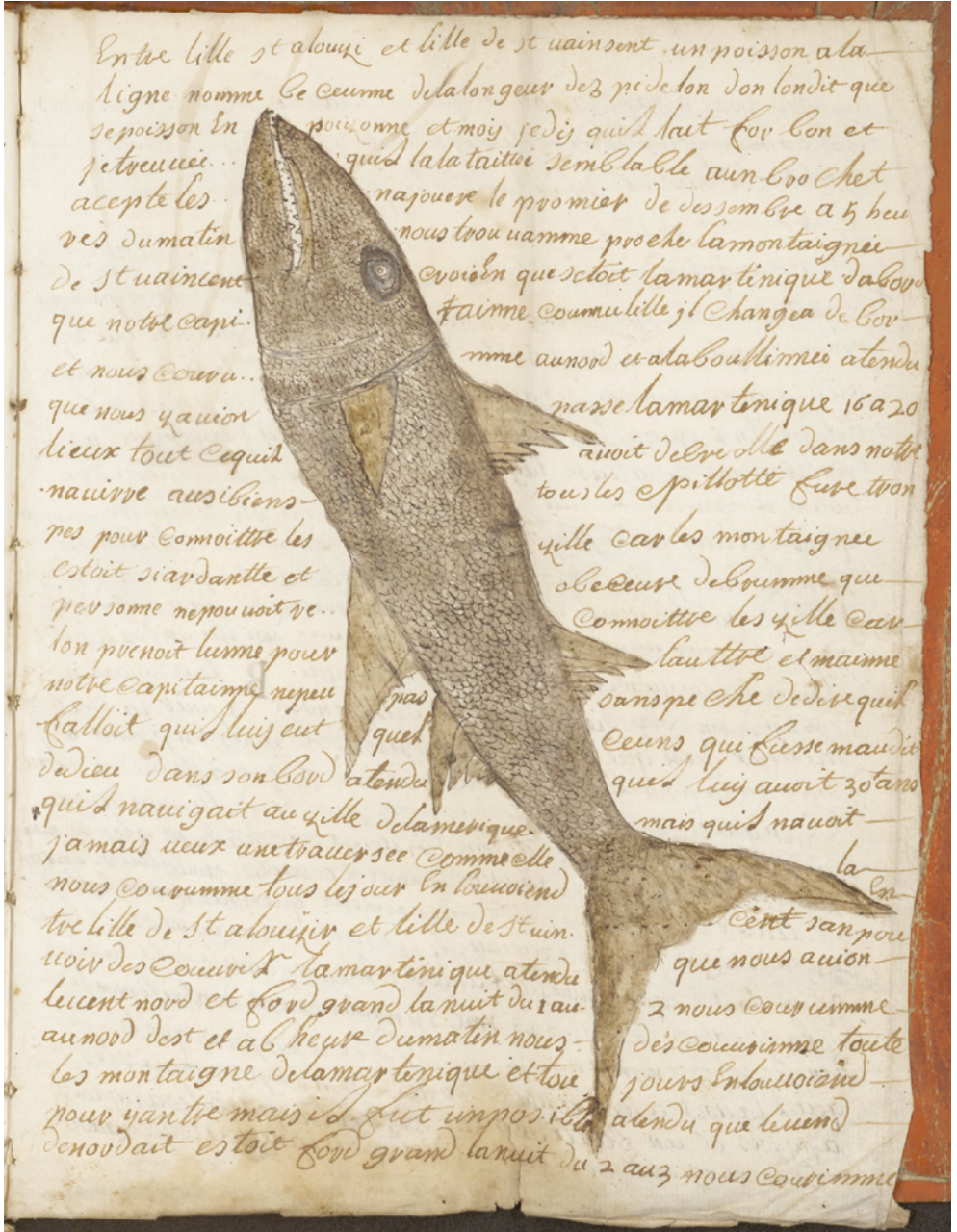


FIGURE 18.7 François de Meyer, Barracuda. Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 21

lon dit que ce poisson enpoizonne et moij je dis quil lait for bon et je trou-  
vee quil la la taillee semblable a un brochet accepte les najouere<sup>51</sup>

at 6 o'clock in the evening, between Ile de Saint-Louis and Ile de Saint-  
Vincent, we caught with a fishing line a fish called 'cunne' [barracuda],  
three feet in length, which is said to be poisonous. But I tell you that  
this fish tastes really good, and I think it's shaped like a pike, except for  
the fins.

