

DIE BEGIN VAN DIE MUSEUMWESE

(In Verkorte weergawe van die eerste van 'n reeks vroeëoggendradiopraatjies deur Hannes Oberholzer wat gedurende Desember 1974 uitgesai is.)

DIE woord museum is aangele van die Grieks "Museion" dit wil sê 'n plek van die muse, oorspronklik die woonplek van die godinne van die skone kunste en wetenskappe en later 'n plek om in te ontspan, te peins en inspirasie te put. Hierheen is as offer aan die muse voorwerp gebring vir oorpeinsing en inspirasie. Beide Plato en Pythagoras gebruik dan ook in hul geskrewe die naam museum vir 'n lokaal wat half tempel en half akademie is.

Die latere beroemde Hellenistiese Museum van Alexandrië wat omstreeks die jaar 280 voor Christus tot stand gekom het, was in werklikheid 'n navorsingsentrum waar versamelings natuurlike en mensgemaakte voorwerpe die wetenskaplike soektog na die waarheid omtrent die godsdiens, geneeskunde, filosofie, dierkunde, aardrykskunde ens. gestimuleer het.

Enige versameling voorwerpe is natuurlik nog nie 'n museum nie. Deur die loop van die jare was daar dan ook verskillende redes en oorwinge vir die opbou van versamelings. In die eerste plek was die motivering vir versameling 'n ekonomiese. Reeds in die tyd van die Griekse het versamelings van kunsskatte, juweliersware en goud en silwer 'n veilige belegging verteenwoordig — 'n beskerming van geld teen mot en roes, met ander woorde, sekuriteit. So word vertel dat Cicero agtien villas vol kunsskatte gehad het — voorwaar 'n vet bankrekening!

Die versameling van Philip die vyfde van Spanje, opgebou deur 'n leerskare van buiters wat dwarsdeur Europa spesifiek vir hom kunsskatte bymekaar gemaak het, veral ook met die oog op stygende waardes, het die van al sy tydgenote oortref.

Ander versamelings is weer opgebou vir sosiale prestige. Hieronder ressorteer die van koning Ptolemy Philadelphus wat sy skatte in skouspelagtige optogte deur duisende slawe deur die strate van Alexandrië laat dra het, asook Napoleon se kunsversameling La Musée Napoleon wat hy in die Louvre byeengebring het.

In die middeleeuse Europa het die alchemiste en sterrewigelaars 'n nuwe soort versameling opgebou wat bestaan het uit fossiele, doodsbeendere, gesteentes, gelukbringers en behoedmiddels, wat almal glo oor die een of ander magiese krag beskik. Op dieselfde wyse het die kerk ook versamelings opgebou waarin selfs kledingstukke en doodsbeendere van gestorwe heiliges opgeneem is. Hierdie voorwerpe is onder meer gebruik om siekes te behandel en duiwels uit te dryf.



Dit was in die Middeleeuse "laboratoriums" van alchemiste soos die een wat hierby afgebeeld is waarin van die vroegste versamelings van natuurhistoriese voorwerpe opgebou is.



(C.M.E.)

No, this is neither a wasp nor a "hotnotsgot", but a mantispid which is a parasite of certain spiders. The adult mantispid is about 4 cm long. Note the beautiful wings and the mantis-like front legs by means of which it grasps its prey.

Terloops, 'n vroeë negentiende eeuse katalogus van sodanige versamelings toon dat daar toenertyd, versprei onder die kerke van Europa, nie minder nie as agtien kakebene van Johannes die Doper bestaan het! Wat nog meer verrassend is, is dat daar betreklik onlangs nog in die Keulense Katedraal 'n kinderskedel uitgestal was met die inskripsie: "Skedel van Johannes die Doper op die ouderdom van twaalf."

A PARASITE AND A SPIDER

DURING October 1974, Jakkie Pretorius, photographer of the Museum visited Levubu in the Northern Transvaal and on his return brought along a few specimens of the lizard-eating spider *Palystes natalius*.

One particularly large and beautiful female which was kept in a cage for observation and purposes of photography soon built a large whitish egg sac, and all concerned were thrilled by the prospect of being able to raise a few hundred babies of these interesting spiders.

Early one morning in December, however, a most peculiar and rarely seen insect hatched from this egg sac. Brown in colour and about four centimetres in length it looks like a cross between a wasp and a mantis. It is no such thing, however, but is a close relative of the common ant lion which is well known because of the conical pits constructed in sandy soil by its larvae. Ant lions and their kin belong to the insect order Neuroptera or nerve-winged insects ("netvlerkinsekte"). The peculiar mantis-like parasite is a member of this order. The Mantispidae are known as mantispids or "vals-hotnotsgotte". The large raptorial front legs is a characteristic of the mantispids.

Only a single mantispa larva enters each egg cocoon and preys upon the young spiders, piercing them with the pointed mouthparts in order to drink its body fluids. The larva changes shape with each moult and eventually pupates in the egg sac. Very little is known about the habits of the adult.

What makes the hatching of our mantispid all the more interesting is the fact that neither this particular species of spider nor the parasite is known to occur in the Free State. Since the spiders brought to Bloemfontein was each kept in a separate cage with no soil or debris from the area in which they were collected, the first instar larva of the parasite, a tiny slender and active insect, must have hitched a ride on the female spider in order to have been present when she laid her eggs in Bloemfontein!



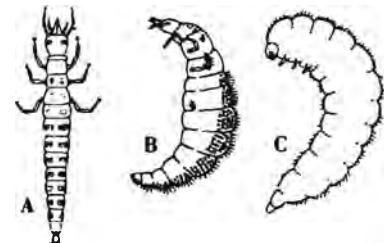
(R.A. HOLLIDAY, courtesy NATAL MUSEUM)

The lizard-eating spider *Palystes natalius* with one of its victims, a harmless gecko. This spider has an intensely active solvent in its saliva which rapidly reduces the flesh of its prey to an easily assimilated liquid mass. A mere pea-sized ball of dessicated bone and flesh is all that remains of the little lizard. The body of this spider is about 4 cm long.



(C.M.E.)

The female spider on her egg sac.



The immature stages of a mantispid. A. The active first instar larva. B. and C. The bloated maggot-like stages through which the larva goes prior to pupation.