

## BOOK REVIEWS

**John Ray's Cambridge Catalogue (1660).** Translated and edited by P. H. Oswald & C. D. Preston. Ray Society publication no. 173. London: The Ray Society. 2011. ix + 612 pp., 1 colour and 33 b/w plates, 1 map. ISBN 0 903874 3 1. £75.  
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An epitaph on a black marble slab in Lambeth church includes the couplet:

Whilst they (as Homer's Iliad in a nut)  
A world of wonders in one closet shut

Though this refers to the Tradescant cabinet of curiosities, 'The Ark', the same could be said of their contemporary John Ray's book *Catalogus plantarum circa Cantabrigiam nascentium* of 1660 – its usual binding is nut brown and its sextodecimo format (c.147 × 85 mm) makes it smaller certainly than a coconut. Yet, in the words of one of Ray's Cambridge contemporaries, within this miniature format, scarcely bigger than an address book, 'a great deal [is] put into a little Room'. More recently Charles Raven, Ray's biographer, wrote that:

few books of such compass have contained so great a store of information and learning or exerted so great an influence upon the future; no book so evidently initiated a new era in British botany.

A difficulty occurs (and this was also the case in Ray's own time) in that the book is written very largely in Latin. The work was translated by Ewen & Prime in 1975 but their interest was largely in its value as the first 'County Flora', and they did not include several of the sections of the original eight-part work. To continue the Tradescant metaphor, what we now have, thanks to the heroic efforts of Philip Oswald and Chris Preston, is the *Iliad* itself: the 184 tiny folios of the original work (and its two appendices, also omitted by Ewen & Prime) have been expanded to 311 densely packed (of which more anon) octavo ones.

This work is an astonishing piece of scholarship, and it seems incredible that it could have been carried out in a mere three years. The 863 footnotes to the main section of the work alone give an indication of attention to detail and loving spirit in which the translation and annotation has been undertaken. One might almost be tempted to venture the epithet obsessive, but this would miss the point, and it is the richness of the expansion and digressive elements that give the work its inestimable value over that of the earlier translation.

It is only by mentioning each of their sections that one can convey an impression of what Oswald and Preston have achieved. This certainly hugely exceeds their aim 'to try to unpack Ray's "little Room"' as modestly expressed in the Introduction. A concise biography of Ray follows, including summaries of his astonishing travels

throughout Britain and Europe, his taxonomic work especially in botany and zoology (which as a synthesiser of earlier work prefigured that of Linnaeus), and on natural theology. What is particularly interesting is the discussion of Ray's puzzling refusal to sign the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which goes further than Raven's account and suggests that it might, just perhaps, have been a convenient excuse for something that Ray wanted to do in any case – to leave his Cambridge fellowship (which his refusal made automatic) in order to undertake research on his own terms in the isolation of rural Essex, his birthplace.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the 'Catalogue' and its two appendices – the first of the latter is by Ray, the second a new edition of it (with additions) by Peter Dent. Ray's original 'Catalogue' comprises eight parts: preface; bibliography of works cited by Ray; the 'Main Catalogue'; index of English names; etymology of the Latin names; lists of plants for interesting localities around Cambridge; glossary of descriptive terms; summary of a classification based, or rather debased, on that of Jean Bauhin's *Historia Plantarum* (but not used in Ray's text, which is alphabetically arranged). There is much of interest in Oswald's and Preston's description and analysis of the 'Catalogue', not least the models on which Ray's book was based. In addition to the best known precursor, Gaspard Bauhin's Basel catalogue of 1622, they newly identify as possible models Thomas Johnson's *Mercurius Botanicus* (1634–41), William How's *Phytologia Britannica* (1650), and a 1658 catalogue of the Oxford botanic garden by Philip Stephens and the Rev. William Browne. Also of interest is a discussion of why the book appeared anonymously, and of the relative contributions of the group of friends (Peter Courthorpe, Francis Willughby and John Nidd) who helped in its production. The authors confirm (from arcane sources including the Upper Buttery book of Trinity College to discover who was in residence when) that Ray was indeed the real author of the work, but that Nidd, a bibliophile who died before its publication, had a major hand in the notes.

The fourth chapter consists of biographical notes on the large number of earlier writers consulted by Ray (and his friends) – classical, mediaeval and modern – and these notes will be of interest in a much wider context than this book. In Chapter 5 is a discussion of the libraries in which Ray could have seen copies of the books he referred to – the inventories that have survived allow an incredible view into the distant world of Cambridge scholarship at a time when access to literature was far harder than it has since become. Some of the very copies used by Ray and Nidd, such as that of Bauhin's *Historia*, appear still to be in Trinity College library. There follows a discussion of the problems involved in giving modern names to the plants treated, a path pioneered by Charles Cardale Babington in the 19th century and followed by Ewen & Prime in the 20th. The final chapter before the translation of Ray's book itself is a note on translation and editorial methods. If the following example is typical then the translation seems to be exceptionally careful and truthful. Raven (1942) gave several passages from the Cambridge Catalogue, translated by himself, though with no claim that these were other than synoptic. He translated the

phrase *polydaedala artificis naturae opera* as ‘the cunning craftsmanship of nature’, whereas Oswald renders this ‘those richly wrought works of the artificer nature’, which not only seems more accurate, but puts a significantly different spin on the phrase (though Ray presumably intended ‘the artificer nature’ as a synonym of the Deity).