François's critical, inquisitive attitude, already apparent in the description of  
the triggerfish, is also apparent here: despite the fact that the fish is said to be  
poisonous, François eats the fish, and considers it 'for bon'. His keen eye for  
detail is also evident when he points out both its difference from and its simi-  
larity to the pike.

François's development in natural history description and portrayal culmi-  
nates in the last fish caught and described, a 175-kilogram shark:

En louvoient nous primme sur les 2 heure aprois mijdij nous primme<sup>52</sup>  
un poisson ue lon nomme requin pezent 350 tt / don se poisson est len-  
nemij de lome attendu quan lomme se baigne dans la mair se poisson le  
coupe en 2 quanstil lattrape et deplus jay remarque ase poisson que la  
nature luij a fait ne extraordinaire danjandre sais petis en comparaizon  
des autre poisson / quand celluij la enjandre ses petis comme une chienne  
enjandre sais petits chiens aulieu que les autres poisson enjandre par les  
zeufe et jene parlle pas zisij par ouij dire / je parlle pour avoir veut et pour  
preuvee voilla<sup>53</sup> un des 5 petits comme il les zavoir dans le corp marque  
B<sup>54</sup> tout prais a sortir de son corp / dieu nous benit deleprendre se jour la  
caraulieux dun que nous croijons prendre nous enprime 6 tous za lafois<sup>55</sup>

Twirling around, we caught a fish called shark at 2 in the afternoon,  
weighing 350 pounds. This fish is an enemy of man, because when a man  
goes swimming in the sea, this fish bites him in half, if it catches him.  
Moreover, what I noticed about this fish is that nature makes it produce  
its young in a special way compared to other fish. This fish produces her

51 NA Delprat 106a, 21–22.

52 Repeated words.

53 So, the drawing is of a young newborn shark. The drawing serves as proof of the veracity  
of the viviparous shark story.

