

Sample Translation

Tjibbe Tjabbes' voyage around the world

With original drawings

and paintings by Fiel Venius

(Tjibbe Tjabbes' wereldreis. Met

oorspronkelijke tekeningen en schilderwerk

van Fiel Venius)

by Harm de Jonge

(Houten: Van Goor, 2008)

Translated by Laura Watkinson

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Preface

A secret in volcanic glass

On the night of 12th October 1991, a storm hit the east coast of Borneo, ravaging the fishing village of Sukabaru on the island of Taratawi. That night, the hurricane tore through the village like a raging bull. Gusts of wind snapped trees and blew houses and sheds into the air. A tidal wave threw the fishermen's boats onto the land and washed away everything that was not tied to the ground. The storm did not die down until the following morning, when the villagers were finally able to assess the damage. Hardly any of them had a roof left over their heads. Their vegetable gardens had been uprooted and were full of dead fish. Manisse Kalimas had lost her pig and all of her chickens. Tokkomoto could not find his bike anywhere. Even old Burumaji's rocking chair was lying in the paddy field like so much firewood.

A few days later, the fishermen discovered that the sea had also exposed the wreck of a ship. It had emerged from the sand, not far from the coast, at a depth of less than seven metres: a wooden ship from days gone by. Strangely, the ship was surrounded by columns, metres high, leaning inwards, with the occasional one snapped off. It looked as though the wreck was on display in an old temple with no roof.

Putu Panchir, the best diver in the village, went to investigate. He claimed that the columns were bones, bleached ribs, covered with algae and shells. But the fishermen just laughed: what kind of creature has a ribcage larger than an entire ship? How was the ship supposed to have ended up amongst the creature's ribs anyway? The fishermen brought some of the intact timbers up to the surface. They broke off the columns, or the bones, and used them to rebuild their huts. They had no idea that they had discovered something quite extraordinary.

A month later, they found a cannon not far from the ship and they also brought the ship's nameplate to the surface: *De Griffioen*, the Griffin. By then, the discovery of the ship was making the news even beyond the village. Old shipping records revealed that the ship was a frigate from the Dutch town of Enkhuizen. *De Griffioen* was built at the Behouden Vaart (Safe Voyage) shipping yard in that town and departed in 1774 under the command of Captain Horzelkaak, but it never returned.



Hotze Horzelkaak
portrait drawing by Annemie van Leiden,
charcoal on sanded wood

Exactly what had happened at the end of the journey remained a

mystery at first. But in spring 2007, a construction firm started to build a beach hotel just outside the village.



Prof. Tjibbe Tjabbes
portrait drawing by Annemie van Leiden
charcoal and sienna on laid paper

As they were digging the foundations, they discovered a curious box. It was not made of wood or metal, but of black stone. It looked like marble, but experts later identified it as obsidian, or volcanic glass. The lid had a bird carved upon it, inlaid in green precious stones. When they shook the box, a rattling sound came from inside, but no one could open the seamless seal of the lid. In fact, it was not until a child was playing with the box and fiddled

with the bird's eye that the lid finally popped open.

Earth". Both of the books were astoundingly well preserved. Not



Inside the box, they found drawings, a few letters and the portrait of a young woman. And right at the bottom of the box were two extraordinary books that belonged to someone who called himself Tjibbe Tjabbes, a Dutch name that is pronounced almost, but not exactly, like Chibber Chabbers. One of the books had the word *Journael* written upon it in elegant letters. It was a journal, a diary that gave an account of a voyage around the world. The second book was an unfinished manuscript: *Het Handtboeck Uijtsonderlijke Beesten van het Aertrijck*, or “The Handbook of the Uncommon Creatures of the

Deodaat Panhuijs-Breskens (left)
Gotfried Panhuijs-Breskens (right)
portrait drawings by Annemie van Leiden silver stylus and thin ink on hemp paper even the colour drawings had faded. This was probably because of the airtight seal of the curious obsidian box.

