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Dominik Collet. *Die Welt in der Stube: Begegnungen mit Auereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit.*

Die Welt in der Stube: Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit. (Veröffentlichungen des MaxPlanckInstituts für Geschichte, 232.) by Dominik Collet

Review by: By Anke te Heesen

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Siraisi emphasizes the conservative traits of Mercuriale's works, and, as David A. Lines explains in his essay on Frans Titelmans's *Compendium philosophiae naturalis* of 1530, a textbook did not need to be up to date to be successful. Titelmans's textbook did not introduce new material, but instead combined systematized Aristotelian natural philosophy with Christian spirituality. This combination, Lines argues, helped make the book the most popular textbook in natural philosophy during the sixteenth century and even appealed to otherwise "secular" university professors, such as Ulisse Aldrovandi at the University of Bologna. However, it was often the case that Aristotle and his commentators provided the basis for discussions about current natural philosophy, as Simone De Angelis argues in the case of sixteenth-century Paduan lectures on *De anima*, Urs B. Leu illustrates with Konrad Gessner's geography lectures in Zurich, and Ann Blair uncovers in notes from seventeenth-century Paris.

Several contributions use the educational setting to contextualize philosophical and scientific ideas and to reconsider the significance of books that are normally left out of standard accounts of early modern thought. One interesting example is Jill Krayer's essay on Kaspar Schoppe's *Elementa philosophiae Stoicae moralis* of 1606, which scolds historians of philosophy since Leibniz for their unfair comparison of Schoppe's book to the works of Justus Lipsius. Schoppe's main purpose, Krayer argues, was not to deliver a comprehensive account of Stoicism, nor even to write a textbook, but to promote educational reform. Similar arguments are made in Volkhard Wels's study of Philipp Melancthon's textbooks on dialectic and rhetoric and in Anja-Silvia Goeing's essay on the Hebrew grammar and comparative language theory of Theodor Bibliander.

One virtue of this volume is its interdisciplinary approach. As Anthony Grafton argues in his introductory essay, early modern scholars and students employed many different kinds of texts as textbooks and approached these texts in many different ways. The study of early modern textbooks, therefore, demands a well-assorted toolbox. The flip side of the inclusive approach, however, is that the volume lacks methodological focus and coherence. Many contributions refer to the connections between textbooks and scholarly practices. Unfortunately, in most of the volume this interest in practices remains cursory, especially in comparison to recent work within the history of science (e.g., David Kaiser, ed., *Pedagogy and the Practice of Science* [MIT, 2005]). The book would have benefited from

further discussions about how textbooks disciplined students, defined and enforced academic standards, and, thus, demarcated scholarly knowledge from other kinds of knowledge. Such discussions would also have made the title seem more appropriate.

KASPER RISBJERG ESKILDSEN

**Dominik Collet.** *Die Welt in der Stube: Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit.* (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 232.) 403 pp., illus., figs., app., bibl., indexes. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007. €68.90 (cloth).

Recent years have seen a wide range of publications dealing with the history of collections. Especially since the 1980s, a hybrid form of collection has attracted historians, the so-called *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*. The term was first given a broader analysis in 1908 by the art historian Julius Schlosser and was later taken up by historians of the sciences and ethnologists as well. This form of collection became prominent because the Renaissance *Kammer* seemed to unify art and science: wonders and facts sat side by side. It was especially interesting for historians of science because its most popular era coincided with that of the "Scientific Revolution."

The articulate work of the historian Dominik Collet begins its argument here: Were *Kunstkammern* set up to produce new knowledge? What relationship existed between books, on the one hand, and the newly collected objects, on the other? After an introduction addressing the current state of research, the author dives into the depths of different archives, bringing up three case studies: the Gothaer *Kunstkammer* of the dukes of Sachsen-Gotha in the years from 1653 to 1721, the *Kunstkammer* of the English dealer William Courten from 1684 to 1702, and the repository of the Royal Society from 1663 to 1711. The work focuses mainly on the Gothaer *Kunstkammer*. Concluding with a chapter comparing the three collections, the book also includes four illustration sections.

