

Analyse d'ouvrage / Book review

Ommen K. van (ed.) 2009. — The Exotic World of Carolus Clusius (1526-1609). Catalogue of an exhibition on the quatercentenary of Clusius' death, 4 April 2009, with an introductory essay by Florike Egmond. *Kleine publicaties van de Leidse Universiteitsbibliotheek* 80. Leiden University Library, Leiden, 120 p., 44 figs, 1 colour portrait as a frontispiece.

ISSN 0921-9293, volume 80.

Format: 20.9 × 14.8 cm. Price: 15.95 €.

This erudite yet nice booklet was published on the occasion of the quatercentenary of the death of Charles de l'Écluse (Carolus Clusius), and might be considered as a detailed historical introduction to the original "Clusius garden", just beautifully reconstructed the last year at Leiden, in its original place.

The book is divided in two unequal parts: a biographical sketch by Florike Egmond (p. 7-12), and the actual catalogue (p. 14-99), which is arranged in three chapters dealing with the botanical garden of Leiden, the Clusius' publications and the "Exotica", i.e. all plants and animals brought from outside of Europe by travellers and ships, and already more or less known at the end of the 16th century.

A careful selection of 44 documents, very diverse in figure (water colour plates, engravings, letters, and some specimens), alternates with concise comments by 14 specialists, further briefly introduced in a conclusive part (p. 100-102). A rich bibliography is provided including primary sources and secondary literature. An index makes still easier the use of this study.

The most interesting remarks concern with the work method of Clusius, amazingly modern in scope. With the expansion of the printing, a need arose for an im-

proved editorial process, well and stirringly illustrated here by the Clusius' personal copies carefully annotated by himself at the end of his long life (p. 41-43). His concerns were also to deal with European and exotic floras in separate works, to translate botanical and pharmacological studies (e.g., about America) from vernacular languages into Latin, and to carry out short ethnobotanical inquiries whenever feasible. His main aim was to get best documented specimens, and for achieving this purpose he wrote several recommendations to the collectors, unfortunately with few results.

The zoological chapter (p. 88-99) shows similar problems Clusius already met in botany: scarcity of complete and well-preserved specimens, as well as good illustrations. These difficulties were increased by lack of reliable information about the right behaviour and breeding possibility.

As a result of his numerous travels throughout Europe (studying, working and/or botanizing in Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain), he got in touch with a tremendous number of correspondents (probably more than 300), and he could keep efficient contacts along his long and active life. He reinforced also successfully his own "Web" by his close relationships with aristocracy (he was himself of low nobility) and shipowners. As emphasized by Paul Kessler, in his foreword, Clusius was a "famous networker".

Since 2004 his incredibly rich correspondence is analyzed by the members of the Clusius Research Project, initiated by the Scaliger Institute at Leiden University, and supported by NOW, it should be made accessible via the Internet in a near future. New insights about the birth of modern botany should undoubtedly evolve from their study.

Thierry Deroin