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It was an important discovery. The *Journael* reveals that Tjibbe Tjabbes voyaged around the world on *De Griffioen* for over two years, until the ship foundered off the coast of Borneo. Wherever he went on his voyage, he studied animals and described them in *Het Handtboeck Uijtsonderlijke Beesten van het*

Aertrijck, which details eighty creatures, some familiar, but, more often, strange and previously undiscovered beasts. Who was this Tjibbe Tjabbes and why was he so interested in these “uncommon creatures”?

Once the name Tjabbes was in the news, more information about him soon became known. Tjibbe Tjabbes turned out to be a Dutch scientist, who had been a professor at the University of Leiden. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, he had sailed on *De Griffioen* on a special mission and then disappeared without a trace.



Annemie van Leiden
self-portrait in oils on prepared hammered paper

The discovery of the *Journael* and archive research have taught us more about Tjibbe Tjabbes and his mission. However, not all of the



Fiel Venius
portrait drawing by Annemie van Leiden
silver stylus on vellum, with Chinese tea wash

mysteries surrounding his disappearance have been solved. But we do have sufficient details to gain a clear impression of the situation in 1774. It involved an extraordinary plan in which four people played important parts:

- Prof. Tjibbe Tjabbes himself, a professor at the University of Leiden;
- Deodaat and Gotfried Panhuijs-Breskens, merchants from Amsterdam;

- Hotze Horzelkaak, captain of the frigate *De Griffioen*.

In the following chapters, we will explain how these people most likely met and exactly what their plan entailed. The rediscovered *Journael* tells us how the plan was carried out. Here we present excerpts from this journal for the first time. Tjabbes' notes on ten creatures from *Het Handtboeck Uijtsonderlijcke Beesten van het Aertrijck* are also included. These are naturally accompanied by the original drawings by artist Fiel Venius, who travelled with Tjabbes on his journey. We also know what these people looked like, following the discovery of something quite extraordinary in the attics of a former monastery in Leuven. Portraits drawn by Annemie van Leiden, Tjibbe Tjabbes' fiancée, were discovered inside a prayer book. We have her self-portrait too, because that was in the professor's obsidian box.

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1 Professor Tjibbe Tjabbes

The professor receives a letter

Even as a young child, Tjibbe Tjabbes was already something of a scientist. He did not play with building blocks, he had no joy from a top or a hoop, but he was



always working on what his father called his “little research projects”. For instance, he would investigate to find out how far grasshoppers can jump. He would study the style of swimming that frogs employed and research the kind of material that swallows use to build their nests. The shed at home was always full of jars of minnows and containers of earthworms, ants and woodlice. As a boy, he used to construct birds that were actually capable of flying a short distance. He used the elastic from his mother’s garters to make the wings flap up and down. Later, he kept a pair of chickens, and used them for his first serious scientific experiments. He would, for example, attempt to change the colour of their eggs by varying their diet. He even managed to make one of his chickens lay eggs with red yolks.

Wooden swallow with flying mechanism made by Tjibbe Tjabbes
from the collection of the Den Oude-Tjabbes heirs

Tjibbe studied in Leiden and became a Doctor of Medicine when he was only twenty years old. He wrote a book about the origin of new creatures. Tjibbe was convinced that creatures adapt to the place where they live, and he believed that was how new varieties developed. Mice in snowy regions, for example, would

ultimately become white, while mice in meadows would turn green. He described his experiments with mice in great detail. In his laboratory, he also attempted to accelerate the changes in animals. Through selection and crossbreeding, he succeeded in producing a new creature, which became known in scientific circles as Tjabbes' frog-mouse. It was a tailless mouse with webbed paws and a rudimentary sticky tongue for catching flies.

Tjibbe Tjabbes soon became a professor at the University of Leiden. He was



The frog-mouse
watercolour from the collection of the Den Oude-Tjabbes heirs

and at work, he built up an extensive natural-history collection. He concentrated on peculiar creatures: a sheep with two heads, a dog with the tail of a fish where its back legs should be, a human child with an eye in the middle of its forehead.

People in Leiden thought it a marvel that someone so young should know so much. His colleagues at the university sang his praises. The ordinary people talked about him when they met beneath the trees and in the taverns: about his red hair, about his strange collections, but mainly about his knowledge:

“Well, he’s our pefesser, isn’t he? Did you know he speaks seven languages?”

