

Book review: Proof engravings prepared for Sir Joseph Banks from plant drawings made by Sydney Parkinson on James Cook's Endeavour voyage

Hans Walter Lack¹

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* characterizes a proof sheet as a “sheet printed from a forme of type or printing plate for the purpose of examination and correction before being finally printed off for use”. Ephemeral by nature, proof sheets are rarely preserved after the printing process has been completed and are of relevance only for specialists interested in the details of print production. However, in cases where the actual publication was delayed or did not happen at all, proof sheets can testify the stage the project had reached before it came to a temporary stop or was given up entirely. This is the background for a slim volume that deals with the proof engravings prepared for Sir Joseph Banks from plant drawings made by Sydney Parkinson during James Cook's first circumnavigation of the globe on the *Endeavour*. These black *avant-la-lettre* pulls, i.e. pulls taken from an incompletely engraved plate with text and numbers still lacking, were produced in Banks's house in London by 1781. The final publication took place in the form of 738 engravings printed *à la poupée*, i.e. in a technique for making colour prints by applying different ink colours to a single printing plate, in 1988–1990 in an exclusive edition of 100 (with ten more not intended for sale). It appears that three sets of proof engravings were taken, of which two (both incomplete) survive in the Natural History Museum in London and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, while a fragment previously owned by Linnaeus the Younger and comprising 45 sheets (plus a loose proof engraving of *Banksia serrata* L. f.) is kept in the library of the Linnean Society of London. Further fragmentary sets were sent to Berlin (shelf mark 2° Ma 8575 Rara of Staatsbibliothek, but lost at an evacuation site in Saxony in 1945), Saint Petersburg (not traced, but probably in the Archive of the Russian Academy of

Sciences, Saint Petersburg) and possibly elsewhere. By good chance another set appeared on the Swedish art market in 2021, comprising 32 proof engravings often carrying in ink the name of the engraver and the plant (frequently misread). It was acquired by Peter Crossing, Sydney, and is the subject of this book.

In the foreword the new owner rightly states that twenty of his proof engravings are unique, i.e. not known from the other sets, and important for science as the first prints of several species native in Australia and elsewhere, one of them apparently the sole basis for the name *Banksia integrifolia* L. f. The foreword is followed by an introduction (pp. 6–18), where David Mabberley explains the complexity of Banks's aborted project to publish the illustrations by Parkinson, who had died off Java toward the end of the voyage, and presents evidence that Baron Cla(e)s Alströmer was the former owner of the set. Previously unknown details refer to the early idea of Banks to have the whole project published in Göttingen (p. 7) and Carl Thunberg's contribution to Linnaeus the Younger's *Supplementum plantarum* (p. 13). The introduction is illustrated with carefully selected portraits of Banks, Solander (including the two famous cartoons of them as the botanic macaroni and the simpling macaroni), Parkinson, Linnaeus the Younger, Alströmer, Pallas and, surprisingly, the lithographer Morgan.

The meat of the book is the first reproduction of the 32 proof engravings with full commentary by Mabberley, i.e. scientific and English plant names, historical information, data on distribution, notes and references. The bibliography (pp. 84–85) and the index (p. 86) are placed at the end of the volume.

The 32 engravings are the work of the engravers Daniel Mackenzie, Gerard Sibelius, Gabriel Smith and

¹ Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, Königin-Luise-Straße 6–8, 14195 Berlin, Germany. Author for correspondence: Hans Walter Lack, h.w.lack@bo.berlin

Charles White and represent plants collected from all the territories of *Endeavour's* landfalls, save Madeira and Java. This means that Parkinson's pertinent drawings were prepared in Brazil (three), Chile (nine), Tahiti (two, in the Society Islands), New Zealand (six) and Australia (twelve, in what is now New South Wales and Queensland). Among the species represented are ferns (six), umbellifers (six) and *Proteaceae* (five). The arrangement of the proof engravings reproduced in this book follows neither taxonomy nor the chronology of the landfalls but the pre-existing sequence of the now disbound volume, evident from the early ink numbers starting with *Banksia integrifolia* L. f. (1), *B. serrata* L. f. (2), *Ribes magellanicum* Poir. (16). All this is further proof of the fragmentary nature of the set and suggests that it had once been larger.

The commentaries to the respective species follow the scheme established earlier (Mabberley 2017). As a rule, these texts are new, but in a few cases, e.g. for *Syzygium suborbiculare* (Benth.) T. G. Hartey & L. M. Perry, they are only slightly modified from the entries published in the earlier work. Importantly, the commentaries (always placed on the left-hand page) include colour photographs of living specimens of the species, which is shown on the opposite page as a reproduction of the black proof engravings. References to the pertinent catalogues (Diment & al. 1984, 1987) as well as to the series of photolithographs prepared by Robert Morgan (Anonymous 1900–1905) are also included. Of the plethora of data assembled in the commentary a single example is mentioned here as an appetizer: *Azorella polaris* (Hombr. & Jacquinot) G. M. Plunkett & A. N. Nicolas, used as an antiscorbutic by early European mariners, was part of the diet of the surviving crew of the wreck *Dundonald* in 1907 who subsisted on the uninhabited Disappointment

Island (west of Auckland Island, New Zealand) for seven months until rescued.

Printed on good-quality paper and solidly bound this most welcome book offers something quite unique – a peephole into the studio of the engravers and printers who produced visual evidence for the plants encountered during the great voyage Banks and Solander undertook in 1768–1771. In short, this is a must-have for the connoisseur of botanical illustration.

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