

Hans Dickel, Elisabeth Engl, Ursula Rautenberg (Hg.), Frühneuzeitliche Naturforschung in Briefen, Büchern und Bildern. Christoph Jacob Trew als Sammler und Gelehrter, Stuttgart (Hiersemann) 2021, 363 S., 100vAbb. (Bibliothek des Buchwesens, 29), ISBN 978-3-7772-2104-5, EUR 164,00.

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This beautifully illustrated work brings together contributions by the participants at a 2019 conference on the Nürnberg naturalist and physician Christoph Jacob Trew (1695–1769), whose collection, today amounting to some 34 000 works, 19 000 letters, and 2 500 images, is now held at the university library at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Besides a small number of biographical and bibliographical studies, mostly decades old, Trew remains little known today, despite his renown in the early modern European Republic of Letters, both for his anatomical and botanical publications and for his prolonged editorship of the journal »Commercium litterarium« and, later, the »Acta physico-medica« of the famous scientific society, known familiarly as the Leopoldina, which subsequently became the German National Academy of Sciences. The first glimmer of renewed scholarly interest in Trew and his huge network of correspondents came in 2008 with an essay by Thomas Schnalke; it is to the editors' credit that they have managed to include contributions by so many outstanding German historians of science working on the history of early modern natural history, only one of which does not really engage to any notable extent with Trew himself. This in itself attests to Trew's place at the hub of natural historical labour in the German lands and beyond: he is, as this volume clearly shows, an exemplary case of the wide range of activities in which an eighteenth-century naturalist needed to engage, in order to participate in the community of European naturalists. At the same time, Hubert Steinke's painstaking analysis of Trew's corresponding practices reveals that he was closer to a local naturalist like Esprit Calvet in Avignon in the patterning of his networks, than to better-known naturalists with a truly international reach. It is precisely in this area that we still lack a thoroughgoing understanding of everyday practice for the thousands of people around Europe who possessed a cabinet and engaged in collecting, gift exchange, and the various forms of communication through sociability, letters or reading that early modern natural history necessitated. Only more studies like these and the proper documentation, cataloguing and digitisation of extant resources around Europe will allow a more representative picture of early modern natural historical practice to be constructed.

Reading the book is almost as enjoyable as attending the conference and exhibition must have been. The publishers



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have wisely agreed to include coloured plates, not just of the extraordinary images Trew helped to produce and publish, but also of his own library. The successive chapters build up a richly coloured picture of Trew's life, collections, correspondence and institutions. Each comes equipped with a generous bibliography of primary and secondary sources, in the former case supplied with classmarks for the items as found in the Trew archive at Erlangen. Reading these, one is struck by how much the picture of German natural historical practice around 1700 has developed since the mid-1990s, thanks in part to painstaking research by scholars who are often represented in this volume. Historians for generations to come will certainly appreciate the treasure trove of information this book represents, and its function as a repository of relevant sources.

But more than this, the book seems in many respects a facsimile of Trew himself. It is always pleasing when a book about a collection succeeds, figuratively speaking, in echoing its character. Like the Trew collection, this book is painstakingly precise, polyvalent, rich, and full of information; it is at once beautiful and useful, two themes that, as several authors note, Trew explicitly sought to couple in the many images he commissioned from local and more distant artists. On the face of it, Trew was nothing other than a Nürnberg town physician, who made a living by practising medicine and teaching it at his university. However, few working in the field of history of science nowadays would even know that he was a doctor. Rather, he is universally known as a botanical and anatomical author and editor. In the visitors' books Trew kept in his collections, we learn from Anja Wolkenhauer's essay, he made use of the inscription supposedly uttered by Tycho Brahe on his deathbed: »Ne frustra vixisse videar« (Let none suppose I lived in vain). This tag, known to scholars of the time, served to invite Trew's guests to endorse the value of his life's work in the collection and library and to promise that his reputation would endure. The publication of this book, indeed, is a testament to the success of Trew's labour in ensuring that his scholarly *œuvre* would transcend the practical mundanities of his day-to-day existence, his work in hospitals or at bedsides. For, just like the man himself, this book is so much more than just a biography of Trew himself: among other things, it offers a valuable summary of the state of historical writing on early modern scholarly correspondence (Hubert Steinke); Wolkenhauer's own essay which delves deeply into the *album amicorum*; a tour of his library (Claudia Valter) and several excellent chapters on the crafting of the plates for his book (Kärin Nickelsen and others). Historians of early modern knowledge will find something of value in this collection for all studies that have a bearing on the many themes Trew's work addressed. In part, this is because Trew was so deeply embedded within this world of networking, writing, observing and growing plants that he functions as an exemplar of how it worked. In part, it is because of the editors' clever choice of authors who work principally on these wider themes, and who were invited to comment specifically upon Trew's place within their visions of early modern scholarship.



