

Summary

LINNAEUS'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH
PEHR OSBECK 1750–1753

By

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Early in June 1752 Linnaeus wrote to his friend Abraham Bäck that he had finished his manuscript of the *Species Plantarum*. On 26 June Pehr Osbeck and Olof Torén returned from their voyages to China with rich collections of natural objects among which many hitherto unknown plants. The present correspondence illustrates how Linnaeus incorporated the new material in his book working quickly but not always, however, with the utmost accuracy.

Also, the letters give a vivid impression of the difficult working conditions for collectors travelling onboard the Swedish merchant ships. It was hard work indeed, and the accommodations for the scientists were bad. Osbeck and Torén, appointed ship's chaplains, were able only to spend their spare time on collecting and preparing the material. In addition, the Chinese authorities would not allow them to pass beyond the restricted areas around Canton to which the Europeans had access.

To botanists the letters can afford a help in the difficult task of locating the types of Linnaean species and, through the illustration of Linnaeus's methods, add to their knowledge of the making of the *Species Plantarum*, the fundamental work in botanical nomenclature. To everyone they will add new facets to the understanding of the conditions for work for the explorers of the 18th century.

The letters of the present edition are: first Osbeck's copy of Linnaeus's recommendation for his employment in the Swedish East India Company, then two letters from Linnaeus with congratulations and advice for the journey, next two letters from Spain. Apart from the last one, no. 34, the remaining letters are written in Gothenburg (Osbeck) and Uppsala (Linnaeus), the first of them, no. 5, on the day after Osbeck's return from China. Along with the letters were sent natural objects and descriptions, etc., the latter kept in the Linnean Society of London, registered as Other Items. The letters 5–31 are marked on the calendar, p. 138, where also some missing letters are indicated. The arrows at the right mark receipt of or answer to the letters in question.

The contents of the letters fall in two parts: the scientific results of the voyage and Osbeck's personal matters. The main part of natural objects under discussion are plants while only a few animals are described and minerals hardly ever. The descriptions of the life and accommodations of the Chinese, which play a considerable part in Osbeck's printed account of the voyage (Osbeck 1757), are not often included in the letters.

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