Collet focuses on exotic objects from overseas, discussing natural objects and artifacts. The strength of his research is that he mainly addresses the practices for which the collected objects were used. In all three cases he assesses where the objects came from, how they were stored, and in what manner they were used in daily routines—for example, those of the dukes of Sachsen-Gotha. Collet gives the behind-the-scenes protagonists flesh and purpose: for example, Caspar Schmal-

kalden, a former soldier who worked his way into the middle of court administration thanks to his collected rarities from overseas (pp. 94–97), or Johann Michael Wansleben, a former theologian who ended up far away from court but was originally sent by the duke on an expedition to collect exotica (pp. 141 ff.). These men made their careers with and through exotic objects (Pt. 2).

Collet also looks at the knowledge gained by collecting and through the collections themselves. His main argument is that both the process of collecting and the collections themselves followed a “model of the *Kunst-kammer*”: canonical items like narwhal horns, elephant teeth, the skin of a rhinoceros, and coconuts had to be in every collection. The focus was not on new objects from overseas but, rather, on those, like narwhal horns, that were repeatedly described. The descriptions of natural items in travel accounts were not written with the “thing in front of the eyes” but relied on the authority of older catalogues, inventories, or travelogues. Authors who wrote about exotic items and foreign countries compiled rather than described what they had seen (pp. 113–128). The possession of exotica was a status symbol more than anything else (Pt. 3).

The third point Collet makes concerns a “projective ethnology” (p. 28). Exotic objects were not used as a “medium of information” (p. 350) but, rather, as a “medium to project” the otherness that would secure one’s own—Christian—culture and customs. He shows how all three collections were more failed research collections than a kind of laboratory (Pt. 4). In summary, the author presents a more differentiated account of the role of (the exotic part of) collections in early modern times than we have seen before.

The book presents microhistorical research, without the narrative style we are familiar with from earlier studies. The author offers a clear and straightforward account of his subject, but the citations of numerous archival documents and the sometimes repetitive descriptions and analyses can be a bit monotonous. In short: *Die Welt in der Stube* is fascinating in its close descriptions of what was going on in the *Kunst-kammern* but could have been condensed. Despite this minor criticism, I can recommend this work as an important piece for historians of science who are interested in knowledge practices and collections.

Summing up, we have to keep in mind that we are all dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants. In his introduction Collet strongly criticizes previous studies in this field as lacking a

perspective on practices or overemphasizing the *Kunst-kammer* as a location for new knowledge and active research. Though not every title in the history of collections in the last twenty years can count as a giant, the sometimes emphatic tone and the enthusiasm for a newly discovered spatial arrangement that characterized numerous publications in the 1990s led to a strong interest in this topic, resulting in both new publications and exhibitions. Therefore I would suggest interpreting this excellent case study not as a correction focusing on hitherto neglected aspects but as a continuation and improvement of our knowledge of a weird and still fascinating place: the space of collections.

ANKE TE HEESSEN

**Matthew D. Eddy.** *The Language of Mineralogy: John Walker, Chemistry, and the Edinburgh Medical School, 1750–1800.* (Science, Technology, and Culture, 1700–1945.) xii + 309 pp., illus., apps., bibl., index. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008. £60 (cloth).

John Walker (1730–1803) is a lesser-known figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, yet he emerges from Matthew Eddy’s book as well worth knowing for a number of reasons. Walker developed a mineralogical system that was taught to generations of medical students at the University of Edinburgh. Like William Cullen and Joseph Black, Walker reached many more subsequently influential minds through his lectures than through publication. In developing that mineralogical system, Walker drew on a range of sources not usually considered in accounts of the Scottish Enlightenment. Eddy’s account thus partially reshapes our sense of the important inputs to that intellectual ferment and reinforces ideas about the importance of institutional context, in this case the Edinburgh Medical School, to its “local” manifestations. Most significantly, Eddy’s reconstruction of the chemical basis of Walker’s mineralogy and its importance to early geological ideas helps to rescue our understanding of eighteenth-century thinking about the earth sciences from Victorian “back-projections,” from the tyranny of, as he puts it, “the various revolution models that still influence the history of science, philosophy and even culture” (p. 2).

An early chapter describes how Walker built a career as a naturalist, obtained patronage, secured election in 1779 to the Regius Professorship of Natural History at Edinburgh, and taught generations of medical students there. Eddy then launches into a detailed account of Walker’s