Kees G nirrep

The treasure of Spaarnberg

An exhibition in the Amsterdam Historical Museum devoted to the nineteenth-century banker Adriaan van der Hoop and his impressive collection of paintings led to the idea of mounting an exhibition in Amsterdam University Library in order to show that other aspect of his collecting activities – his passion for exotic plants, which he brought together on his country estate Spaarnberg in Santpoort, and the logical consequence of that passion, the library he assembled there.

When soon after 1850 professor of botany Friedrich Miquel (1822-71) embarked on the process of preparing a new catalogue of the plants in Amsterdam’s Hortus Botanicus or botanic garden, he found somewhat to his dismay that the garden’s library was no longer up to date. When it came to the older works it was excellent, he opined, but it was inadequate for the task of compiling a catalogue of the Hortus. Instead, Miquel was obliged to draw on his own library for the purpose. But as he identified and catalogued the plants, so too he went about the job of setting the library to rights. One consequence of this was that books that were no longer needed for the garden’s botanical work were now transferred to the Stadsbibliotheek or city library. This too had now awoken from a long hibernation.

A hundred and twenty years later history repeated itself. A junk breaking into the Hortus removed a number of rare old books. When the same thing happened soon afterwards, it was decided that it was unsafe to leave the old books and documents at the garden a day longer, and in 1983, at very short notice, they were moved to Amsterdam University Library, the successor to the old Stadsbibliotheek. The unintended result of this move was that the entire seventeenth- and eighteenth-century library of Amsterdam’s renowned botanic garden was now reunited in a single place.


2 An outline history of the city library in the first half of the 19th century is given by H. de la Fontaine Verwey, ‘Een verzwegen hoofdstuk uit de geschiedenis van de Universiteitsbibliotheek’, in: Historische sprokkelingen uit de Universiteit van Amsterdam, aangeboden aan mevr. M. Feiwel (Amsterdam 1961), pp. 93-107. In 1861 three hundred books from the Hortus were included in the Catalogus van de bibliotheek van de stad Amsterdam, suppl. vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1861), preface. p. [3]. Most of these works, it appears from an annotated copy in the rare book department of the university library, were placed in the city library. A few modern works were included in the library’s catalogue but remained in the botanic garden.

3 Voor de kruyd-lievende lezer: De bibliotheek van de Amsterdamse hortus in de 17e en 18e eeuw. Catalogus bij de tentoonstelling, 23 juli-11 sept., met een alfabetische catalogus van de 18e-eeuwse bibliotheek (Amsterdam: UBA, 1992) – the catalogue to the 1992 exhibition of the library’s holdings.
Among the books to come to the university library from the garden in 1983 were a number of magnificent early nineteenth-century illustrated works. But how did these pinnacles of botanical book illustration come to be in the impoverished *Hortus*? Who provided the garden with the masterworks of Pierre Joseph Redouté (1759-1840), at the peak of his artistic powers in *Les Liliacées* and *Les Roses*? (Illus. 1) Original editions, uniformly bound in eleven volumes of red sable stamped in gold. Who bought the glorious book by John Bateman (1811-97), the handsomest volume on orchids ever made? (Illus. 2.) Who gave instructions for the *Sertum Botanicum* of Pierre Corneille van Geel (1796-1836) to be bound in four magnificent bindings (Illus. 3.) by Abraham van Rossum (1783-1866), one of the best Amsterdam binders of the first half of the nineteenth century? How did the *Hortus* come to own a complete set of the *Botanical Cabinet* on large paper in contemporary bindings? The excellent history of the garden by Wijnands, Zevenhuizen and Heniger, *Een Sieraad voor de Stad* (1994), lifted a corner of the veil. In 1924 the garden had received the book collection of the Spaarnberg estate in Santpoort. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the *Hortus* had had close ties with Spaarnberg when the house was occupied by the Amsterdam banker Adriaan van der Hoop. [...] Husbands and wife Wüsten-Von Gotsch, who lived at Spaarnberg at the beginning of the twentieth century, bequeathed to the *Hortus* in their wills the botanical works in their library, most of them dating to the first half of the nineteenth century. The Amsterdam garden also received a collection of prize medals won by van der Hoop at horticultural shows, together with a portfolio of painted illustrations of rare plants at Spaarnberg. Was this the solution to the puzzle? Had all these magnificent books come from the banker’s collection? Certainly his profession could explain the luxurious bindings in which some of them were contained.

---

4 The impression that the garden was destitute was a consequence of the condition of its library in 1803 and the fact that the *Hortus* hardly ever received funds with which to purchase plants. *Sieraad* (n. 1), pp. 14-16, points out that from the eighteen-twenties onwards the garden received an annual subsidy of Dfl. 8,000, putting it among the institutions most generously supported by the city. In the period 1814-28 its annual spending ran at around Dfl. 8,000-9,000. After this there was a substantial reduction, with annual expenditure at about Dfl. 5,500 from 1829 onwards, gradually rising to Dfl. 7,500 in 1877.


6 Nissen (n. 5) 89.


8 Nissen (n. 5) 2222.

9 Translated from *Sieraad* (n. 1), p. 226. The library of the Royal Zoological Society ‘Natura Artis Magistra’ received the zoological works and all the books by Linnaeus. The library became integrated in the University of Amsterdam in 1939 and is now part of the Special Collections of the University Library Amsterdam. It has one of the greatest collections of Linnaean in the world.