Book review

Author: Lack, H. Walter

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Florike Egmond: Eye for detail. Images of plants and animals in art and science 1500–1630. – London: Reaktion Books, 2017. – ISBN 978-1-78023-640-7. – 20 × 25.6 cm, 280 pp., 128 colour illustrations, hardback. – Price: GBP 35. – Available at http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk/

It may come as a surprise to see this book reviewed in *Willdenowia*. After all, it deals more with the history of zoological illustration than with the history of botanical and mycological illustration, only very rarely are scientific names used and according to the blurb the author is a "cultural historian specializing in natural history". However, Florike Egmond is extremely competent in her field and offers the reader a comprehensive presentation of the pictorial documentation of animals, plants and fungi in the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For obvious reasons this review is restricted to the botanical and mycological part of her book.

Four aspects merit applause. Firstly Egmond's approach in dealing with a broad spectrum of source materials ranging from e.g. the Codex Bellunensis (British Library, London) to the Album Anselmus Boodt (privately owned), from Codex Fuchs (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna) to the Ulisse Aldrovandi Albums (Biblioteca Universitaria Bologna), from the Erbario Pietro Antonio Michiel (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice) to the Libri Picturati A16–30 (deposited in the Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Cracow) to name a few. Secondly for her clear focus: she concentrates on pictorial documentation and excludes the many printed illustrations based on it. Thirdly her capacity for a synthetic presentation taking into account both new evidence as well as the massive amount of pre-existing information published by others. Fourthly her critical approach, which becomes evident, e.g., in her statement "for many … image collections … forensic detection and provenance research are often the only means of deciding whether what we see in front of us is an old arrangement or a much later one" (p. 53).

As explicitly stated in the introduction, the book "focuses on the importance of images – specifically original drawings – and investigates the visual formats and representational conventions … in the service of nature study in early modern Europe" (p. 9). By image collection, loose drawings, oil paintings, frescoes or decorative art are not meant, but rather "sets, albums and collections, each of which contains from a few dozen to many hundreds and even more than a thousand coloured drawings" (p. 10), some of them clearly Klebebände, a term surprisingly avoided by Egmond. Regrettably, although understandably, all such collections outside Europe are not dealt with, e.g. the Codex Badianus (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City) based on a Nahuatl manuscript.

Egmond's book is structured "in terms of themes and questions, not collections … it is constructed along visual lines: it starts with a panorama [i.e. Chapter 1], zooms in [i.e. Chapter 2] and ends with a discussion of the representation of detail and the interest in the almost invisible [i.e. Chapter 3] before and during the early days of the microscope" (p. 17).

The first chapter, "Nature captured", begins for good reason with the naturalia albums of Rudolf II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and of his uncle Ferdinand, the creator of the Kunst- und Wunderkammer at Schloss Ambras, Tyrol. These effectively are paper museums supplementing the existing collections, although only partly documenting them. The complex relationship between collection and pictorial record is dealt with further in this chapter, with ample references to the court of the Medici in Florence and the aristocrats and rich merchants in the Low Countries. In this context, the Carrara herbal, the Codex Bellunensis and the Codex Roccaborella, all from the Veneto, are correctly associated with the plant-based medicinal knowledge taught at Padua University in the fifteenth century. The author also rightly states "the making by hand of multiple copies of coloured images and the exchange of such plant and animal drawings were common among both aristocratic collectors and professional naturalists all over Europe" (p. 32), thereby making clear how careful any qualified statement has to be. The second chapter, "Untrue to life", extensively deals with what Egmond calls "the high-definition naturalism" (p. 93), mentioning, e.g., Ulisse Aldrovandi's visit to Jacobo Ligozzi's studio in Florence and Gherardo Cibo's watercolours showing common plants from the Apennine Peninsula in landscapes appropriate to each species. Egmond rightly realizes that naturalistic depiction does not necessarily guarantee direct observation by the draughtsman, irrespective of notes like "ad vivum". This chapter also contains key general statements, such as "While generic images became icons of scientific illustrations, the specific images that portray an individual plant, animal or human being have increasingly become associated with the domain of art" (p. 128), to which the present reviewer is prepared to subscribe.

In addition to conventional representations of plants and fungi, Egmond also deals with collages (e.g. a composition consisting of fragments of herbarium material of *Helianthus annuus* in Platter's herbarium in the Burgerbibliothek, Bern; p. 89), nature prints of leaves (e.g. those in the Codex Kentmann, Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar; p. 91), plus a few odd herbarium specimens (e.g. those in the En Tibi Herbarium, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden; p. 119).

There are merits and demerits: all 127 illustrations, many full page and mostly never published before, have been carefully chosen; they are given with complete coordinates and have been reproduced in impeccable quality. The biographical notes (pp. 238–243) are a mine of condensed information and include data on lesser known figures such as Fray Cristovão de Lisboa (1583–1632) or Manuel Godinho de Erédia (1558/1560–1603). The list of abbreviations used in this book (pp. 244–247) is comprehensive. The bulk of the historical information is up to date, e.g. dating the earliest properly pressed herbarium specimens glued on paper to the late fifteenth century. On the negative side, there is an almost complete lack of scientific names, admittedly understandable for the very small organisms depicted, but not for many vascular plants, and the morphological terminology is poor. What is called in the text "the inner structure of the trunk" (p. 84) and in the legend accompanying Fig. 38 "seed vessels" (p. 83) are in fact mostly indehiscent fruits plus two inflorescences of *Araceae*. It would also have been helpful to know why the author is convinced that some of the enlarged representations (e.g. male cones of *Juniperus communis* in Federico Principe Cesi's Plantae et Florae, Institut de France, Paris; p. 225) were produced with the help of a microscope and not with a strong lens. However, the number of genuine mistakes is small, e.g. Friedrich Wilhelm (1622–1688) is incorrectly styled the "Great Elector of Prussia" (p. 53). In fact, he was one of the seven Electors of the Holy Roman Empire and at the same time the Duke of Prussia, a territory that never belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Platter's musical instruments are nowhere illustrated in the book, although this is stated in the text (p. 64), and a similar mishap occurrs in Fig. 31, which shows a zebra and not a white-flowered plant as stated in the text (p. 71). Alexander von Humboldt definitely did not "propose an alternative form of plant classification to the Linnaean" (p. 115), but rather promoted an alternative by selecting Carl Sigismund Kunth to write the *Genera et species plantarum*.

The book ends with a long list of references (pp. 247–265), a selected bibliography (pp. 266–269), a list of illustrations (pp. 271–274) and an index (pp. 275–280). This perfectly produced volume is a mine of otherwise widely scattered information and is strongly recommended for all who are interested in the history of botanical and mycological illustration from its beginnings to the early seventeenth century.

H. Walter Lack
Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin,
Freie Universität Berlin, Königin-Luise-Str. 6–8,
14195 Berlin, Germany.

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