“And he can breed animals what don’t exist, Jules.”

“Blimey, what’s that you’re telling me? Are you one of his breeding experiments?”

“The pefesser knows a whole lotta stuff, though, doesn’t he?”

“He’s got the brain of two men, he has.”

“Four men, if it’s your brain we’re talking about, Jules.”

known there as a friendly young man who was able to present a simple explanation for all manner of difficult subjects. He was engaged to a girl called Annemie van

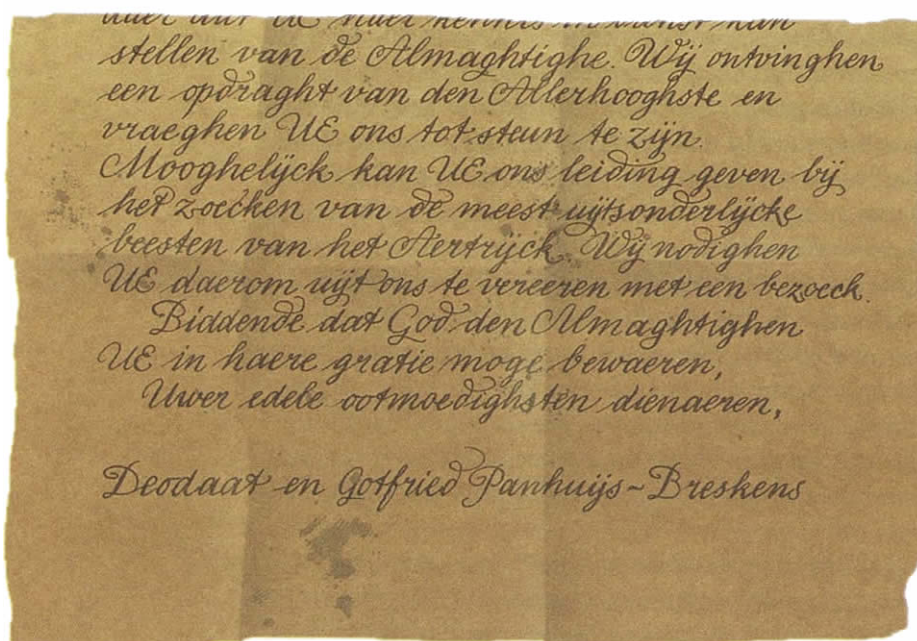
Leiden, but he still lived with his parents. At home

“Heh, nice one, Marcel. But he really has got a head full of facts, hasn't he?”

“That man's got two brains in one head.”

Tjibbe Tjabbes paid no attention to any such chatter that reached his ears. He kept working on crossbreeds, ones that had been deliberately created, and ones that occurred naturally. He believed the walrus to be a cross between a whale and a horse, for example. He was particularly interested in seafarers' tales about a fearsome sea monster. Sailors called the beast the blue waterbull. It was supposed to be an absolutely immense creature. It spouted water eighty metres into the air and snapped ships as though they were crusts of bread. Some people thought it was a cross between a sperm whale and an octopus. But Tjibbe believed that the monster was descended from an extinct giant creature and he hoped one day to prove it.

Tjibbe Tjabbes might perhaps have remained a learned, but slightly eccentric professor all his life. Maybe he would have managed to breed a chicken that sang like a nightingale. Or a rabbit that could lay eggs with gold spots. It would not have been a life of tempest and adventure. However, the Panhuijs-Breskens brothers crossed his path and Tjibbe's life changed completely. The twin brothers drew him into a strange adventure that was to have terrible consequences.



