

Breakout Session Record

Amanuensis/Student name: Anke Timmermann

Date: 13 July 2005

Institution: Natural History Museum

Title of Breakout session: Sloane's apothecary drawers and Herbaria

Names of Breakout session leaders: Dr Rob Huxley

Dr Kim Sloan

General themes discussed at the Breakout session:

- the NHM's Botany Collection: scope (6 million object, out of which 40,000 in NHM), date (mainly s. xvi-xvii) and history
- Sir Hans Sloane: biography, education and professional life → motivation and scope of his collections, methods of preservation (esp. herbals: dried plants in bound volumes) and curiosa (insects and fish preserved in same manner)
- means of acquisition, preservation and presentation of the specimens (for more information see Object Information sheets)
- two of Sloane's contemporaries (members of the Temple Coffee House Club = first society of natural history) and their collections discussed in contrast to Sloane: 1. James Petiver (whose collections with specimens from around the world Sloane acquired after P's death); 2. Leonard Plukenet (a difficult personality, but produced great works; a friend of Sloane's)
- some remarks on Mark Catesby

Any other information about the session:

objects could be handled; very lively discussion with participants, who often provided answers to questions asked by other participants; curious focus on book production in discussion – many participants had a keen interest in bindings, paper, and means of producing the herbaria, rather than their contents

a lady from the university of Middlesex mentioned that she has Jamaican students of herbal medicine who would be interested to see Sloane's materials

please note also that the question of the 'original context' of the objects could be applied to any of their parts (e.g. in the case of manuscripts: paper, specimens pasted on them, bindings); I have provided the most obvious answer for the completed object, or omitted the answer where necessary

Object information¹

Object title: Cocoa specimen (in Sloane's herbarium, vol. 5)

Object Date: 1687-89

Description of object: manuscript pages in folio volume, containing:
leaf of cocoa plant, dried (collected by Sloane)
accompanying drawings by The Reverend Garrett Moore
descriptions and notes

Function of object? documentation and preservation of specimens collected by Sloane on his travels to Jamaica; in documenting the plant's name, date of collection and name of person collecting it, the manuscript functions like a database; artists were employed to produce accompanying pictures

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? Sloane's private use and circulation among/access to friends

Who used it? initially Sloane and peers, later also scholars etc.

Original context of the object? Sloane's works and collections

The significance of the object? apart from obvious value of preserving the state of botanical studies and knowledge at the time, it shows techniques of collecting, preservation, classification, discovery, etc.

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

Q: who had access to Sloane's collection?

A: initially those belonging to his household; Sloane liked to show them off to visitors, but afraid of damage or stealing; once the collection formed part of museum collections special access granted to interested readers; then as now emphasis on accessibility: curators want the collection to be used

Q: DNA analysis of specimens possible to check classification of plants?

A: yes, and it has been done, but not on Sloane's materials: the preservation with chemicals, which many samples have been subjected to, would spoil the results

¹ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information²

Object title: “Anchovy Pear” specimen (in Sloane’s herbarium, vol. 7)

Object Date: 1687-89

Description of object: manuscript pages in folio volume, containing:
leaf of “anchovy pear” plant, dried (collected by Sloane)
accompanying drawings by The Reverend Garrett Moore
and Everhardus Kickius
descriptions and notes

Function of object? documentation and preservation of specimens collected by Sloane
on his travels to Jamaica; in documenting the plant’s name, date of collection and
name of person collecting it, the manuscript functions like a database; artists were
employed to produce accompanying pictures

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? Sloane’s private use and circulation
among/access to friends

Who used it? initially Sloane and peers, later also scholars etc.

Original context of the object? Sloane’s works and collections

The significance of the object? apart from obvious value of preserving the state
of botanical studies and knowledge at the time, it shows techniques of
preservation, classification, discovery, etc.

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

Q: how were the manuscripts produced once the specimens had been collected?

A: specimens were transported back to England, only then were they pasted into
volumes

Q: when were volumes bound?

A: [participant explains codicology of manuscripts, binding, and implications of book
format, quality of paper, etc.]

Q: practicalities of transporting specimens

A: [vivid discussion of aspects of humidity, temperature, corruption through insects and
other factors, colour changes (esp. in pre-photograph times, so they cannot really be
traced); comparison with modern preservation methods]

² please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to
their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information³

Object title: Hans Sloane, *Natural History of Jamaica*

Object Date: 1707 (vol. 1), 1725 (vol. 2)

Description of object: printed book (folio format)
Sir Hans Sloane's accounts and descriptions of fauna and flora, natural phenomena, local customs, etc. of Jamaica, recorded on his voyages to the islands Madeira, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher's and Jamaica

Function of object? documentation and preservation of nature and customs in aforementioned areas

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? circulation in print, consequently use in households of those who bought it, and relevant institutions

Who used it? all those buying a copy of the books; this specific book was previously owned by Banks, who annotated book in margin

Original context of the object? N/A

The significance of the object? printed counterpart to Sloane's herbarium; documenting and preserving natural history; document on travels of discovery; marginal notes provide insight into contemporary uses of volume and reading techniques

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

Q: how many copies were produced, and how was the work published?

