

Buchbesprechung

1. Sterba, Thomas 2018. Die Süßwasserfische des Karl von Meidinger – Mit naturhistorischen Illustrationen aus vier Jahrhunderten. [Karl von Meidinger's Freshwater Fish – with natural-historical illustrations of four centuries]. – Acta Biohistorica 18, Basilisken-Press, Natur + Text GmbH, Rangsdorf, hardcover 24 × 29.5 cm, 660 pp., 609 figures, in German language, ISBN 978-3-941365-57-5.

Apart from his official occupations as state council secretary for the Archduchy of Lower Austria and later as the state council minute taker for the imperial-royal “Landrechte” of Lower Austria under the Austrian Empire, the Austrian scholar Karl von Meidinger (1750–1820) researched and published works on diverse areas of natural science. Among them the “Icones Piscium Austriae”, published at his own expense between 1785 and 1794, in which 42 species of fish and a number of varieties from the Donau drainage basin are reproduced on 50 hand-coloured folio copper plates, compiled in five leaflets. A small print run, high selling price, and the sparse Latin text prevented a wide circulation of this meanwhile nearly forgotten work.

Thomas Sterba deserves recognition for rediscovering Karl von Meidinger's “Icones Piscium Austriae”, for restoring it in terms of quality, and for presenting it to a broad audience with the book introduced here. The author places Meidinger's fish depictions in a larger context: based on the presentation and evaluation of Meidinger's fish depictions, Sterba draws a comparison with the similarly elaborately illustrated “Oeconomischen Naturgeschichte der Fische Deutschlands” by Meidinger's contemporary, the famous Berlin doctor and ichthyologist Marcus Elieser Bloch (1723–1799), published between 1782 and 1784 as the first part of Bloch's “Allgemeine Naturgeschichte der Fische”. Furthermore, Sterba describes the historic development of illustrations and knowledge regarding the fish shown in Karl von Meidinger's plate work by stretching the time scale from the early 16th century up to the beginning of the 20th and includes fish depictions from over 80 further authors in his critical

evaluation, wherein, alongside zoological and artistic perspectives, he also takes into account general aspects concerning the relationship between man and fish.

The main body of the work, the historical comparison of Meidinger's fish plates, is preceded by an introduction, the chapters “The Ichthyological Illustration”, “The Fish Phenomenon and its Taxonomy”, Karl von Meidinger's biography etc., and a guide to using the book. The appendices include an index of figures, a bibliography, two species registers – in German and Latin –, and an index of persons. The Basilisken-Press at the Natur + Text publishing house in Rangsdorf must be credited for enabling such an extensive subject to be brought to life. With this it has demonstrated again their skill for such projects.

Who needs a book like this? Well, anyone who takes a more profound interest in the multitudinous relationships between man and fish and their identification, as for example ichthyologists, fishery experts, faunists, ecologists and hydrologists focusing specifically on central European fresh water fauna, as well as historians of science who desire to follow the development of natural science illustrations or zoological research using fish as an example and also relevant universities and colleges, libraries, and natural history museums, to whom the acquisition of this book is recommended.

Some little misinterpretations were noticed. On page 49: not the Eurasian ruffe is the type species of the genus *Gymnocephalus* but the schraetzer, or striped ruffe. The taxa regarding the white bream mentioned on page 95 (*Cyprinus buggenhagii* Bloch, *Abramis leuckartii* Heckel and *Abramis heckelii* Selys-Longchamps) each refer to bastards of common roach and common bream but not to the white bream. And *Leuciscus heckelii* Nordmann used as a synonym for common roach on pages 315/316 is a valid species as *Rutilus heckelii*. These are just a couple of critical comments in order to, alongside the appraisal of a great literary feat, likewise fulfil the obligations of a reviewer.

Hans-Joachim Paepke