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Author: Lack, H. Walter

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H. WALTER LACK¹

Book review: Klemun M. & Hühnel H., Nikolaus Joseph Jacquin (1727–1817) – ein Naturforscher (er)findet sich

Klemun M. & Hühnel H., Nikolaus Joseph Jacquin (1727–1817) – ein Naturforscher (er)findet sich. – Göttingen: V&R unipress GmbH, Vienna University Press, 2017. – ISBN 978-3-8471-0710-1. – 15.8 × 23.7 × 4 cm, 650 pp., 60 illustrations, Deutsch, hardback. – Price: EUR 32.99. – Available at <https://www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com/>

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This is the first comprehensive account of the life and works of Nikolaus Joseph Jacquin (1727–1817), the second professor of botany and chemistry at Vienna University and second director of its botanic garden. For good reason and for more than a century Jacquin is known as the Austrian Linnaeus, a most appropriate epithet considering his numerous and significant contributions to plant taxonomy. Clearly the book is a milestone and merits a detailed review, which I took special pleasure in writing for a very personal reason: Anton Rollett (1778–1842), a distant relative of mine, hosted the biographee, his son Joseph Franz and the latter's son-in-law Karl Ritter von Schreibers in October 1810 in Baden, a small town south of Vienna, and all three signed the family's guest book.

Clearly the biography of a scientist can be written either by a historian of science or, alternatively, by a scientist competent in history. Approaches will differ and so will results, with the scientist possibly stressing the contributions of his colleague to the fields in which he had specialized, while the historian of science will possibly focus more on the role played by the biographee in academic life, society and culture in general. The authors of this book are clearly historians of science: Marianne Klemun is professor extraordinary for history at Vienna University, Helga Hühnel is deputy director of the De-

partment of Maps at the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Unsurprisingly their terminology is not the terminology with which a scientist is normally accustomed: the very first sentence of the solid volume comprising 650 pages and a total of 1723 footnotes has no less than four such terms: “Wissensräume” [knowledge spaces], “Dokumentationen” [documentaries], “Selbstentwürfen” [one's own designs] and “Narrationen” [narrations]. For unknown reasons the authors also avoid the term “illustrieren” [to illustrate] and instead persistently and consistently make use of the verb “visualisieren” [to visualize]. What a scientist would call a specimen, is here denominated a “Representation” [representation] to name a few examples. While all this may be regarded as idiosyncrasies of the authors, the rejection of conventional, i.e. linear, chronology as a structural principle of their book is more difficult to understand. A good example is the fact that Jacquin's expedition to tropical America (1754–1759), regarded by the authors as the key event of his life, is dealt with in Chapter 2, while his youth in Leiden and the subsequent formative years in Louvain, Paris and Vienna, i.e. the years 1729–1754, are described in Chapter 3. This approach may be sometimes intellectually stimulating, but it results in too many redundancies to be readily acceptable.

¹ Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, Königin-Luise-Str. 6–8, 14195 Berlin, Germany; e-mail: h.w.lack@bgbm.org

By contrast, five very positive aspects of this volume stand out: firstly Jacquin is understood and treated not only as a botanist but also as a chemist, a mineralogist, a professor, as an author (and publisher), as an advisor to the administration of mines in Hungary, as well as a pharmacist and garden director (p. 476), which indeed is a very appropriate approach. Secondly the text is “quellengesättigt” [source saturated] (p. 15) with the consequence that the reader is informed in unprecedented detail about many aspects of Jacquin’s long life and that of his family. Thirdly Klemun & Hühnel’s book is definitely not a hagiography; Jacquin is not seen as the great hero of science, but as a man who upon his arrival in Vienna enjoyed the support of a key figure at the imperial court and made use of it, married money, got ennobled, arranged for his son to become his successor on both chairs—in short was able under the reign of four emperors to maintain his dominant position in botany. Fourthly, the book includes an extremely valuable appendix (pp. 477–587) containing (1) transcripts of biographical material on Jacquin, (2) translations of 37 letters written in Latin and sent by Jacquin to his friend Jacobus Gronovius in Leiden (all kept in the Department of Manuscripts of the Austrian National Library), (3) translations of a miscellany of other letters written in Latin and (4) translations of several prefaces to Jacquin’s works, all of them also published in Latin. Fifthly the sixty illustrations, partly in colour, have been very carefully selected and provided with comprehensive legends, among them maps of the imperial gardens of Schönbrunn (p. 213) and of the botanic garden of Vienna University (pp. 278, 280), a photograph of the house where Jacquin lived in Schemnitz [now Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia] (p. 230), his coat of arms (p. 345) and a letter to his son kept in the Tiroler Landesmuseum in Innsbruck with an illustration of a terrestrial orchid (p. 433).

The number of mistakes is very small: a “k.[aiserlich] und k.[önigliche] Akademie der Wissenschaften” [imperial and royal academy of sciences] never existed in Vienna (p. 24), but only the Imperial Academy of Sciences; *Ravenala madagascariensis* is not a palm and has no fronds (pp. 216, 217); in 1806 Emperor Francis II hardly deposed the “römische Krone” [Roman crown] but the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, i.e. the Ottonian crown (p. 363); the title page of the copy of the second edition of Jacquin’s *Selectarum stirpium americanarum historia* shown on p. 429 was not painted by Franz Bauer (1758–1840) for the imperial family, but for Jacquin’s personal copy of this book; the title page of a second copy

of this work shown on p. 430 was not painted by Bauer; neither Jacquin’s *Hortus Botanicus Vindobonensis* nor his *Florae Austriae icones* nor his *Plantarum rariorum horti caesarei Schoenbrunnensis descriptiones* are garden catalogues, because they treat only those species its author thought new or interesting (p. 479). The number of typographical errors is extremely small; the present reviewer was able to spot, e.g., “Széchényi Konyvtár” instead of Széchényi Könyvtár (p. 604), the name of one of the many libraries where manuscript material was consulted by the authors.

To a great extent the usability of a work of this kind depends on the index. Listing only the names of persons as was done in this case is disappointing; at least the numerous topographical terms (after all Jacquin travelled extensively), the many names of taxa mentioned in the text and the titles of the various publications should have been included. However, my critique is largely outbalanced by the many positive aspects of this book, in particular the wealth of detail on Jacquin’s widespread activities. For example, the reader will be amused to learn that, during field work in the West Indies, Jacquin, then aged 27, carried formal dress (including silk stockings) and had his wig reshaped every month. One would have liked to learn more about his role as “Rektor” [vice chancellor] of Vienna University elected because of his fluency in French when the city was occupied by Napoleon’s troops; the experiments done by Jacquin’s brother-in-law Jan Ingenhousz in Schönbrunn could have been explained in more detail because they led to the discovery of a fundamental biological process—photosynthesis; for the plant taxonomist, desiderata include information on the mode of publication of Jacquin’s *Icones plantarum rariorum* (e.g. precise publication dates of the individual fascicles) and on the fate of Jacquin’s herbarium (sold to Sir Joseph Banks in London and subsequently split up). On the other hand, Jacquin’s association with Mozart—he gave piano lessons to Jacquin’s daughter Franziska and was a friend of Jacquin’s younger son Gottfried—is presented in full, taking into consideration the most recent pertinent literature.

In short, this book is obligatory reading for all specialists of the history of eighteenth century science, not just of botany, but also of chemistry and mineralogy. In addition, Klemun and Hühnel’s work contributes significantly to the history of the city where Jacquin spent the greater part of his life and where he is best known today, with impressive monuments on two very prominent sites—Vienna.

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