A (provided by participant): number of copies dependent on practicalities of printing; there are ca. 800-1,000 surviving copies; note that work has been digitised

Q: what exactly are contents of book?

A: apart from obvious documentation of plants etc., there is a section on Jamaican music, notation provided by Sloane; but the music has not been performed yet

³ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information⁴

Object title: Hans Sloane, *Catalogus Plantarum*

Object Date: 1696

Description of object: printed book
Sloane's catalogue of his Jamaican plant collections

Function of object? reference work

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? [cp. other publications]

Who used it? users/readers of his *Natural History of Jamaica*, and other interested readers

Original context of the object? N/A

The significance of the object? N/A

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

⁴ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information⁵

Object title: John Ray, *Historia Plantarum*

Object Date: 1686-93

Description of object: printed book (folio format), annotated
descriptions, names and classifications of plants from around the world

Function of object? documentation of natural history

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? [see information for other books]

Who used it? interested contemporary readership, similar to that of Sloane's *Natural History of Jamaica*; it is still in use for its original purposes

Original context of the object? N/A

The significance of the object? this is an annotated copy, which acts as a partial index to Sloane's herbarium

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

Q: details about annotations and their provenance

[this resulted in several parallel animated discussions which were impossible to record; they included palaeographical considerations of hands in books, Sloane's products and their commercial success, the digitisation of materials]

Q: binding of volume

A: Dr Huxley took out other volumes from the collection, which had not been intended to be part of the breakout session, for participants to handle and compare with present volume

Q: collection of stones and how they were kept

A: different part of collection

⁵ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information⁶

Object title: James Petiver (1658-1718), *Hortus Siccus Americannus Jacobi Petiver Vol 2*
= vol 158 of Sloane's herbarium

Object Date: late s. xvii/early s. xviii

Description of object: manuscript, containing:
plants collected by several collectors in the Caribbean and
Central America

Function of object? identical with that of Sloane's herbarium, but Petiver deliberately
collected only specimens of previously unknown plants, therefore novelty an
additional factor

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? ditto

Who used it? initially Petiver himself; Sloane had tried to buy Petiver's collection during
Petiver's lifetime, but failed when he tried to heckle about the price; however,
Sloane acquired the collection after Petiver's death, and thereby became the
another user (together with the group of people who had access to Sloane's
collection)

Original context of the object? see above

The significance of the object? exemplifies documentation of plants according to
principles

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

Q: practicalities of putting volume together

A: participant points out that some specimens and snippets of printed text appear to
have been cut and pasted (i.e. remounted) from another volume, as obvious from paper
residues

Q: activities and role of natural historical societies?

A: expeditions with purposes of collecting, procuring materials for apothecaries, making
a natural historical model of the world in the form of books

Q: do collectors find new *kinds* of plants?

A: yes; they build on older collections, name, define & describe relations between things

⁶ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to
their being part of a self-contained collection

Q: could contemporary apothecaries publish their own works? Did they have time to write them at all, and was it a matter of social status?

A: problem of defining apothecaries – many people apply several labels when describing their occupations; certainly status changed/established with foundation of the society of apothecaries

Object information⁷

Object title: Leonard Plukenet, *A Collection of Plant from the East and West Indies, gathered by Mr Cunningham, Mr Du Bois, Mr Dampier and others with the Indian names to several, and Dr Plukenet's notes and conjectures etc. ...*

= vol 93 in Sloane's herbarium

Object Date: late s. xvii

Description of object: manuscript, i.e. the herbarium of Plukenet, containing plants collected by various collectors

Function of object? similar to that of other herbaria described above; note, however, that Plukenet did not collate his new finds with specimen that were already known to or even catalogued by him, and therefore frequently assigned several names (or wrong names) to plants

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? cp. information on Petiver's herbarium

Who used it? cp. information on Petiver's herbarium

Original context of the object? cp. information on Petiver's herbarium

The significance of the object? cp. information on Petiver's herbarium (but obviously without a claim to novelty innovation; activity of collecting per se more prominent)

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

one member of the audience pointed out connections to Bacon in organising principles of volume

⁷ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information⁸

Object title: Mark Catesby, *Plants gathered in Carolina and the Bahama Islands by Mr Mark Catesby*

= vol 232 in Sloane's herbarium

[this object was discussed very quickly, as we ran out of time; only the following information available:]