54 It is not clear what the letter B refers to, at least not to the accompanying drawing.

55 NA Delprat 106a, 22.



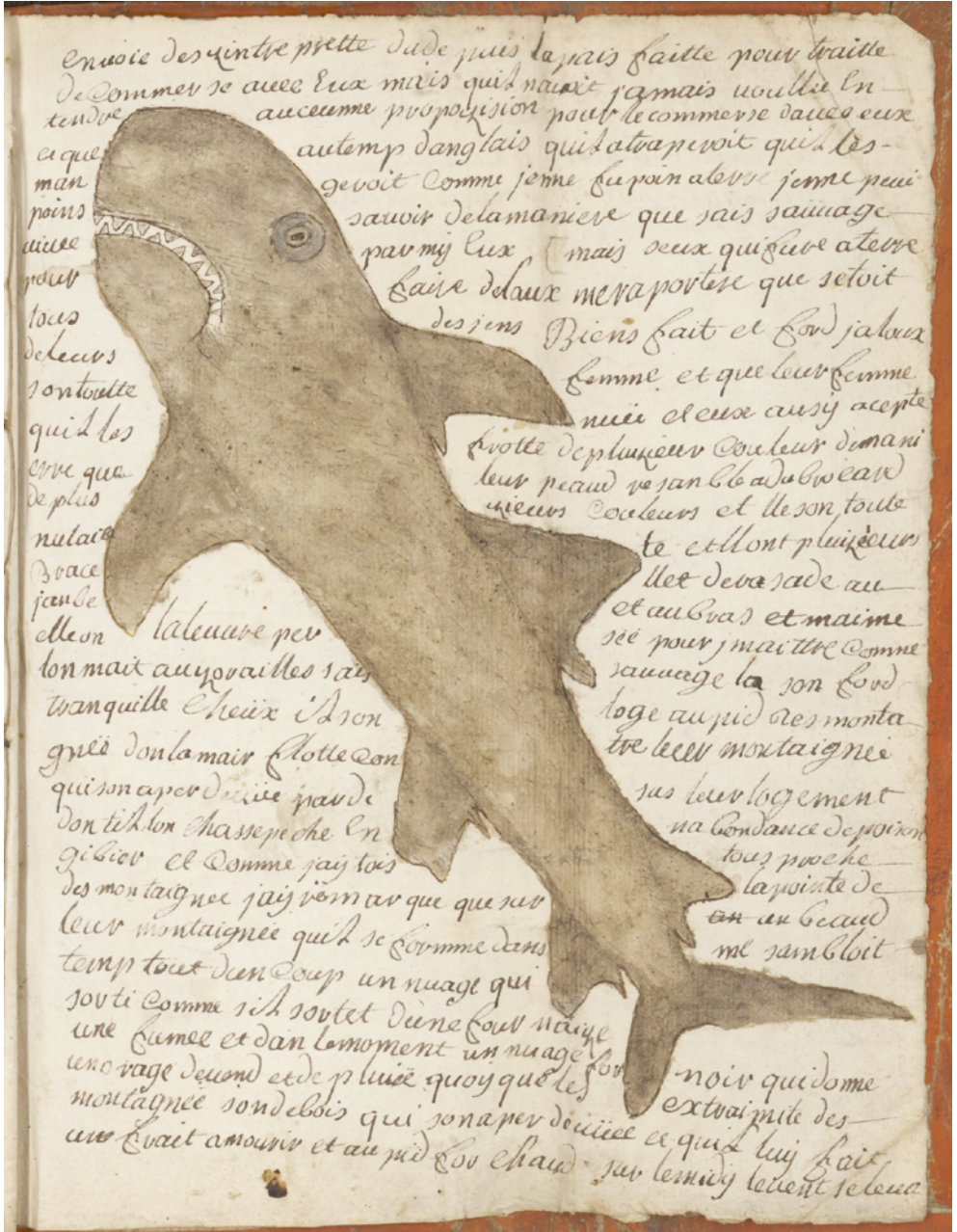


FIGURE 18.8 François de Meyer, Shark. Ink-washed drawing. In *Journal de voyage de François de Meyer*, 1698. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Collection 349, Familie Delprat, 2.21.183.16, Inv. no 106a, p. 23



young as a bitch produces her cubs, while other fish reproduce by means of eggs. And I'm not talking from hearsay about this. I speak of it because I have seen it. Here's a drawing of one of the five young sharks, just as the shark had it in her body (marked with a B), ready to leave the body. God had mercy on us to catch the shark just that day, because we thought we were only going to catch a single shark, but we caught six at a time.

It is remarkable that the danger of the animal is only briefly, almost obligatorily, mentioned. Much more interesting for François is the discovery that the fish is viviparous. The drawing [Fig. 18.8] therefore does not depict the shark itself, but one of the five young that were about to leave the mother's body. The drawing, which depicts the unborn shark as large as possible – i.e. half of its size – obliquely across the page, is intended to authenticate what has been described. Also striking is a certain sense of humour that speaks from the closing sentence of this description: it's a good thing we caught this shark just before the birth of the young, so instead of one shark we had six at a time.

As the discussion of these passages indicates, François certainly had a more than passing interest in the birds, fish, and sea mammals that he encountered while aboard *l'Aigle*. His interest in examining marine life only seems to have intensified as the journey progressed. References to observations of fascinating marine species become more frequent, and they are documented in more detail. We now turn to a closer analysis of his strategies of depicting and describing marine life, placing them in a broader context of early modern natural historical study of the time.

