

# Dodonæus in Japan

Review >  
Japan

Rembertus Dodonæus, the Latin name of Rembert Dodoens (1517-1585), was a famous herbalist, born in Mechelen, in what is now Belgium, and at the time, the Spanish Netherlands. What is remarkable about him as a scientist is that his work had a significant impact in Japan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dodonæus' herbal, which influenced botanical developments in Japan, was first published as *Cruydeboeck* in 1554 and was reprinted as *Cruydt-boeck* in 1618 and 1644. In the introduction to *Dodonæus in Japan*, Vande Walle defines its purpose as 'the study of the science of translation and the translation of science...it endeavours to trace how the Western herbal tradition, notably the herbal by Dodonæus, was received into the intellectual discourse of Tokugawa Japan, and to demonstrate how it contributed to the articulation of modern episteme, the scientific mind' (p.23).

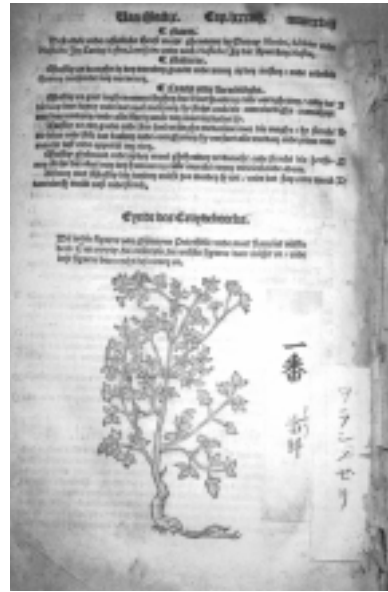
By Margarita Winkel

The essays in the book, divided into four parts each consisting of four essays, take Dodonæus' herbal as the point of departure for explorations into a wide range of topics concerning the introduction, translation, and impact of European science in Early Modern, or Tokugawa, Japan (1600-1868). The first part of the book situates Dodonæus in the European context through an assessment of his contribution to modern science. The other three parts discuss the translation and indigenization of Dodonæus' herbal in the wider context of the development of the modern scientific mind in Japan. It is these parts that concern us here.

The essays in part two, 'Translation and the Articulation of the Modern Episteme in Japan', discuss translation as part of a creative process of adoption and adaptation into a new environment, a process that inevitably requires a creative reinterpretation of the original. Michael Schiltz, in his essay on the essential meaning of translation, problematizes the relation between translation and notions of society and territorial boundaries. Vande Walle traces the history of the translation of European scientific concepts in Japan and China, which begun with Jesuit translations in the seventeenth century, against a back-

ground of existing linguistic traditions in these countries. In an essay on the artistic impact of the Western linear perspective in Japan, Shigemi Inaga follows the transformation of this European linear perspective and reveals how this painting principle was not passively adopted, but was reinterpreted to fit into existing Japanese artistic traditions. Kazuhiko Kasaya views the translation of Dodonæus' book from a political perspective. He places it against the background of the official shogunal policies promoting the local production of medicinal herbs.

The essays of part three, 'Japanese Renditions of Dodonæus', trace the effects of these translations further into the actual adoption and impact of these works in Japan. Kiyoshi Matsuda outlines the history of the impact of the aforementioned *Cruydt-boeck* in Japan from its first possible use in a Japanese herbal in 1709 to its complete translation in 1823. Shirahata traces the significance of this book in the transition of a medicinal interest in herbs to a more fully-fledged botanical attitude in Japan. As a consequence, botanical gardens came to be established as centres for horticultural experiments. Timon Screech describes the considerable visual impact of the lavishly and ingeniously illustrated herbals and other Western botanical, zoological, and med-



Taken from Appendix 7 of the book under review.

Page from the first Dutch edition of Dodoens' *Cruydeboeck* (1554), reproduced from the personal copy of Yamamoto Bōyō, presently in the possession of Yamamoto Dokushoshitsu, Kyoto.

ical books that Japan imported. Haga Tōru focuses on the legacy of a remarkable and controversial pioneer in Japanese herbology, Hiraga Gennai (1728-1779), who attempted to unsettle traditional China-oriented herbology in Japan by drawing attention to European works, in particular to Dodonæus' book *Yōzaburō*.

The essays of the fourth and final part of the book, 'The Rangaku Con-

text', develop the theme of the introduction of European science into Japan. Two essays focus on the close relation between herbology and medical science. Harmen Beukers discusses the role of Deshima surgeons in introducing Western medical science and *materia medica* into Japan, and Frederik Cryns presents the Japanese translation and adaptation of the mechanical concept of the human body, developed by the Dutch medical teacher Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), as an exercise in the translation of concepts. The other two essays in this part extend the scope of this book to the role played by non-Dutch European science and scientists. Although foreign science practices were known as 'Dutch Studies' (*rangaku*) because they were introduced through the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the VOC employed many who came from elsewhere in Europe. Moreover many of the 'Dutch' books brought to Japan were translations from other European languages, notably French, German, and English. Taking the work of the French surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) as an example, Gabor Lukacs' essay gives an overview of the important influence of French science in Tokugawa Japan. In her essay on a prominent non-Dutch VOC employee, the Swedish botanist Carl Peter Thunberg (1743-1828),

Catharina Blomberg discusses Thunberg's observations on Japan during his stay in 1775-1776.

This book is a good example of fruitful Japanese-European academic cooperation. Five of the authors are from Japan, the others from Europe. All have contributed well-informed essays drawing on their specific expertise in relation to this topic. The only thing one might have wished for would be a conclusion evaluating and synthesizing the new insights presented in this book. The book itself is well designed, uniform in style, and is conveniently presented. More than one hundred illustrations give a good insight into the depictions of herbs and other scientific illustrations in European scientific books, as well as their transformed, Japanese appearance. They are a joy to the eye, but also an absolute necessity in understanding the significant visual impact of scientific illustrations at that time. The Japanese characters for names and terms appear in the margin, adjacent to the text. The book is meticulously edited, for which the editors and their assistant deserve all credit. <

- Vande Walle, W.F. and Kazuhiko Kasaya (eds), *Dodonæus in Japan. Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*, Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies and Leuven University Press (2001), pp. 383, ISBN 905867179-8

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