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Inevitably, with a volume containing this many contributions, a major challenge will have been the editing, and it is here that some weaknesses do appear. There is an extensive amount of informational overlap between the individual essays. Basic bio- and bibliographical information about Trew, his artists and his collection are repeated over and over again in successive contributions – this could have been avoided with a firmer editorial hand. Surely it was unnecessary, too, for eleven out of the sixteen essays to utilise Trew's full name in their titles, in a book whose title itself also refers to its subject. Some of the essays seem misplaced; for example, Henriette Müller-Ahrndt's chapter on Trew's relations with artists provides vital information about Georg Ehret which should have preceded several of the preceding discussions in order for the reader to position Ehret accurately and to grasp the nature of his relationship and interactions with Trew, including how this famous botanical artist came to be lastingly associated with the Linnean classificatory system. Some essays are rich in methodological discussion at the beginning, whereas others take a more descriptive tone, leading to unevenness in the approach to the subject matter. While this methodological approach can yield excellent fruit, on occasion it leads to internal inconsistencies within the volume itself: whereas Kärin Nickelsen underscores Trew's express concern to achieve a combination of not only »Zierrath, sondern auch [...] Nutzen« in his images (p. 292), one of the editors, Hans Dickel, would have it that seventeenth century Cartesian mechanism and new visual technologies like the microscope marked a caesura between artistic and scientific pictorial practices (p. 338). And yet even by the later eighteenth century, a clear distinction between ornamental and scientific remains hard to discern, and was hard to enforce, in images, collections and collecting practice. Even systematics, when applied (which was rare), did not necessarily subscribe to Linnaean norms, as canonical studies like Frans Stafleu's »Linnaeus and the Linneans« (1971) already showed.

As a result of all this, the volume does deviate from Christoph Jacob Trew's natural historical praxis in one key respect: it suggests that sometimes there was insufficient communication between editors and authors, between individual authors, or with wider cultures of scholarship around Europe. The linguistic barrier to mutual exchange is one obvious reason for the latter problem, and in this sense it is to be regretted that few Anglophone historians will be able to consult this book. But the individual authors also often miss opportunities to tap their arguments into research concerning other countries, and thereby to provide a more pan-European context for numerous important developments. Despite numerous references in passing to Trew's early decision to use Tournefortian systematics for his collection, for example, there is no essay in the volume concerning Trew's links to France, either during his student years or thereafter. Yet to use Sébastien Vaillant's name for ginseng in the first half of the eighteenth century, as Trew did (p. 305) was to take sides in a controversy splitting European botanists at the time. Ursula Rautenberg's otherwise excellent and fascinating essay on Trew's work on aloes does not fully capture his



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main reason for particular interest in this plant: the global trade of a New World drug, touted as a substitute for expensive African aloe by the Italian botanist and physician Pietro Andrea Mattioli in his 1554 commentary on Dioscorides. Nor does Rautenberg engage with work on the seed and plant trade in France and England (e.g. Sarah Easterby-Smith or Richard Xavier Coulton), or on English and Swedish naturalists' use of lists, notes and paper slips (e.g. Elizabeth Yates, Staffan Müller-Wille and Isabelle Charmantier). Dominic Olariu reveals the gorgeous coloration of the apothecary Georg Öllinger's collection of botanical plates, but seems unaware of recent writing on the tomato (e.g. Anastasia Stefanaki or Florike Egmond). There is in general a predilection for citing works published by German authors or on German naturalists which, inevitably, constrains the practice of early modern natural history to within current national boundaries, even as virtually every area of natural historical practice turns out, in this very book, to have a transnational and pan-European character. It seems that European scholars of today are not communicating with one another as well as we might, as well as Christoph Jacob Trew and his contemporaries strove to do, in spite of the enormous obstacles of distance and cost that stood in their way when publishing a book.



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