#### 4 Depicting and Describing Marine Life

So far, we have treated François's travelogue as a stand-alone document, without attempting to plot him on the map of early modern people who busied themselves with the study of nature. While the travelogue is a unique document, certain aspects of it conform to more widely shared natural historical practices, as we will show here.

For example, historians have made clear that the study of living nature was by no means the prerogative of university-educated individuals. People with a more practical background, such as fishmongers and fishermen, took to study and even produce manuscripts.<sup>56</sup> We might group François among

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Egmond F., "On Northern Shores: Sixteenth-Century Observations of Fish and Seabirds (North Sea and North Atlantic)", in MacGregor A. (ed.) *Naturalists in*

what Anthony Grafton calls 'practical men', who were better versed in practical techniques than in book learning.<sup>57</sup> That such practical men were valued for their uninhibited look can be seen in Michel de Montaigne's chapter "Des cannibales" in his *Essais* (1580, first edition). In this chapter, Montaigne dwells upon the usefulness of the eyewitnesses of practical men, fulgurating against 'those clever' cosmographers, who always have the tendency to embellish their reports. Montaigne eloquently exemplifies his argumentation by focussing on one particular person from his household, who stayed for a long time in French Brazil:

I have long had a man with me who stayed some ten or twelve years in that other world which was discovered in our century when Villegaignon made his landfall and named it La France Antartique. [...] That man of mine was a simple, rough fellow – qualities which make for a good witness: those clever chaps notice more things more carefully but are always adding glosses; they cannot help by changing their story a little in order to make their views triumph and be more persuasive; they never show you anything purely as it is: they bend it and disguise it to fit in with their own views. [...] <sup>58</sup>

This matter-of-fact perspective of the reliable eyewitness, without frills or exaggeration, is visible everywhere in François's travelogue.

Furthermore, that ships were privileged sites for the study of natural phenomena was evident in the early modern period. Accounts of observations of marine life from aboard a ship en route to faraway islands are not uncommon.<sup>59</sup> For European naturalists journeying overseas, documenting their experiences of nature began upon departure from the harbour, not upon arrival on the dock. Of course, sailors and seamen also made plenty of observations over the course of their employment; we find their accounts, for example, among

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*the Field: Collecting, Recording and Preserving the Natural World from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Leiden: 2018) 129–148; Trijp, D. van, "Fresh Fish: Observation Up Close in Late Seventeenth-Century England", *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 75 (2021) 311–332.

57 Grafton A., *New Worlds, Ancient Texts. The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: 2014), 69.

58 Montaigne Michel de, *The Complete Essays*, transl. M.A. Screech (London: 1991) 231.

59 For example, Davids, *Global Ocean of Knowledge* 66–68; Williams G., *Naturalists at Sea: Scientific Travellers from Dampier to Darwin* (New Haven: 2013) 76.

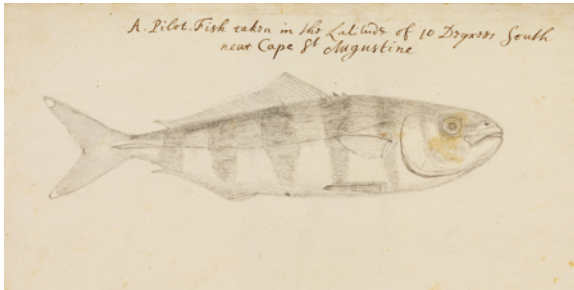


FIGURE 18.9  
Edmond Halley, Pilot fish  
(*Naucrates ductor*). Pencil  
on paper. 1699–1700. Royal  
Society Archives MS/131/49.  
<https://pictures.royal-society.org/image-rs-9364>

the works of the Fellows of the Royal Society in London, who drew on their information and interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