Section of a letter to Professor Tjabbes
Calligraphy museum, Waaldrecht

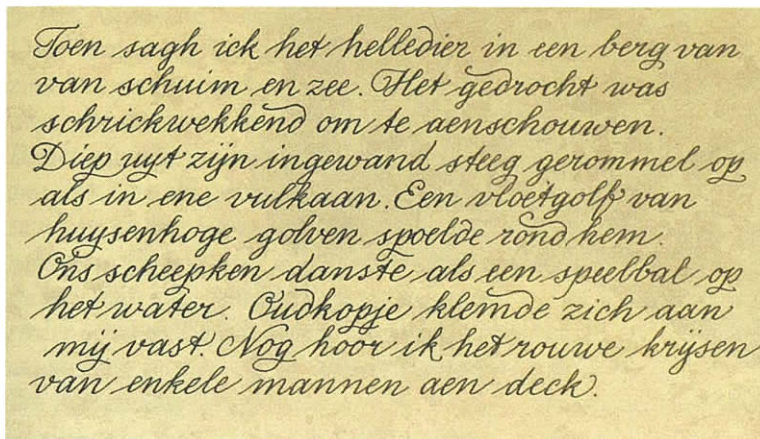
It all began on the evening of 8th September, 1774. Tjibbe had been studying late in his laboratory. He had just closed his book to reflect upon what he had read. The jars of creatures preserved in alcohol gleamed dully in the light of the oil lamp. The mice in the experiment cage were rustling around in their wood shavings. Otherwise it was silent in the laboratory. Tjibbe looked at the portrait of the girl on his desk. He had had a silver frame made for it. It was a girl with long blonde hair and she was very beautiful. Tjibbe forgot all of the knowledge in his book for a moment and smiled at the portrait of his fiancée. And at that moment his assistant Adriaan Kopernek knocked at the door. He brought in a note that had just been delivered with some urgency. Tjibbe turned his oil lamp higher and sliced open the letter. It was from the Panhuijs-Breskens brothers in Amsterdam and the contents were most peculiar. The brothers wanted Tjibbe to travel with all haste to Amsterdam to meet with them. They explained that they had been approached about an unusual task and were not entirely sure how to proceed. They thought that the professor might be able to help them, so they wrote the following to him:

*Most highly learned Professor Tjabbes,
Men in all places speak praise of your research into nature. But the time
has come when you may use your knowledge in the service of the
Almighty. We have received a command from the Most High and would
bid you be of assistance to us in this endeavour. You may be able to give
us direction in the search for the most uncommon creatures of the Earth.
We would therefore invite you to pay us the honour of a visit.
Praying that God the Almighty may keep you in His Grace,
Your humble servants,
Deodaat and Gotfried Panhuijs-Breskens*

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The voyage of De Griffioen in the years 1774–1777

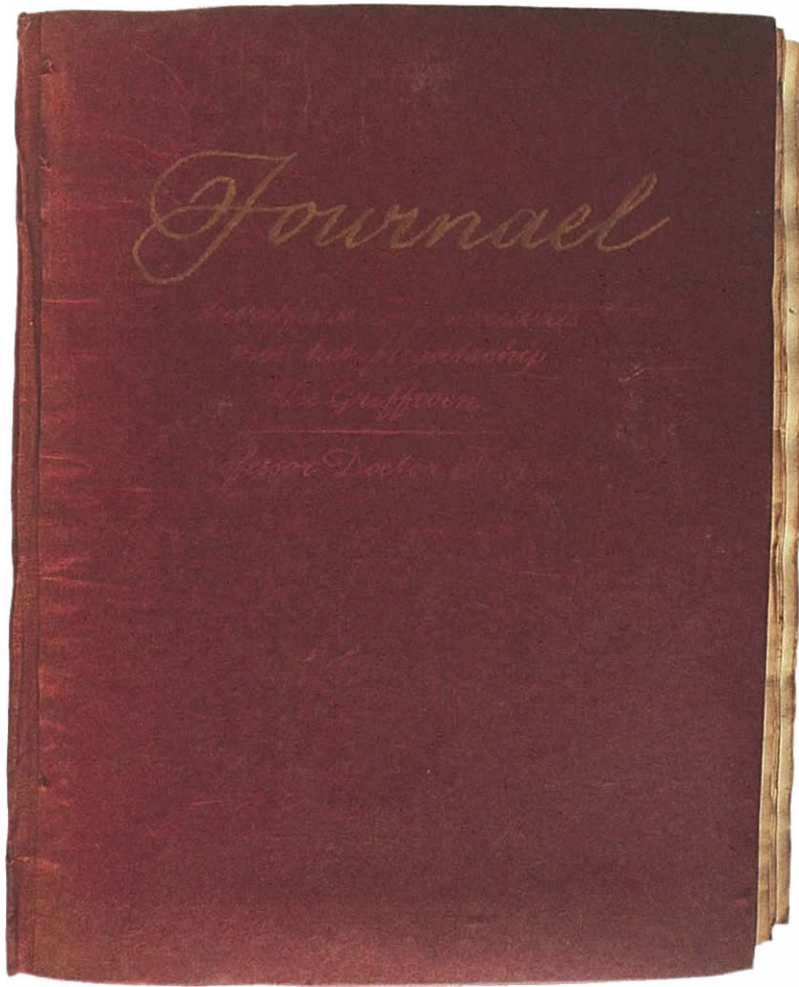
Tjibbe Tjabbes' *Journal* is first and foremost an account of his journey around the world in search of animals for the Panhuijs-Breskens brothers' ark. But it also tells us about *Het Handtboek Uijtsonderlijke Beesten van het Aertrijck*. And sometimes the *Journal* becomes a real diary too, when Tjabbes writes about his admiration for Captain Horzelkaak or his homesickness for Leiden and his fiancée Annemie. Early in the journal, Tjabbes also begins to address his beloved directly. The *Journal* then takes the form of a long letter to Annemie, which was never sent.



