Because of this diversity, the book provides a very stimulating overview of (Western) attempts to make graphic sense of life and its history on this planet. It has no rival as an introduction to the subject.

The visual wealth, however, comes with methodological problems. Pietsch writes: “The focus of this book is on diagrams that resemble trees in the botanical sense” (p. ix). But this statement does not sit well with the actual content. A substantial portion of the diagrams should not, for a variety of reasons, be described as trees – they were not named trees by their authors, they do not resemble trees, and so on – and the majority are certainly not “trees of life”, at least not in Darwin’s sense of a family tree of all life. Even so, Darwin remains the point of reference. Rather ahistorically, Pietsch applies his term “tree of life” to the entire, complex and diversified tradition. This has the unhelpful effect of reinforcing an insufficiently nuanced grand narrative of natural history in terms of before and after Darwin.

It also has the effect of turning the reader’s eyes away from fascinating variations. Natural historians have indeed produced many “diagrams that resemble trees in the botanical sense”. But this was mainly a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even as later phylogenies were referred to as trees, they were typically more abstract; recently there has even been a turn toward circular “trees”. Perhaps Pietsch has failed to discern such incongruities because he believes in an actual tree of life. Introducing the last diagram in his book, by Hillis, Zwickl and Gutell (2003), Pietsch writes that it was based on rRNA sequences “from about three thousand species from throughout the tree of life” (p. 312). Here the metaphor is the model for itself.

Many have attempted to write histories of the evolutionary tree, including this reviewer (Archives of natural history 39 (2): 234–252 (2012)). But most scholars so far have privileged content over visual expression, which makes Pietsch’s study a welcome contribution. His book will not only be consulted by historians, but will also please a broader readership, who will enjoy it for the perspectives it offers as well as for its lavish illustrations and handsome presentation.

The objects of study are indeed beautiful and inspiring in their own right and I know of only one tree-history that is visually richer: Christiane Klapisch-Zuber’s L’arbre des familles (2003), a lush genealogy of the genealogical tree. The evolutionary tree has deep roots and anyone hoping to understand its history must cross disciplinary boundaries. After all, Pietsch’s evolutionary phylogenies are only late descendants of the trees once drawn for aristocratic pedigrees.

DOI: 10.3366/anh.2013.0161 NIELS PETTER HELLSTRÖM


The 664 letters gathered together for these volumes, to and from a total of 139 correspondents, have come from numerous repositories worldwide to which they were dispersed after Joseph Banks’s death, and are part of a projected eight-volume series to be completed in early 2013. A mighty work of research and synthesis simply to compile, the letters themselves have all been transcribed in full and to a splendid level of accuracy throughout. This high level of coverage and accuracy is matched by the editorial interpretation and annotation also incorporated in each volume. There is, too, a professionally written index, and a biographical calendar of all correspondents – a formidable work of scholarship in its own right. The volumes are handsomely produced and the page layout is easy to read and attractive. The overall impression is of a wealth of richly complex material, thoroughly edited and now admirably presented for the first time to grateful scholars around the world.

The eight years spanned by these letters find Joseph Banks in the fifth decade of his long and active life as a central figure in British science and exploration, with influence among a fascinating range of national institutions that included the Royal Society (of which he was president from 1778 until his death); the British Museum; the Royal Gardens at Kew; the Home Office; the Admiralty, the Navy
Board; the Board of Trade; the Board of Control and the East India Company, as well as a range of colonial governors in India, New South Wales and the Caribbean. The multidisciplinary network that Banks developed among these institutions and individuals permitted his involvement through a wide range of their global activities that extended from the Pacific Northwest, the South Seas, New South Wales, India, the Cape Colony and the West Indies. And it is not insignificant that in linking these geographical areas, the editor has ensured a convincing vision of the operation not only of Banks’s network of influence, but also the scope and concerns of the British Empire as it reformed itself in the years following the American Revolution.

One of the themes emerging most strongly from the broad Indian and Pacific focus of this series is what became, in response to Banks’s efforts, the global transportation of economically valuable plants and other products. Perhaps the most spectacular of these enterprises is the mission led by William Bligh in HMS Providence that successfully transported breadfruit plants from Tahiti and other South Sea islands to the West Indies, a mission whose success has been historically eclipsed by the more famous mutiny on the Bounty on the first breadfruit mission under Bligh. What emerges most clearly from this correspondence – including that from William Bligh himself, James Wiles and Christopher Smith, the gardeners on board, all of whom were Banks selections – is the persistence and scope of the Banksian vision in action.

Other major plant movements covered here in which Banks had a pivotal role include that of the Porpoise, in a largely unsuccessful attempt to transport important crop plants from England to New South Wales; the delivery of huge numbers of plants to Kew from William Roxburgh, director of the East India Company’s botanic garden in Calcutta; and the distribution from the Moluccas by Christopher Smith of hundreds of spice plants, mainly clove and nutmeg, to India and the West Indies. Another important route on this transport network was that between New South Wales and India, transferring essential supplies of animals and plants to the new colony, and plant novelties with possible economic importance to the garden at Calcutta.