We will now look at textual and visual documentation of nature in overseas journeys. In 1698, the same year our travelogue is dated, Edmond Halley (1656–1742) was commissioned to command the voyages of HMS Paramore to the South Atlantic. These voyages, which lasted from September 1699 to September 1700, had as their main aim to take readings of the variations of the magnetic needle in the Atlantic Ocean to improve navigation.<sup>61</sup> Halley also set aside time during this voyage to produce several sketches of the fishes that he came across. Upon return to London, he brought these to a meeting of the Royal Society.<sup>62</sup> Among them were pencil sketches of species that François also depicted: tuna, pilot fish, triggerfish, and flying fish. The inscriptions that Halley added to the sketches indicate that the fish were caught while he was on the ship. The pilot fish, for example, was ‘[...] taken in the Latitude of 10 Degrees South near Cape St Augustine’, whereas the flying fish was ‘[...] taken in the sight of Palm’<sup>63</sup> [Fig. 18.9].

A little over a decade before François left for Guadeloupe, the physician and collector Hans Sloane (1660–1753) undertook a similar trajectory. He describes his journey on no fewer than 47 pages in the first part of his *Voyage to Jamaica* (London, 1707–1725). From his departure in September 1687 onwards, Sloane reports every few days, often mentioning the directions of the wind and other weather circumstances in the few first lines. Most of his attention, however, is

- 60 Deacon M., *Scientists and the Sea 1650–1900: A Study of Marine Science* (Ashgate: 1997, second edition). 75; Hellawell P., “‘The Best and Most Practical Philosophers’: Seamen and the Authority of Experience in Early Modern Science”, *History of Science* 58 (2019) 28–50.
- 61 Cook A.H., *Edmond Halley: Charting the Heavens and the Seas* (Oxford: 1998) 256–291.
- 62 Royal Society Archives, Atlantic tuna: MS/131/48, and unidentified fish, MS/131/1, Flying fish, MS/131/53, Pilot fish, MS/131/49, Doctor fish [a type of triggerfish], MS/131/2.
- 63 ‘Palm’ likely refers to La Palma, part of the Canary Islands. Royal Society Archives, MS/131/53.

taken up by observations of the natural world. He describes the many animals they pass along the way. Among them are 'many of a kind of *Larus*, or Gull', a lark taking a rest on the ship's rigging, and a giant jellyfish seamen call 'Caravel or Portuguese Man of War' because their impressive size reminds them of a warship, as well as vast amounts of *albacore*.<sup>64</sup>

Just like François, Sloane seems interested in fishing techniques and the taste of different species. Among the tools he mentions is the harping-iron with which seamen catch porpoises for food.<sup>65</sup> One time, a shark was brought aboard. Upon cutting it open, the crew saw several young in its belly, a situation similar to that described by François.<sup>66</sup> When one reads Sloane's and François's reports alongside each other, despite some obvious similarities (the general structure of the travelogue, the trajectory, the species observed) the difference is clear. For Sloane, every phenomenon which he observes sparks off a wealth of comparisons to travel reports, books, and other publications. His description of the common dolphin fish, for example, contains no fewer than 28 references to other authors.<sup>67</sup> That is not the case for François, who nowhere refers to any specific written source.

Yet François is not quite a *tabula rasa*. This is apparent in the first place from his drawings: although these are roughly drawn and are based on autopsy, it requires practice to select and depict precisely those characteristics of a fish that make the fish recognizable as a species. This applies to the shape and proportions of the fish's body as well as the shape and position of its fins. To be able to do this, François could have benefited from the many illustrated books on fish and other aquatic animals that had been widely available in Europe since the 1550s: especially works by Belon, Rondelet, Gessner, Aldrovandi, Jonston, and Willughby and Ray. Not that François had these works in front of him when writing his travelogue, but he could have leafed through these kinds of illustrated fish books.