Excerpt from Tjibbe Tjabbes' *Journal*

Beesten van het Aertrijck. Ten of the creatures discussed in the book are included here. Tjibbe wanted to include one hundred animals in *Het Handtboek*. He made it to eighty.

Here follow ten important sections of the *Journal*, each accompanied by the description of one of the animals from *Het Handtboek Uijtsonderlijke*



Tjibbe Tjabbes' Journael

From the *Journael* of Tjibbe Tjabbes:

Flutes for the Arowak indians

En route to Mexico, 17th November 1774

Today I am making a start on my *Journael*. Finally I have set to work and have taken on board the first animal for the Panhuijs-Breskens brothers' ark. We left on 27th September 1774 and this week reached the Caribbean region. *De Griffioen* is a fast ship and makes good progress even with little wind.



Ship's paint box as used by Venius

a long time and it was a number of weeks before I acquired the rolling gait of the seaman.

I did not often show my face amongst the seamen on deck, but spent my time reading and organising the laboratory. At that point, there was no subject for study. Once I cast a net overboard and hauled in some jellyfish, starfish and a weever fish. The creatures of the sea need have no fear of the new Flood, but still I studied them eagerly. My assistant Fiel Venius was also practising his illustration skills and he painted the mournful face of the weever fish. Venius is a competent artist and also something of a joker. I believe that he deliberately made the head of the fish resemble my own.

It took me a few weeks to become accustomed to the captain. Horzelkaak is a man who seldom smiles. He looks terrifying, partly because of his stern expression, but also because the ear on one side of his head is missing. He is a man of fixed habits. We eat our meal together every evening and then we discuss issues of importance. The rest of the day we scarcely exchange a word.

“You and the skipper are very different,” said Fiel Venius recently. “And yet the two gentlemen resemble each other.”

I thought that a rather amusing idea and asked Venius to summarise the similarities. He thought that Horzelkaak was scared of no one and that I could

It was a successful journey, but, for my part, not a pleasant one. I frequently wondered whether undertaking such a long journey had been a wise decision. My homesickness for Leiden, for my dearest Annemie, made my spirits low. In

addition, I was seasick for



Materials of the kind used by Venius

Last week, on 13th November 1774, Cuba came into sight. Horzelkaak wanted to avoid the Spanish government as far as possible, so we anchored on the north side of the island.

Some of the remaining indigenous people were waiting there for us: the Arowaks. Magnificent people with tattoos on their bodies and a band of feathers around their heads. The Indians remained sitting around fires on the beach all evening. Horzelkaak did not have a boat rowed out to the beach until the

also stand my ground. He also credited Horzelkaak for his strong fists and myself for my strong intellect. “Horzelkaak is a man who always wants to be right,” said Venius and then he went on to flatter me: “But Professor Tjabbes *is* always right.”

