

Book review

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Book review

Cooper P. M.: Images of nature. The Bauer brothers. – London: The Natural History Museum, 2015. – ISBN 978-0-565-09359-4. – 21.6 × 25.4 × 1.3 cm, 112 pp.; paperback. – Price: GBP 13.

The Library of the Natural History Museum London is the repository of a spectacular collection of scientific illustrations, many of them unpublished, which document an extremely broad spectrum of plants and animals on a global scale and in considerable historical depth. As Britain's most comprehensive collection in this field, this library has organized several exhibitions of its treasures, as a rule staged on the premises of the Natural History Museum in Kensington and accompanied by a catalogue of the items on show. Titles in this series include *The art of the First Fleet*, *The art of India* and *Women artists*.

P. M. Cooper, a Special Collection Librarian at the Natural History Museum, is the author of the last catalogue exclusively focused on the plant, fungal and animal illustrations prepared by Franz Bauer, F.R.S. (1758–1840) and Ferdinand Bauer (1760–1826) kept in the Natural History Museum. In the context of the exhibition this approach makes perfect sense, but it should be noted that a vast number of works by the Bauer brothers is not in the Natural History Museum, but in the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Sherardian Library at Oxford, the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Göttingen and the Princely Collections in Vienna, just to mention the most important depositories. As consequence the overall impression of the works and achievements of the Bauer brothers transmitted by this catalogue is by necessity biased towards the holdings of the Natural History Museum.

Having said this, it is good to read a balanced introduction (pp. 4–15) giving a brief overview of the lives of Franz and Ferdinand. Only a few mistakes are to be spotted, e.g. the plates of Franz's *Delineations of exotick plants cultivated in the Royal Garden at Kew* were not “engraved in colour” (p. 8), the famous *Flora Graeca* with its copper engravings based on Ferdinand's watercolours was finished only in 1840 and not in 1832 (p. 10) and Robert Brown's *Prodromus florum Novae Hollandiae* was not accompanied by illustrations (p. 14), while Ferdinand's *Illustrationes florum Novae Hollandiae*, surprisingly not mentioned in the introduction, consists of illustrations only.

The catalogue in the strict sense gives for each item on show the scientific and common name of the organism depicted, the approximate date of production, and the dimensions together with a short commentary. In addition, all exhibits, almost exclusively watercolours, are reproduced in good quality. The brief commentaries are helpful, but it would have been a good idea to ask an in-house plant taxonomist to check the text. *Rafflesia arnoldii* was definitely not “introduced to Kew via seeds” (p. 55) since as a holoparasitic plant it has never been successfully cultivated; the parasitic fungi growing on wheat and barley (pp. 46–47) could easily have been determined by a mycologist and proper names given in the legends; the orchids depicted on p. 61 and cultivated in two different gardens belong to two different species, not to one; *Flindersia* is not a family name but a generic name (p. 70); and what is shown on the cover is definitely not *Aerides* sp. of the orchid family, but *Alpinia zerumbet* of the ginger family, with the inflorescence almost certainly shown incorrectly, i.e. erect, instead of pendant. All animal watercolours by Ferdinand included in the catalogue are invariably dated “1805–1814” implying that they were prepared while he was in England; however, archival evidence recently published clearly demonstrates that a considerable number of these depictions of Australian animals was made after Ferdinand's return to Vienna in 1814.

What probably matters more to the visitors of the Natural History Museum is the fact that they have a take-home item at a good price and with good print quality that permanently documents an exhibition of selected works by two of the most outstanding botanical illustrators ever.

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