Banks had been instrumental in the foundation of the Calcutta Botanic Garden and exchanges with the garden’s directors, Robert Kyd and William Roxburgh, show the extent of his influence in the continuing development of East India Company concerns in India. The prime interest is in botany, of course, and it is from Roxburgh that Banks receives lists of plants, news of novelties and huge consignments of seeds and plants, and it is also to Banks that Roxburgh entrusted the editorship of what became his famous Plants of the coast of Coromandel (1795–1819). We also see Banks as instrumental in the possible development of economic crops in India, including hemp, for which he provided the seed stock and English hemp cultivators to trial the crop. The history of the attempt to break the Spanish monopoly of cochineal production in Mexico is a theme that continues from previous volumes, but which ends with its ultimate failure and Banks’s withdrawal from this enterprise. Nonetheless, British attempts to break foreign monopolies in the supply of goods and resources and at the same time to draw on their own overseas territories for crops and materials all provide valuable grist for economic historians of the Napoleonic era.

As a leading proponent of the formation of a penal colony in New South Wales, Banks continues an interest in all aspects of its development, of which he is informed in many lengthy letters from the colonial governors, particularly John Hunter and Philip Gidley King, the latter at first as governor of the subsidiary settlement at Norfolk Island. Other major series of letters included here are those between Banks and Thomas Haweis, one of the chief founding members of what became the London Missionary Society. Alongside them range those of Archibald Menzies on his voyage as surgeon and naturalist aboard the Discovery with George Vancouver to the Pacific Northwest; with George Leonard Staunton in relation to his publication of the official account of the Macartney mission to China, for which Banks provided support, especially regarding natural history; and with George Caley, Banks’s paid personal collector in New South Wales and who became one of Australia’s earliest explorers and a querulous gossip who deserves much more attention than he has hitherto received from historians. These wonderful volumes will serve to enrich the record not only of Banks’s activities but those of hundreds, indeed now thousands of correspondents if we are to include Chambers’s previous science
series (published in six volumes, 2007). The scholarship of the editor and the impressive production of the publisher do ample credit to the global legacy of Banks and both are worthy of the warmest congratulation.

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DAVID HIBBERD


The discovery of a manuscript containing a copy of a substantial proportion of a mediaeval herbal allowed the reconstruction of Henry of Huntingdon’s “lost” Anglicanus ortus which was known about from other manuscripts. It described an imaginary garden, a square with a central lake, planted with herbs regarded as having medicinal uses (see, for example, J. H. Harvey, 1987 The square garden of Henry the Poet. Garden history 15: 1–11). Henry (c. 1088–c.1164) who became Archdeacon of Huntingdon was a “happily married man” with at least one son. He studied under Anselm of Laon and probably came to know the herbals and medical treatises which informed his Anglicanus ortus while at Laon.

Black has attempted to trace the sources that Henry used, noting that the last section was largely based on Constantine the African’s Liber graduum. Other sources appear to include Macer, but Black identifies about 16 sections that apparently owe nothing to other extant mediaeval texts, including those about artemisia, ozyma (which is equated with basil), crocus, baldmoney, “rare and pleasant” lavandula, beta minor, costmary, petroselinum, acimum, pigmentum, viola dictamnus, aquilegia and cynoglossum. The costmary (“Anglica costus”) verse is notable for its comment that the French call the herb “English cost, but by the English it is called the ‘Herb of the Scot’ as if a thing despised.” It was recommended, mixed with honey, for treating abscesses and pleurisy. “Parvenca” is identified by Black as periwinkle (Vinca minor), and the text is apparently original to Henry of Huntingdon, who described the plant as possessing unsurpassed powers: “When Periwinkle kindles lust, give heed to the mover!” Another largely original section comprises seven lines about “Pigmentum” which Black suggests refers to meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria): “mixed in drinks, [it] bestows a pleasing flavour ...”. Whether this is so is a matter of opinion and illustrates the problems of equating mediaeval nomenclature with present-day names especially when the plants are not described.

The published volume includes Latin texts and translations, with copious notes and comprehensive indexes.

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E. CHARLES NELSON


This is a delightful book, beautifully printed and handsomely bound, which I feel privileged to review. It is also long overdue, having been conceived by John Raven (1914–1980) during the Second World War. The letter that he wrote to his father on Boxing Day 1942 proposing “a little collection of essays & illustrations” and outlining eleven possible chapters (“even if there is not the remotest prospect of [their] being published until long after the war”) is reproduced in an appendix. But the project had an even earlier genesis, in the family’s summer holidays from 1929 onwards, when Canon Charles Raven (1885–1964) acted as locum-tenens at Goleen in County Cork. From the rectory they explored Three Castles Head, “utterly solitary and accessible only on foot”, initially collecting butterflies but then