I myself believe the main similarity to be that we both enjoy peace and quiet in the evening and reading books. I read studies written by my fellow academics and the skipper reads about maritime affairs and naval battles.

But now let me proceed to describe the panoplied glugg of Cuba, the first animal on the ark.



An idol of the Arowak people

following morning. To be on the safe side, he sent along some armed men. However, the natives were not of ill intent and they received us in the friendliest of fashions.

That day, our men brought food and fresh water on board for us. Venius and I spent time amongst the Indians. I was most excited. The work could finally begin: the panoplied glugg was said to live there amongst the reeds. I had never seen the beast, but had read a lot about it in the works of Spanish biologists. It certainly seemed the type of creature that belonged in the new world of Panhuijs-Breskens.

Venius found a young Indian who spoke some Spanish and brought him to me. I asked him about the animal and Venius did a quick sketch. The Indian rattled



Part of an Arowak dowry

guttural sounds to his pals. A number of them ran off and half an hour later they returned. They had captured a pair of magnificent panoplied gluggs in the marshes. The creatures had shut themselves inside their armour and would not come out.

I was very pleased indeed with the animals and gave the Indians a number of wooden flutes

to express my gratitude. And then something extraordinary happened. The Arowaks also appeared with a gift: a box of black obsidian. The young Indian said that it was destined to hold the shadow of a strange god. The lid has a bird engraved upon it, green in colour with a red eye containing the secret lock. When I press the eye, the lid pops open. It surprised me that they would give me such a precious gift, but Venius understood the situation:

“It’s your hair, Professor. They think your hair is quite extraordinary.”

“They do not know this colour,” I said, “and yet we call them redskins.”

“They believe you are a son of the gods,” said Venius, unable to suppress a smile. “Your shadow has to go into the box, Professor.” I accepted the gift with thanks: it would serve to store my *Journal* and other documents. And it would also be nice to keep Annemie’s jewellery in one day.

We kept the panoplied gluggs in a large pen in the hold of *De Griffioen*, where I would study the creature in the days to come. We cruised off the coast of Cuba for a few more days and Venius and I went on two short excursions into the interior. In a mangrove swamp, we found Cuban rice-suckers and a litter of proboscis cats, and we took a couple of each on board. Then *De Griffioen* set course for Mexico.

We are now on the open sea and I have all the time I need to study the animals. I have just released the panoplied gluggs for a short stretch. They are scratching around on the floor and no longer retreat into their shells when I walk by. I can spend a long time watching those animals: they are magnificent creatures. Never has almighty God created a more beautifully coloured beast than this. Venius has drawn them and captured all of their splendour in beautiful colours.

This morning I was able to conclude the first chapter of *Het Handtboeck Uijtsonderlijcke Beesten van bet Aertrijck*. I have decided to record what I have studied myself, but also the peculiarities reported by other scholars. Fiel Venius will do a drawing of each of the animals, which I will include in the handbook between sheets of tissue paper. This is the method by which I shall describe all of the most uncommon species for the Panhuijs-Breskens brothers.

From *Het Handtboeck Uijtsonderlijcke Beesten van het Aertrijck*:

The glorious colours of the panoplied glugg

Number: 01

Lat.: thoraxis splendoris

Ark advice: a good-tempered beast that need not be caged

The panoplied glugg is the size of a goose, which it somewhat resembles, and yet it is not a bird. It is without wings and has a much shorter neck than a goose.

Like a bird, it grows inside an egg, but it never leaves said egg. The egg grows with the creature and hardens to form an armoured shell.

The creature is, in fact, a walking egg. Soon after it is laid, openings form in the shell for the head, tail and two legs. Beneath the feet and by the head and tail of the panoplied glugg are lids that perfectly seal off the gaps in its armour. Whenever there is danger, the glugg retreats entirely into its shell. Then it can even bounce down mountainsides at full tilt. The shell can withstand great heat: the glugg has proven able to survive forest fires without difficulty.

It is a friendly creature that lives on grain, berries and the occasional snail. Originally the glugg came from the Nile region of Egypt and Sudan, but it is able to close up the openings in its shell and make them watertight, and in this way has floated along rivers and across oceans to reach other places. In addition to Cuba, the animal has been found in America, Mexico and China.

