

# A plant's path to publication – Caspar Bauhin (1560–1624) and Johann Theodor de Bry (1561–1623)

Karen Reeds<sup>1</sup> and Davina Benkert<sup>2</sup>

The Basel botanist Caspar Bauhin is justly famed for bringing order to late Renaissance botany. Through his *Phytopinax* (Basel, 1596), *Prodromos Theatri Botanici* (Frankfurt, 1620), and, above all, *Pinax Theatri Botanici* (Basel, 1623), Bauhin prepared the way for his *Theatrum Botanicum*. He envisioned this as a comprehensive, systematic, illustrated account of all six thousand-plus plants known to him. His contemporaries had high regard for these works (Reeds 1991; Benkert 2020); a century later, Linnaeus found them indispensable. Today, they remain our key to pre-Linnaean botanical literature.

Sadly, of *Theatrum's* twelve planned sections, only Liber I was published. Those 700 pages on grasses, edited by Bauhin's son, Johann Caspar Bauhin (1606–1685), finally appeared in 1658, long after Bauhin's death. To illustrate *Theatrum*, Bauhin had to choose: copperplate engravings? Or woodcuts? Two sets of virtually unstudied material in the Universitätsbibliothek Basel (UBB K I 6a, b; K IV 3, B,C. Sackmann 1991) reveal why Bauhin's past experience with floral engravings made him follow the Renaissance herbal tradition of woodcut illustrations instead.

Around 1613–1614, Johann Theodor de Bry (1561–1623) – the successful publisher of Bauhin's anatomical works – had enlisted Bauhin's expertise for a deluxe album of engravings of ornamental flowers: *Florilegium novum* (Oppenheim, 1612, 1614, 1618). Through Bauhin's herbarium specimens and a handful of watercolors and engraver's proofs (Bauhin Herbarium: BAS B15-078B; UBB K IV 3, B,C) depicting *Stramonium Aegyptiacum* (*Datura stramonium* L.), we can follow that plant's path to publication (Fig. 1 a-i) and to appreciate Bauhin's rejection of engravings for *Theatrum*.

Bauhin's herbarium specimens of *Datura sive Stramonium Aegyptiacum* had come from Giovanni Pona of Verona and Prospero Alpino of Padua in 1614 (Fig. 1a). The two flamboyant *Stramonium* watercolors, by an unidentified artist, are labeled in Bauhin's hand (Fig. 1b, c). The copperplate proofs of the *Stramonium* flowers (Fig. 1d, e, f) – possibly engraved by de Bry himself – together with the artist's watercolor of the completely unrelated hyacinth (Fig. 1d) show how de Bry squeezed the images of *Stramonium Aegyptiacum* (Fig. 1e) and *Hyacinthus ramosus* (*Hyacinthus ramosus* L.) (Fig. 1d) into a single *Florilegium* plate (Fig. 1h). These engraved images reached their biggest audience through *Florilegium renovatum et auctum* (Frankfurt, 1641; plates 115, 116),

## Keywords

Florilegium, Herbarium, Renaissance botanical illustration, University of Basel

## Addresses of the authors

<sup>1</sup> Princeton Research Forum and National Coalition of Independent Scholars  
19 Woodland Dr, Princeton NJ 08540/USA

<sup>2</sup> Universität Basel, Petersgraben 35,  
Postfach, 4001 Basel/Switzerland

## Contact

karenreeds@princetonresearchforum.org  
davina.benkert@unibas.ch

## Accepted

21. 3. 2023

## DOI

<https://doi.org/10.12685/bauhinia.1373>



Fig. 1a. Two specimens of *Datura/Stramonium*



Fig. 1b. Watercolor, *Stramonium Aegyptiaca... flore gemino*.



Fig. 1d. Watercolor, *Hyacinthus Ramosus*.



Fig. 1c. Watercolor, *Stramonium Aegyptiaca... flore... purpurascete*.

Fig. 1a–i. A plant's path to publication.

Sources:

Fig. 1a. Bauhin Herbarium, University of Basel: BAS B15-078B.

Fig. 1b–c. UBB K IV 3: B [5] 3r, B [1] 1r.

Fig. 1d. UBB K IV 3: C [3] 2r.

Fig. 1e–f. UBB K IV 3: B [7] 4r, [3] 2r: <https://www.e-manuscripta.ch/bau/content/structure/773810>.

Fig. 1g–i. De Bry/Merian, *Florilegium renovatum et auctum* (1641), plates 116, 115: <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/details/bsb11057823>

published by de Bry's son-in-law and heir, Matthaeus Merian (Fig. 1g, h, i). Because the printing technology for engravings could not accommodate copperplates and typeset text on the same page, only brief labels identified the plants.

But, for Bauhin, combining two unrelated plants in one picture and omitting all commentary was unacceptable. Serious readers needed his images and text side-by-side – possible only with woodcuts and traditional typesetting. Two extraordinary volumes, *De Graminibus*, demonstrate the difficulties of assembling the *Theatrum's* illustrations (Sackmann 1991; UBB K I 6a; 6b). The two Bauhin's painstakingly prepared the unique cut-and-paste draft by first interleaving a copy of *Pinax* with blank sheets, then, onto those, gluing hundreds of manuscript labels, annotations, and clippings of new or recycled woodcuts of plants (Fig. 2). It was Bauhin's – and botany's – misfortune that all that effort came to naught.



Fig. 1e. Engraver's proof, *Stramonium Aegyptiacum... flore gemino*.



Fig. 1g. Title page. De Bry/Merian, *Florilegium renovatum et auctum* (1641).



Fig. 1h. Two images combined onto a single plate: *Stramonium Aegyptiacum flore gemino...* and *Hyacinthus ramosus...* (plate 116).



Fig. 1f. Engraver's proof, *Stramonium Aegyptiacum... flore... purpurascens*.



Fig. 1i. Oversize engraving, [*Stramonium Aegyptiacum*] *flore extrinsecus... purpurascens*... (plate 115).



Fig. 2. Bauhin's *Theatrum Botanicum* as a work-in-progress: interleaved page with attached manuscript labels and woodcuts of the potato, *Solanum tuberosum* *esculentum*, and other *Solanums*, facing *Pinax*, p. 167. UBB K I 6a, *De Graminibus*. Photo by KM Reeds

## References

- Benkert D (2020) Ökonomien Botanischen Wissens: Praktiken der Gelehrsamkeit in Basel um 1600. *Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft* 188: 1–352. Schwabe Verlag, Basel
- Reeds KM (1991) *Botany in Medieval and Renaissance Universities*. Garland, New York. 326 pp.
- Sackmann W (1991) «Pflanzenbilder mit Beziehung zu Caspar Bauhin und seinem Herbar»; «De Graminibus» in *Die Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Basel: Die Handschriften der Signatur K – Naturwissenschaften*. Publikationen der Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Nummer 12. Basel. Basel. [https://ub.unibas.ch/digi/a100/kataloge/mscr/mscr\\_div/BAU\\_5\\_000118184\\_cat.pdf](https://ub.unibas.ch/digi/a100/kataloge/mscr/mscr_div/BAU_5_000118184_cat.pdf)