

Las plantas del mundo en la historia: Ilustraciones botánicas de cinco siglos. (Colecciones Particulares.) 217 pp., illus. Valencia: Bancaja Obra Social, 1996.

Despite its title, which gives the impression that it concerns world history as a whole, this book is basically a collection of historical essays on the works by Spanish botanists. Plant illustrations are loosely used as the unifying theme.

The first essay, by the distinguished scholar José María López Piñero, provides a reasonable historical account of the better-known Spanish botanists. References to major events in the history of botany in countries other than Spain, however, are sparse and superficial. López Piñero ignores even some foreign botanists who visited Spain and its colonies. He mentions Linnaeus's disciple Pehr Löfving, for one, only in passing, even though Löfving conducted botanical studies not only in Spain but also in Venezuela. Thus the essay is essentially a good summary of the botanical achievements by Spaniards up to the first half of the nineteenth century. Readers seeking an introduction to this topic will find this chapter an excellent place to start. Some specialists, however, will not always agree with

López Piñero's assessment of the impact of the contributions he describes.

Manuel Costa Taléns is the author of the second essay, a mixture of history and concepts of flora and biogeography found in botanical textbooks. Like López Piñero's essay, it is good for the nonspecialist but contains some assessments that not all experts will agree upon. For example, Costa Taléns, like many of his compatriots before him, feels that foreigners such as Linnaeus and Philip Barker Webb failed to appreciate the botanical studies produced in Spain. There is no question that many of the scientific expeditions the Spanish Crown sent around the world included talented naturalists, while other good botanists remained in the Spanish peninsula and carried out their own research programs. But the failure to publish promptly and in full the results of those efforts, as well as the late acceptance of the Linnaean system in Spain (where for a while botanists preferred that of Joseph Tournefort), contributed to the image of Spain as a country where botanical research was not at the cutting edge of the times. Lack of scientific communication and the Inquisition did not help to improve that image.

The third essay is a very interesting and illuminating contribution by Felipe Jerez Moliner on the evolution of illustration techniques up to the nineteenth century; anyone curious about this topic should read it. The next essay, by Jesús Ignacio Catalá Borges and Cristina Sendra Mocholi, provides a general introduction to systems of classification. And in the last essay, María José López Terrada examines the impact of the world of plants on Spanish art. I was happily surprised to find that the editors included this topic, as it is always fascinating to see the ways in which artists perceive and depict nature and scientific themes.

The rest of the book (more than half) superbly reproduces illustrations of many of the sources mentioned in the text. They include the typical one-species drawings and morphological illustrations (even microscopic ones) of plants and fungi, some in color. The explanatory text that accompanies these illustrations is highly informative.

In general, this book represents a diversity of approaches. The essays are furnished with the appropriate bibliographic sources, but unfortunately the volume lacks a subject/name index. This omission and the inaccurate title ("en la historia" should be "en la historia de España") are the book's only two major weaknesses. It is a very useful resource, particularly for those inter-

ested in exploring the work of Spanish botanists.

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