The translation of the Main Catalogue includes the important synonyms (largely from the works of the brothers Bauhin and Johnson’s 1633 ‘unspotted’ edition of Gerarde’s *Herbal*) omitted by Ewen & Prime as of only antiquarian interest. The text is full of fascinating observations, not only those of Ray himself, but in the copious footnotes already mentioned. Ray’s own etymology of plant names was also omitted in the earlier translation, again at great loss of understanding the richness of the whole work; though much of this is now superseded (not least as Ray believed that Hebrew was the mother language of Greek and Latin) it is still full of interest, whether accurate or merely quaint – for example *Carlina* ‘because it is believed that this herb was revealed to Charlemagne by an Angel’. Following the translation of all of Ray’s supplementary material and the two appendices, the book concludes with Oswald’s & Preston’s gazetteer of Cambridgeshire place names, a vocabulary of Ray’s descriptive epithets, a bibliography, and an index. All these are exceptionally richly elaborated, and the vocabulary is especially valuable and will be of use in a wider context. The Cambridge tradition is still alive and well and it is intriguing to learn that this translation was made from Charles Raven’s own copy of his hero Ray’s ‘Catalogue’, passed down to Chris Preston by apostolic succession, and that Philip Oswald studied Classics at King’s under Charles’s son John.

In terms of book production the outstanding scholarship of this work has unfortunately been poorly served by the Ray Society. This Society was founded in 1844 to produce (for subscribers) works of natural history for which it was hard to find a commercial publisher – one of its founders was George Johnston of Berwick on Tweed, and among its handsome early publications was Darwin’s two-volume work on (extant) barnacles (1851, 1854). The present volume is the seventh of the Society’s works relating to Ray himself (biographical material and facsimile works), and the decline in terms of design since the last of these with botanical content (1981) is depressing. The paper is a nasty coated one that cockles if held in the fingers for more than a few seconds (even in Scottish midwinter), the typography is abominable and Ruari McLean, the distinguished typographer who designed for the Society in the 1970s, must be spinning in his grave. For a small run it seems astonishing that the book was not printed digitally, which would have freed up some money to employ a designer whom one can be sure would not have used lame old Times New Roman, would not have crammed quite so many long lines onto a page or allowed such mean margins, and would certainly have given more consideration to the appearance of the title page (and its verso) and the caption of the murky frontispiece. Appearance DOES matter. If one simply wants information text can now be published on the Web; if a ‘hard copy’ is to be produced then the volume should be a pleasure both to look at and to hold.

## REFERENCES

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**Flora of Nepal Volume 3.** M. F. Watson, S. Akiyama, H. Ikeda, C. A. Pendry, K. R. Rajbhandari & K. R. Shrestha. Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. 2011. ISBN 978 1 906129 78 1. £87.

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The Himalayas are famous for the beauty and variety of their flora and have attracted intense interest from botanists, horticulturalists and travellers since the early 19th century when their riches were first revealed. Recent publications of modern floras for Pakistan, Bhutan and China (Nasir & Ali, 1970 onwards; Grierson *et al.*, 1983–2002; Wu *et al.*, 1994 onwards), have done much to update our knowledge of the plants of this region, but anyone seeking information on the flora of Nepal has had to rely on the checklist prepared by Hara *et al.* (1978–1982) with subsequent updates and a number of pictorial guides, notably that of Polunin & Stainton (1984). The appearance of the *Flora of Nepal* is thus both timely and welcome.

The *Flora* is the result of international collaboration between botanists in Scotland, Japan and Nepal, who have worked on the Himalayan flora over many years. They have been assisted by experts in specific plant families from various different institutions. When completed the *Flora* will consist of 10 volumes; the first volume to appear is number 3 covering around 600 species out of a total of around 7000. Several important families are treated including Rosaceae, Saxifragaceae, Cruciferae, Papaveraceae and Fumariaceae, which contain genera well known for their diversity in the Himalayas such as *Meconopsis*, *Corydalis*, *Potentilla* and *Saxifraga*, the last being the largest genus in the volume with 87 species. It is very much to be hoped that the other volumes will appear rapidly over the next few years.

The *Flora* provides detailed descriptions of families, genera and species with summary distributions of all three worldwide. Keys are provided for genera and species and these are set out in a clear format which should prove very user-friendly. For each species the place of original publication, Nepali name, local economic uses, full synonymy and details of distribution, habitat and flowering time in Nepal are given. A comprehensive index is also provided. The accounts are well edited and I noted few errors or inconsistencies. However, there is minimal introductory material and it is not clear what information will be included in the introductory volume. At present users have no key to families, no description of the vegetation of Nepal, only the briefest bibliography and no glossary. The absence of a glossary is