

moral and economic environment and about the business transacted in the urban marketplace.

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Jes Rust, *Albertus Seba's Cabinet of natural curiosities: Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri, 1734–1765*, Cologne and London, Taschen, 2001, pp. 587, complete plates in colour, based on the copy in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, £100.00 (hardback cased 3-8228-1600-0).

Public museums are a relatively new invention. However, the passion for collecting things, and setting them aside as treasured objects, has a long tradition. From the sixteenth century, in many European palaces and aristocratic residences, cupboards and whole rooms were set aside to house the particular collections of princes and noblemen. The earliest of these “cabinets of wonders”, as they were most commonly called, were to be found in Italy, during the 1570s. North of the Alps, one of the most famous was the *Wunderkammer* of the homophobic Emperor Rudolf II.

Why European princes engaged in the often very costly enterprise of putting together such cabinets—none were open to the general public—has recently been much discussed by historians. It has been pointed out that these collections served not only to display their owners' wealth, taste and learning, but that they were also used to trumpet princely fame abroad and display their magnificence before foreign dignitaries and potentates.

A wide variety of objects found their way into these cabinets of wonders, all crammed together in drawers or densely arrayed floor to ceiling: antique coins and figurines, jewellery, exquisite furniture, books and paintings, were displayed next to rare plants, stuffed animals from faraway lands, minerals and even magical things such as horns of unicorns, bezoars and monstrous men and animals. The heterogeneity of these

collections was not the result of caprice or chance but was calculated to dazzle the onlooker, deliberately provoking wonder and awe.

However, not only the noble and politically important were eager to surround themselves with the marvels of God's creation. From the middle of the sixteenth century, more and more members of the middling classes were filling their townhouses with things they considered precious and rare. Their motivation for doing so was very similar to that of their noble peers, albeit their collections tended to be more specialized.

Two of the most famous collections were amassed by Albertus Seba (1665–1736), an Amsterdam apothecary. For decades, Seba haunted the docks of his home city, at that time the centre of the international maritime trade, thanks to the Dutch East India trading company. He supplied departing ships with cases of medicine and treated sick sailors from incoming ships, often in return for the rare specimens of exotic animals, plants, and minerals these men were bringing home. Seba exhibited the best specimens in a specially designed room in his Amsterdam house and the collection soon attracted many visitors from all over Europe. Even Peter the Great visited it in 1717, and was so impressed that he bought it and shipped all the items to St Petersburg.

Seba immediately set about building up a second, even larger collection. In 1731, he commissioned no less than thirteen artists to draw every single specimen he owned. He had the drawings transferred to large, folio-page copper plates for printing and these were finally published between 1734 and 1765 in four volumes entitled *Thesaurus*. Initially, the catalogues were published in black and white, leaving it to buyers to have their edition painted at their own expense by special colourists.

Seba's catalogue is now sumptuously reproduced by Taschen, the art-book publishing house. The edition, printed in folio-sized pages, leaves out nothing of the original in its single, exquisite volume, weighing seventeen pounds, copied from the richly coloured original, hand-tinted edition held by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in the Hague. The introduction and

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commentary, written by distinguished scholars in the field of art history, biology, geology and zoology, discuss Seba's collection within its own time, the history of natural history and describe the many difficulties that confronted a collector and publisher such as Seba. How, for example, was he to conserve African snakes, frogs and lizards during the long voyages from overseas? How should an Amsterdam-based painter draw and colour an exotic animal in a life-like pose when he had never seen a live one with his own eyes?

These questions point to the enormous difficulty we are confronted with today when looking at the species in Seba's *Thesaurus*, that is, their identification according to the rules of modern nomenclature. Carl von Linné's (1707–78) classificatory system, first published in 1735, which still forms the basis of our modern biological classification and taxonomy, was not yet available for Seba as a guideline for the organization of his large assortment of specimens. Seba's classification was still based on similarities and comparison, and still offered plenty of room for all kinds of natural abnormalities, such as Siamese-twin deer, and even fabulous creatures such as the seven-headed hydra. Seba, frequently confronted with overseas species he had never seen before, simply invented new names for them, a standard practice at the time. For the modern reader it is therefore very helpful that the editors made the extra effort to identify the animals and plants presented in the work and provide their modern names.

Seba's catalogue is a unique Baroque document, both as an artistic tour-de-force and as an important example of the history of collecting and natural history. The Taschen reprint of the *Thesaurus* is a little wonder in itself and deserves a special place on the shelves of every scholar's own *Wunderkammer*.

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Zohar Amar, *The history of medicine in Jerusalem*, BAR International Series 1032,

Oxford, Archaeopress, 2002, pp. vi, 163, illus., £20.00 (paperback 1-84171-4127).

Zohar Amar's *The history of medicine in Jerusalem* joins a long series of studies conducted by the author in recent years at the Unit for the History of Medicine in Ancient Times in the Department of Land of Israel Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Although the book focuses on medicine in greater Jerusalem, it reflects the nature of medicine in, and the changes it underwent throughout, the history of the Levant.

Drawing on hundreds of primary and secondary sources in various languages, the author has produced, for the first time, a concise and lucid description of the history of medicine in the holy city. The book contains information about the status of medicine in different periods, the physicians, the hospitals and other medical institutions that served the public, and more besides.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, 'A short history of medicine in Jerusalem', has eight chapters which cover in chronological order: medicine in Jerusalem in Biblical times; a range of subjects in the Roman period from sanitation and hygiene to the different varieties of medical practitioners; and the practice of medicine under Byzantine and Muslim rule and during the Crusader period (until 1187). The author describes and discusses the medical work of the military orders such as the Hospitalers, the Teutonic knights, the Order of the Lepers (St Lazarus), and the relationship between the Western and Eastern medicine. This is followed by accounts of the city's hospitals in the Ayyubid period (1187–1254), and of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian physicians; the Mameluke period (1260–1517); and the physicians, institutions of healing, sanitary conditions, and *materia medica* of the Ottoman period (until the end of the eighteenth century). An epilogue discusses the beginning of modern medicine in Jerusalem, concentrating mainly on the Jewish institutions of healing.

Part two, entitled 'Physicians in Jerusalem in the tenth to eighteenth centuries', focuses