That he did have illustrated works before his mind's eye is apparent from the way in which some fish are depicted with the harpoon used. For example, in the work of Guillaume Rondelet, a whale is depicted in a similar way with a harpoon [Fig. 18.10].<sup>68</sup> Also, the way the triggerfish mechanism is depicted, with A and B references from the text to the illustration, attests to knowledge of an illustrated technical book – although not necessarily a book on fish.

64 Sloane, *A Voyage* 4, 7, 11.

65 Ibid. 5. More mentions on 11, 20, 22, 26.

66 Ibid. 23.

67 Ibid. 21.

68 Rondelet Guillaume, *L'histoire entière des poissons* (Lyon, Macé Bonhomme: 1558) 351.

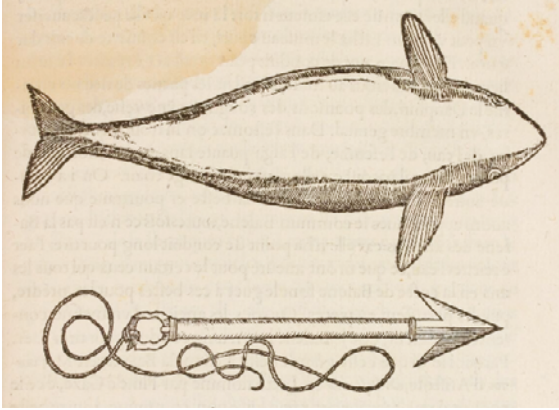


FIGURE 18.10  
Whale. Rondelet Guillaume,  
*L'histoire entière des poissons*  
(Lyon, Macé Bonhomme:  
1558) 351. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1512044f/f367.item>

This way of referring was common in medical literature from the 16th century on. Famous is the comparative anatomical image of Pierre Belon, who, using letter references, indicated the similarities between the skeleton of a human and that of a bird.<sup>69</sup> In the later 18th century, this form of illustration would become commonplace; one can think of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.

The description of the shark is perhaps the most convincing evidence that François gives of a certain bookish knowledge: he appears to be aware of the fact that the natural historical works on fish of the time do not mention that certain shark species are viviparous. This explains why François emphasizes both textually and visually that he has seen this – according to him – unknown fact with his own eyes.

Other descriptions also suggest that François is not completely ignorant of existing literature. For instance, the resemblances between François's travelogue and Jean de Léry's account of his voyage to Brazil (1578)<sup>70</sup> are manifold: Both authors describe dolphins, flying fish, mahi-mahis, white tunas, whales, sharks, frigatebirds in a very similar way.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, like almost all early modern naturalists, François begins each description with the name of the animal described, which is usually given via a fixed formula ('que l'on nomme' ...), and sometimes provided with an etymological explanation (wagtail, tropicbird, frigate bird), which testifies to a certain linguistic awareness. The naming of

69 Belon Pierre, *L'histoire de la nature des oyseaux* (Paris, Guillaume Cavellat: 1555) 40–41.

70 Léry Jean de, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil* (La Rochelle, Antoine Chuppin: 1578; numerous editions and translations).

71 Smith P.J., "Léry et les poissons: une lecture rapprochée des stratégies descriptives", *Le Verger* 25 (2022) 1–18 (<http://cornucopia6.com/blog/2023/01/06/bouquet-xxv-lhistoire-dun-voyage-fait-en-la-terre-du-bresil-de-jean-de-lery/>) (last consultation 14 January 2023).

the animals comes from different sources: native dialect (wagtail, dogfish); nautical vocabulary (tropicbird, frigatebird, and various tropical fish species); of the latter category, some are semantically transparent (pilotfish), others (for instance 'becunne' or 'ceune') are not.

