

Analyse d'ouvrage / Book review

Jarvis C. 2007. — *Order out of Chaos. Linnaean Plant Names and their Types*. The Linnean Society of London in association with the Natural History Museum, London, 1016 p., 340 figs (214 pls, 87 vignettes, 3 portraits, 36 other photographs).

ISBN: 978-0-9506207-7-0.

Format: 28.2 × 22.8 × 5.9 cm. Price: 80 £.

This long-awaited book is undoubtedly a major editorial event in the biological literature of the century now beginning, one that summarizes an impressive work carried out by the author and an international team of botanists over the last 25 years, but in fact was already outlined in 1957 under the impulse of William Stearn. It should be pointed out that this book encompasses not only tracheophytes but also bryophytes, algae, fungi, and lichens. Moreover, due to the outstanding character of this contribution, it is not astonishing that it is most favourably introduced by a foreword written by Peter H. Raven (Missouri Botanical Garden), and two prefaces by David F. Cutler (Linnean Society of London) and Michael Dixon (Natural History Museum, London).

In his introduction, Charlie Jarvis pinpoints at once the basic problem inherent in the Linnean project. Linnaeus was indeed at a crucial focus in the history of biology, as he had first to gather all the botanical literature available in Europe and, through a critical processes, to fight against the distressing instability of species designation at that time. The author emphasizes the well known role of binomial nomenclature, but also of accurate illustrations, and even of synoptic tables, by predicting the correct position and name of any previously unknown plant. Unfortunately increasing knowledge in botany could lead to a new disorder, requiring firm nomenclatural rules, especially the designation of types. Linnaeus could not of course have been aware of this methodological need regarding his descriptions, and he therefore quoted specimens from his own herbarium – some of which were further destroyed by him! – as

well as from other collections, now often scattered or even lost. The aim of the Linnean Typification Names Project is to solve this problem, sometimes by proposing the most convenient substitute, when no original specimen is available any more.

The work is divided into seven chapters. Chapters 1 to 6 are concise introductory parts, detailing all the essential basics for understanding and exploiting Chapter 7, the core of the book, which quite appropriately repeats its title: “Linnean Plant Names and their Types”. Several items are successively tackled in the introductory sections: Art and science of typification (Chapter 1), A brief life of Linnaeus (Chapter 2), Major botanical publications (Chapter 3), and the problem of data resources, which is especially developed in chapters 4-6 (Literature used by Linnaeus, Linnean and Linnaeus-linked herbaria, and Collectors and correspondents). Charlie Jarvis keeps to the course for the technical aspects of typification, and never strays from this point when dealing with other epistemological problems, which is a terrible temptation while studying the Linnean work! Superfluous commentary is carefully avoided regarding the literary and philosophical influences in Linnaeus's writings, as these items have been analysed previously in many books including, for French speakers, the classical study of Knut Hagberg¹ and the recent one edited by Thierry Hoquet². Conversely, nomenclatural terminology is accurately defined in glossaries. Chapter 6 provides a rich alphabetical listing of botanists related to Linnaeus, with a very brief biographical sketch for each person and, when available, autographs.

After these bright pages, Chapter 7 quite understandably appears as a rather dry dictionary. However, it is preceded by three explanatory pages and a rich glossary. Moreover, a clever use of the typography makes the reading easier, and several black and white vignettes of plants are finely inserted in the columns. By leafing through these pages, the profoundness of the clarification provided by the work can be fully

assessed, as well over 80% of the Linnean binomials for which types can be found are now formally typified. In brief, this chapter comes across as a shining defence and illustration of classical botanical nomenclature, and an exceptional encouragement to complete such painstaking tasks.

As expected, an unavoidable weak side of this kind of dictionary is the citation of current names as synonyms for Linnean binomials, which were not chosen using a homogeneous classification. In Convolvulaceae, for example, we read (p. 440): *Convolvulus medium* L. = *Merremia medium* (L.) Hallier f., but later (p. 442): *Convolvulus tridentatus* L. = *Xenostegia tridentata* (L.) D.F.Austin & Staples. It would have been better to put both species together, either in *Merremia* or in *Xenostegia*. Although this heterogeneity does not detract from the usefulness of the dictionary, it is worth keeping in mind that, as in Linnaeus's time, it remains difficult to find and designate a reference specimen and to place it in a wholly consistent, updated system.

The editorial work that has gone into this book is worthy of mention, and the result is to be warmly greeted. The margins are very wide, allowing for an-

notations. There is a good balance of illustrations, with a sensible use of magnified details where relevant, and an interesting blend of the different styles of art work used at Linnaeus's time. Readers can also admire some herbarium plates in which flowering twigs appear to gush graciously out of baroque vases. It is not common to see such a technical book that has metamorphosed in an artistic one, extending to a readership well outside the closed circle of herbariologists. In the same vein, the price to quality ratio of such a book is an important consideration, and the present work may already be regarded as a classic, highly recommended for all herbaria regardless of size, for all large libraries, and for people concerned with the fundamentals of botany.

Thierry Deroin

1. HAGBERG K. 1944. — *Carl Linné. "Le roi des fleurs"*. Je sers, Paris, 211 p.
2. HOQUET T. (ed.) 2005. — *Les fondements de la botanique. Linné et la classification des plantes*. Vuibert, Paris, 290 p.