The armoured egg is the most extraordinary thing about the panoplied glugg. It takes the shape of a large ball with coloured ridges on the surface. You can tell the age of the glugg by counting these ridges. The oldest example known to science had seventy-three ridges.

The armoured shell is astoundingly strong. Crocodiles shatter their teeth if they try to bite it. Undamaged panoplied gluggs have been found under tree-



The panoplied glugg (study)
silver stylus on rice paper

trunks and boulders. The eggs are sought after for their beautiful colours and pearly sheen, and they are used for a variety of purposes. Consequently, the animal has become very rare in certain places. In Africa it is completely extinct.

Facts from scientific texts:

From flowerpots to armour

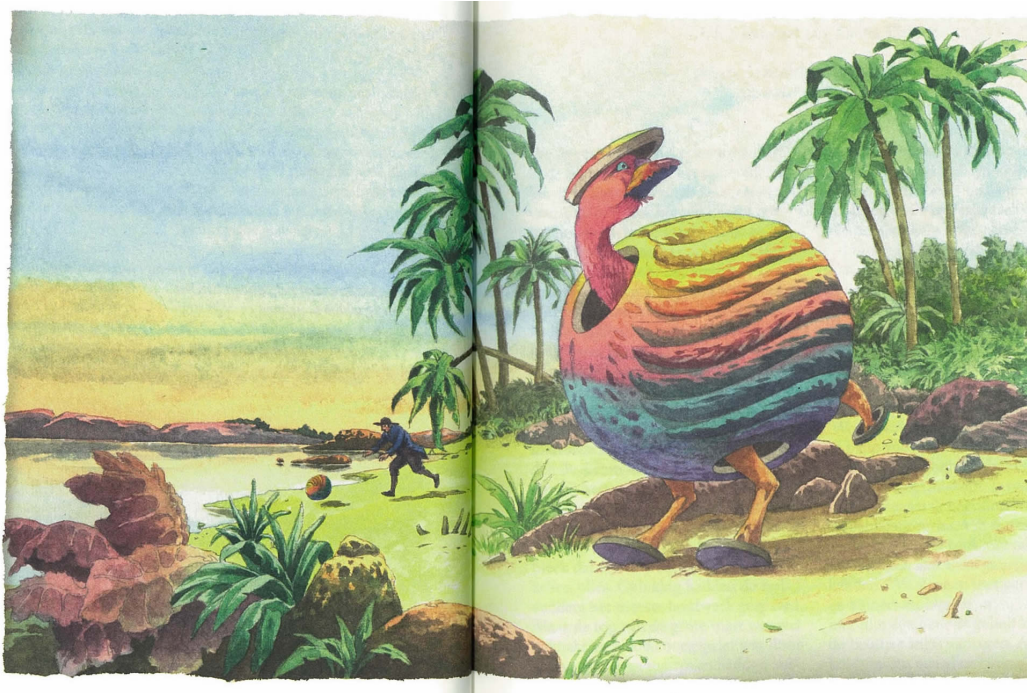
No animal has provided more useful objects for human beings than the panoplied glugg. In olden days, people used to saw fruit bowls, vases and crockery from the shell. It was customary for a long time at the Russian court to use halves of shells as lampshades. But the strength of the shell meant that the eggs were used primarily in wars. In ancient history, people used the animal's shell to make shields, helmets and even war chariots.

Queen Cleopatra's eggs

The Egyptian queen Cleopatra collected the eggs of the panoplied glugg. She introduced a tax whereby every village was obliged to pay three gluggs a year. Cleopatra's collection was lost in an earthquake in Alexandria in 36 BC: divers in the Mediterranean still occasionally bring undamaged eggs to the surface.

Skulls in the Chang Suk valley

The discoveries in Chang Suk (South China) have been extraordinary. In a tributary of the Li Sang river, archaeologists found human skulls upon which surgeons had carried out brain surgery in around the year 1000. All of the skulls had been sealed using protective lids from the shell of the panoplied glugg.



A panoplied glugg
watercolour on laid paper