the body politic through an examination of the physiological theories of Giambattista Vico. The final chapter shifts the focus onto monstrous language, examining debates on the proper use of literary figures.

Throughout this book Hanafi adopts a methodological principle of "seeing the connections" rather than "making explanations" (p. x) that diffuses the scholarly value of her insights and interesting examples by presenting the material simply as metaphors to meditate on the postmodern condition. Many of the sources brought together in individual chapters (and, indeed, the chapters themselves) seem incompletely related to each other, particularly in the absence of generalizing explanations and a discussion of what is meant by such key terms as "secular," "sacred," and "the machine." Tenuously linked sources are thus placed in unilluminating (because unexplored) relationships, such as the odd conjunction of Marsilio Ficino's description of talisman making with Della Porta's of animal crossbreeding, and peculiar omissions occur, for instance, the absence of any consideration of the golem tradition. In short, this book might itself be said to possess the jumbled limbs and motley order of its monstrous subject matter, which unfortunately mitigates against its interest for the specialist and its usefulness for the general reader.

SOPHIE PAGE

Georgius Everhardus Rumphius. *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*. Edited, translated, and annotated by **E. M. Beekman**. cxii + 567 pp., frontis., illus., figs., bibl., index. New Haven, Conn./London: Yale University Press, 1999. $45.

The Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) was one of the most aggressive and successful trading enterprises in the seventeenth-century world. In the Indian Ocean it elbowed the Portuguese out of major ports, dominated the lucrative spice trade, and ruthlessly punished the natives if they refused to cooperate. Like the English East India Company, which would soon become a fierce rival, the VOC was a formidable commercial, military, and imperial complex in the expanding maritime world. In recent years historians of science have begun to examine how this growing maritime trade in the early modern period contributed to the development of natural history. Specimens and observations brought back from the tropics and other exotic lands had an enormous impact on the European understanding of the natural world. Scientific voyages and explorations were relatively few before the middle of the eighteenth century. It was the network of maritime trade that supplied most of the scientific data about the rest of the world. More than anyone else, employees of the Dutch and English maritime enterprises collected the specimens and observations that fed the scientific communities in their home countries. Many of these largely forgotten individuals were accomplished naturalists whose experience and knowledge earned them respect among the scientific elite in Europe.

The activities of Georgius Rumphius nicely illustrate the conjunction of science and maritime trade. After a peripatetic military career, Rumphius joined the VOC and in 1652 sailed to the Dutch East Indies, where he would spend the rest of his life. He didn't go to the East with the purpose of investigating natural history, but the strange creatures in this exotic land caught his attention, and he began studying natural history, collecting specimens, and writing about them. It was a labor of love. Not even blindness could stop his research; in fact, he produced most of his voluminous writings on the natural history of Ambon, or Amboina, a small island northeast of Java, after he lost his eyesight. But it would be an oversimplification to see Rumphius as a lonesome genius marooned in a remote island struggling to produce brilliant work that only posterity would come to appreciate. In the Dutch East Indies during this period, several employees of the VOC were dedicated naturalists, including the noted Hendrik van Reede, and they exchanged ideas and information with him. Rumphius also maintained an active correspondence with the scientific establishment in Europe and was elected to a prestigious scientific academy.

Rumphius's major work was an illustrated herbal that described about 1,200 plants found in Ambon and the nearby areas. *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet,* however, focuses not on plants but on crustaceans, shells, minerals, and other items that are grouped into three categories: "Soft Shellfish," "Hard Shellfish," and "Minerals, Stones, and Other Rare Things." Each of the volume's 170 chapters examines one or more natural objects, often with accompanying illustrations. The descriptions are usually vivid and convey a sense of wonder at exotic natural objects. The text also contains rich ethnographic records of the maritime world of Southeast Asia. Rumphius drew heavily on the indigenous lore of the natural world and frequently cited information collected from Chinese traders and immigrants. Combing through the text, one comes across many telling examples of how a seventeenth-century naturalist pursued research in the social and cultural environ-

