

Anna Marie Roos, Vera Keller (ed.), Collective Wisdom. Collecting in the Early Modern Academy, Turnhout (Brepols) 2022, 325 p. (Techne. Knowledge, Technique and Material Culture, 10), ISBN 978-2-503-58806-3, EUR 85,00.

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As the editors explain, this volume is the result of a research network of the same title which investigated the role of collections associated with academies, with a focus on the Leopoldina, the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society, amid changing ideas of their public during the 17th and 18th centuries. This explains the concentration of German and British examples. Academies, as distinct from informal networks or licensing bodies, had protocols, regular meetings, records, repositories, and possibly publications on the premise that knowledge could and should be acquired collectively. These academies, the editors point out, »played a unique, formative, and understudied role in considering infrastructures for relating the collection to the public in various ways« (p. 14). This volume nicely complements the recent special issue of the »Journal of the History of Collections« 33/3 (2021), on early modern collections in use.

For a society like the Leopoldina, their immediate audience was learned physicians like themselves or their learned peers. Fabian Kraemer notes that the publications by members of the early Leopoldina, set up by a group of physicians, covered studies of *materia medica* (naturally and regularly occurring material for medicinal uses) and of preternatural diseases, reported in its periodical, »Miscellanea Curiosa«. The reports in »Miscellanea Curiosa« adopted the textual format of the genre of medical observations, where first-hand experience of the physician (*observatio*) was separated from information from other sources, including books (*scholion*). As a result, the journal reads like a »cabinet of curiosities on paper« (p. 122). Vera Keller adds that the inclusion of monstrous marvels in »Miscellanea Curiosa« was to demonstrate the society's open-mindedness, though authorship of the reports excluded apothecaries and other vernacular practitioners who supplied those objects and with whom the Leopoldina members had close professional ties. To counter the possible charge of credulity, Johann Daniel Major began using his collection to teach students in a »private« seminar to examine first-hand (using the skills of the physician) the objects themselves (e.g. the skin and rib of a »siren«). The Leopoldina did not have a fixed site to house its own collection, and it is perhaps for this reason that its members developed what Keller calls a »prescriptive museology« (p. 127). Philip Jakob Sachs, for example, discussed the use of collections for the study of nature, and listed collections in Europe particularly suited for that purpose. Major opened a



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»public« museum in Kiel in 1688, but only grudgingly admitted women. In the early Leopoldina, the ideal knower of collection-based investigation was a male physician (or a medical student).

Collections were also deemed useful for reforming pedagogical practice. Georgiana D. Hedesan points out how, in parallel to introducing the teaching of natural history at the University of Copenhagen, Ole Worm used his museum for teaching and his catalogue served as a quick guide to the natural world for university students. Teaching children was the focus of the works of Georg Philip Harsdörffer, a member of the Fruitbearing Society (a literary society for the promotion of vernacular German) and of Erhard Weigel, professor of mathematics at Jena, as Kelly J. Whitmer explains. Drawing on the educational ideas of Jan Amos Comenius grounded in everyday objects and the learned works on art and nature (by Kircher, Cardano or Scaliger), both wrote manuals in German to promote the idea of educating children through playful, tactile handling of a collection of realia (including both *naturalia* and *artificialia*).

Individuals could belong to multiple academies and draw on a variety of collective wisdom. Julia A. Schmidt-Funke emphasises the urban context of a short-lived group in Frankfurt involving Johann Georg Kissner and Johann Friedrich von Uffenbach, and the Literary Society in Danzig of which Johann Philip Breyne was an active member. Both cities, as commercial and trading hubs, provided infrastructure for acquiring objects and information, on which they corresponded internationally and published with other societies. Locally, they remained a small group, exuding »ostentatious seriousness« (p. 184), meeting in the homes of members affluent enough to have a library, garden and a collection and of high enough social standing to appreciate domestic sociability. More enduring with a wider membership was a society established in Spalding, located 160 km north of London. As Dustin M. Frazier Wood explains, the Spalding Gentlemen's Society drew membership from a wide range of professions with a sizable number of non-local members who were also members of the Societies of Antiquaries or the Royal Society. Their wide interest (»all arts and sciences« except politics [p. 235]), was reflected in their collection of antiquarian, scientific and virtuosic material. The minutes, combining descriptions of objects with precise provenance and cross-referenced to other information, served as guides to the collection »for the use of current and future members« (p. 255).

Collective wisdom was not yet siloed into specialism. As Chantal Grell shows, Tito Livio Burattini, instrument maker, mining entrepreneur and negotiator for the Polish crown, published a study of ancient measurements, »Misura universal« (noted in »Philosophical Transactions« [1675]) by analysing measurements he had taken of the pyramids with John Greaves, the Oxford-educated scholar of astronomy and antiquities. Anna Marie Roos also argues that members of the short-lived Egyptian Society (1741–1743) brought to bear on their study of Egyptian objects



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the methods of humanist scholarship, empirical observation, metrology, early archaeology and biblical exegesis.

However, objects sometimes evaded scrutiny. Philip Beeley presents the case of a manuscript on Byzantine music now in the Society of Antiquaries. It was acquired in London by the young Humphrey Wanley, then assistant librarian of the Bodleian Library. As a manuscript from Buda recently liberated from the Ottomans, and the possible association with the famed Corvinian Library, made the manuscript, in Wanley's eyes, worthy of a »Publick Library« such as the Bodleian. Its content and historical value, however, were difficult to determine despite consulting an array of specialists. This example illustrates Wanley's passion for manuscripts which eventually led him to establish the Society of Antiquaries. One of Wanley's patrons, Hans Sloane, chose not to join the Society of Antiquaries. Kim Sloan argues that the way antiquities were catalogued and displayed show how Sloane gathered objects with physically similar features rather than by geographical origin. This indicates his »global« ambition to »understand the entire world, past and present« (p. 232), in contrast to antiquarian societies that focused on national contexts.

Louisiane Ferlier's essay closes the volume by describing her experience of digitization projects at the Royal Society. Hands-on work, technical know-how, funding and planning are just few of the hidden labours that historians as consumers may not fully appreciate (but we should!) of digitization projects. Digitization that is attentive to historians' needs has led to consideration of the materiality of the original documents, ways of navigating through existing material, and highlighting lacunae inherent in the archives. For the fruits of such efforts, I refer the readers to »Science in the Making« launched recently by the Royal Society.

Essays in this volume thus engage with the theme of »collective wisdom« on different levels, and present new research on understudied aspects of academies, including less well-known groups and their collections. It would be of interest to historians of science, academies and collecting.

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