Description of object: manuscript containing plant specimens

Function of object? collection for economic reasons (i.e. considerations of which plants would be economically useful in the hinterland of North Carolina)

Original context of the object? private collection

The significance of the object? exemplifies different motivations and dynamics of collections if compared with the volumes above

⁸ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Object information⁹

Object title: Sir Hans Sloane Vegetable Substances (two drawers)

Object Date: Sloane's active time

Description of object: two drawers from Sloane's collection of materia medica, seeds and fruits, curiosities, from all around the world

Function of object? medical use and reference; curiosities for collecting purposes

Where was the object used/viewed/consumed? Sloane's practical, professional contexts

Who used it? Sloane himself

Original context of the object? N/A

The significance of the object? N/A

What questions did the audience ask on this object?

[ran out of time]

Sloane's original catalogue for the collection, the *Vegetable Substances Catalogue*, was mentioned at the very end of the session, followed by a demonstration of the NHM's digital resources relating to the collection

⁹ please note that objects do not come with an acquisition number – Dr Huxley said this was due to their being part of a self-contained collection

Further notes on object discussions

Acquisition of objects

- collectors would either travel in person and collect specimens, which they then processed either at the place of collection or after their return home, or both; or, more frequently, they asked friends or professionals to bring back specimens from their travels; neither Petiver nor Plukenet travelled in person, whereas Sloane's travels took him as far as Jamaica (but he asked for others' collected materials as well and sought to buy complete collections from other collectors)

use of herbaria

- various questions and discussions about use of herbaria showed that they were intended for use, and indeed used, by apothecaries, interested readers who could not travel to see plants in original context, and physicians (for reference)
- it was also pointed out that the manuscripts contain notes on how the native people of the respective countries would have used the plants, and for what purposes, and that there was a considerable interest in that by various groups of people

Ways of making and Knowing

Breakout session Sir Hans Sloane's Apothecary Drawers and Herbaria

1. Hans Sloane "Natural History of Jamaica" 1707, 1725

"A Voyage to the Islands Madera [i.e. Madeira], Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the natural history of the Herbs and Trees, Four-footed Beasts, Fishes, Birds, Insects, Reptiles, &c. of the last of those islands, &c"

Sir Hans Sloane's (1660-1753) accounts and descriptions of fauna and flora, natural phenomena, local customs etc. Published in two parts Volume 1 1707, Volume 2 1725

2. Hans Sloane "Catalogus Plantarum" 1696

"Catalogus Plantarum quæ in Insula Jamaica sponte proveniunt, vel vulgo coluntur, cum earundem synonymis & locis natalibus : adjectis aliis quibusdam quæ in Insulis Maderæ, Barbados, Nieves, & Sancti Christophori nascuntur : Seu Prodrumi Historiæ Naturalis Jamaicæ pars prima"

Sloane's catalogue of his Jamaican plant collections published 1696

3. John Ray Historia Plantarum (1686-93)

The magnum opus of John Ray (1627-1705) "The English Aristotle" in which he describes, names and classifies plants from many parts of the world.

This annotated copy acts as a partial index to Sloane's herbarium

4. Cocoa specimen (*Theobroma cacao* L.)

Collected by Sir Hans Sloane in Jamaica (1687-89). Accompanying drawings by The Reverend Garrett Moore and Everhardus Kickius. In volume 5 of Sloane's herbarium

5. "Anchovy Pear" (*Grias cauliflora* L.)

Collected by Sir Hans Sloane in Jamaica (1687-89). Drawings by The Reverend Garrett Moore and Everhardus Kickius. In volume 7 of Sloane's herbarium

6. James Petiver Hortus Siccus Americanus Jacobi Petiver Vol 2

Plants collected by several collectors in the Caribbean and Central America. In the herbarium of James Petiver (1658-1718) Volume 158 of Sloane's herbarium

7. Leonard Plukenet. A Collection of Plant form the East and West Indies, gathered by Mr Cunningham, Mr Dubois, Mr Dampier and others with the Indian names to several, and Dr Plukenet's notes and conjectures etc

Plants collected by various collectors in the herbarium of Leonard Plukenet (1642-1706)

Volume 93 in Sloane's herbarium

8. Mark Catesby Plants gathered in Carolina and the Bahama Islands by Mr Mark Catesby

Volume 232 in Sloane's herbarium

9. Sir Hans Sloane Vegetable Substances

Two of the 90 drawers from Sir Hans Sloane's collection of *materia medica*, seeds and fruits, curios

a) Typical drawer containing Sloane's boxes of seeds etc

b) Apothecaries Drawer of seeds, pods barks etc

10. Vegetable Substances Catalogue

Sloane's original catalogue for the collection (rebound).