

BOOK REVIEWS

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INSECTORUM SIVE MINIMORUM ANIMALIUM THEATRUM: THE BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS, by George Thomson. Published in 2000. Page size 7 3/4 by 11 1/2 inches. (2) + 66 pages, with numerous line illustrations and two colored plates pasted in. Hard covers, with dust wrapper. No ISBN, price £65 (approx \$100). Limited edition, privately published by the author, and obtainable from Dr George Thomson, 2 Ravenhill, Lochmaben, Lockerbie, Scotland DG11 1QZ, UK.

Despite its many shortcomings, Thomas Moufet's *Insectorum Theatrum* is important as being the first entomology book to have been published in Britain, appearing in its original Latin version in 1634, and in English translation in 1658 although the original manuscript dates from the late 16th century. That the work is effectively the product of several authors, including Gesner, Penny and Wotton, is well known and has been widely discussed before, and we are fortunate that the original manuscript of the book is still extant in the British Library.

Thomson has here attempted to give an introduction to the book and its history, with a particular study of the adult Lepidoptera, which form only a small part of the whole *Theatrum*. He begins with a section on the manuscript and its origins, an account of Thomas Moufet and the other contributors, and a brief note on the illustrations. These are followed by the text of the English translation of the "Butterflies" chapter of the book, with the illustrations inserted in their correct places. Thomson has made useful comparisons of the mostly rather crude published woodcuts with the often very accurate and beautiful original paintings that are pasted in the margins of the manuscript. Each illustration is annotated with its modern scientific and common name, with a note on its occurrence in the original manuscript, the Latin text and the English text. After a brief bibliography a facsimile of the Latin version of the "De Papilionibus" chapter occupies 22 pages, and the book ends with a note about a butterfly specimen found between two pages of the original manuscript.

Although Thomson mentions that two chapters of Moufet's book contain many descriptions of lepidopterous larvae he does not include them, which is a sad omission as many could have been easily identified. He rightly states that the adults are not given names, but omits to state that many of the larvae *are* named, and they provide a useful insight into the origins of scientific names later given to some species.

The 82 forms described in the original work comprise 56 species, consisting of 30 moths, 25 butterflies, and one unidentifiable taxon. Five of the species are not found in Britain, although four of these occur elsewhere in Europe. The exception is the well-known North American *Papilio glaucus*, and a colored reproduction of John White's watercolour painting of this species forms a frontispiece to Thomson's book.

The historical sections of this book are all based on secondary sources, such as Lisney (1960) and Raven (1947), and, excellent though these books are, they are no substitute for more detailed

works such as the study of Thomas Penny by W. Gardner (1930. A Lancashire entomologist in the time of Queen Elizabeth. *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Entomological Society* 1931: 31–52) which is not mentioned here. Thomson's paraphrasing of secondary sources has led to ludicrous errors, such as stating that Moufet "accompanied Peregrine Bertie and Lord Willoughby to Elsinore" without realizing that these "two" men are one and the same!

Having described Rowland's English translation (published by Topsell) of the *Theatrum* as "somewhat inaccurate" and "rather poor" we might take this to mean that Thomson could have improved on it; however, he gives the translation in full without comment and we have to assume that his critical remarks on Topsell's edition are merely quoted from other sources.

This is a privately published book of 500 copies, well printed on good quality paper in an attractive binding, and it is inevitable that such a limited edition book will sell for a high price. However, readers expect a certain quality of content for their money and unfortunately this book falls into the familiar trap of many privately printed works in that it would clearly have benefited from professional editing. There are too many errors to list in this review; some are minor typographical mistakes but others cannot be so easily ignored and are very prominent. For example, the section on Theodore Mayerne bears the heading "Sir Thomas Mayerne", a name by which he was never known (this even appears in the contents list!). The two pages outlining Thomas Moufet's life have at least nine mistakes, and even the transcription of the Topsell translation contains a great many errors, with several misspelled scientific names (*Aglais* is spelled three different ways) and even the wrong authorship of one species (*Euphydryas aurinia*, mis-spelled *aurinea*, is attributed to Linnaeus rather than Rottentburg). Altogether I have noted over 60 errors in 42 pages of text (not including the facsimile section) which is unacceptably high in such an expensive book.

The final brief note on a butterfly found between the pages of the manuscript is accompanied by a colored illustration of the specimen. Thomson speculates on the possibility that the specimen may be contemporary with the manuscript, and he makes comparisons of the style of preservation with some known early collections such as that of James Petiver. Unfortunately he seems to be unaware of the published work on these collections, e.g., M. Fitton and P. Gilbert (1994. Insect collections. In A. MacGregor (ed.), *Sir Hans Sloane*. British Museum Press, London: pp. 112–122).

When I first picked up this book I had high hopes that it would be an original and stimulating work, but sadly those hopes have not been fulfilled. If the author had confined himself to describing the Lepidoptera in the *Theatrum* then this book would have had some value, but even then more care should have been taken with accuracy, and the inclusion of the larval chapters would have enhanced it considerably. But as a supposed historical study it has so many errors that it will be a disappointment to the expert, and potentially misleading to the novice.

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