What François says about the anatomy of the animal sometimes seems to be a distant echo of what can be read in fish books. For example, the resemblance between the organs of a dolphin and those of a pig is a commonplace, which can be found in the work of Belon, Rondelet, Gessner and Léry.<sup>72</sup> The description of the flying fish is also reminiscent of that of Rondelet, Belon and Léry.<sup>73</sup> François describes the same characteristics as Rondelet, Belon or Léry, with a similar way of comparing. For example, François compares the length of the flying fish with that of a 'meuiller' (a mullet); Rondelet does this with a 'muget' (the words are similar in sound). Belon mentions that the fish fly because they are afraid: 'Quand il ha peur' en la mer, il sort hors' (When he is afraid in the sea, he leaves it); Léry observes: 'ces pauvres poissons volans [...] ne sont jamais en repos: car [...] les Albacores et autres grands poissons les poursuivans pour les manger [...], ils se veulent sauver au vol'<sup>74</sup> (these poor flying fish are never at rest: for as the white tunas and the other large fish pursue them to eat them, they want to escape in flight), and François writes: 'il sord de leaud quend il les poursui de quelque poisson'<sup>75</sup> (He leaves the water when he is chased by some fish). François gives information about the length of the flight (as far as a quail flies): with Belon this is, 'Il vollee quelquesfois iusques a un traict d'arbaleste' (he flies sometimes as far as the arrow of a crossbow); Léry has: 'quelques fois près de cent pas loin' ([they] sometimes [fly] nearly a hundred paces). François's comparison between the wings of a flying fish and those of a bat is furthermore similar to Rondelet's and Léry's.

François makes frequent use of this descriptive strategy, namely the analogy or comparison of the described animal with known animals. The use of analogy, in relating the unknown to the known, can have two different rhetorical effects. The effect can be either confidence-inspiring (there is no difference between the 'chien de mer' and the 'toul' in La Rochelle) or alienating (the 'soufleur' is larger than a European ox). The latter seems to fit into the strategy of the hyperbole: 'huge amount ...', 'the largest ... the crew had ever seen', etc.),

72 For Belon, see Belon Pierre, *La nature et diversité des poissons* (Paris, Charles Estienne: 1555) 4, 11.

73 Belon, *La Nature et diversité des poissons* 191; Rondelet Guillaume, *La Première [seconde] partie de l'Histoire entière des poissons* (Lyon, Macé Bonhomme: 1558) 137.

74 I cite Léry Jean de, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil 1578* (2<sup>e</sup> édition, 1580), ed. F. Lestringant (Paris: 1994) 128.

75 NA Delprat 106a.

which is very common in travelogues. But one has the impression that François is never exaggerating. The analogy can apply to the whole animal as well as to the parts (or aspects) of an animal: the flying fish is, as it were, divided into parts, and each part is compared with a corresponding part of another animal. It is noteworthy that within the analogy between the known and the unknown, the geographical context of the known is often made explicit: La Rochelle, France, Europe.

## 5 Conclusion

As has been stressed in the introduction, little remains known about François de Meyer and his reasons for embarking on this specific journey to Guadeloupe. In this article, we have examined his manuscript in order to shed light on François's unusually lively interest in maritime fauna. Based on an analysis of François's spelling and use of language, he can be characterized as a person with at least a basic education. On the basis of his handwriting and especially his aberrant spelling, we can say that he is not a trained writer. The phonetic spelling and choice of words as well as its references to France suggest that François, despite his (probably) Dutch family name, was French. Judging from his good relationship with the captain, as well as the fact that he has the time, space, and interest to draw up a logbook, he is apparently high in rank.

This article has shown that François is an attentive observer of all that occurs on as well as around the ship. His descriptions are extensive, especially those of maritime fauna, which at one point takes up all his attention. In his travelogue, François shows a developing interest in natural historical study. His accounts of marine fauna differ from those of learned naturalists in that they are not laden with bibliographical references. At the same time, his reports seamlessly adhere to the emphasis on *autopsia* widely shared among naturalists, stressing that he has seen the species which he describes with his very own eyes. The coloured drawings convey and underline these observations. Sources like these offer a wealth of insight into how early modern individuals without a formal training experienced and interpreted the natural world.

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