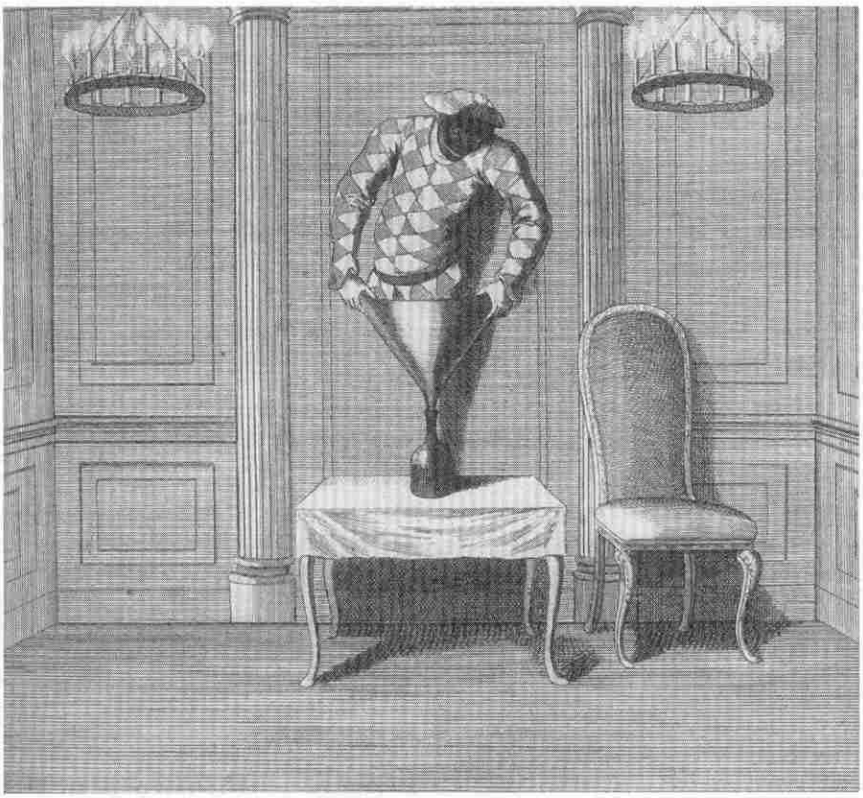
ment of a colonial entrepot. The translator, a distinguished scholar of Dutch colonial literature, has added a long introduction detailing Rumphius's life and work. The text itself is amply annotated.

FA-TI FAN

Barbara M. Benedict. *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*. x + 321 pp., frontis., illus., index. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. $45.

In recent years historians of science have come to an increasing appreciation of the role played by such moral and affective categories as "trust," "wonder," "pedantry," and "self-discipline" in the knowledge-making enterprises of the early modern period. Barbara Benedict's book on curiosity is a most welcome contribution to the literature devoted to such topics. In a lively and entertaining work, Benedict sets out to "analyse literary representations of the way curious people, including scientists, authors, performers, and readers, were engaged in practicing and producing curiosity itself" (p. 1). The author modestly states at the outset that the work is not, and does not claim to be, a history of science, and indeed as a whole the essay perhaps falls short of the more ambitious promise of the subtitle—"a cultural history of early modern inquiry." Yet it deals with a subject that is nonetheless of profound importance for historians of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science.

Of particular significance is the way in which the book demonstrates how curiosity and its representations served to demarcate the boundaries of legitimate topics of knowledge and modes of enquiry. The discourse about curiosity thus served to inform central epistemological questions of the period: Is it appropriate to seek all knowledge on all topics, and is it to be sought by all people? If there are areas of knowledge that are illicit, what are they and why are they proscribed? What are the proper methods for the various spheres of knowledge? Benedict carefully articulates the role played by the discourse



"The Bottle Conjuror" (from Benedict, Curiosity, *p. 165).*