

Virtual Museum of the History of Mineralogy (VMHM)

Newsletter 2019/1 (August 2019)

<http://www.mineralogy.eu>

Among the most recent and most interesting additions to the VMHM book collection are three exceptional works written by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Plinius Secundus and Christiaan Huygens; all three are important books desirable for their rarity and their exceptional content.

The first two books published in 1492 and 1497/98 are incunabula i.e. by definition books published in Europe before 1501 (an arbitrarily selected end date) and both works are remarkable encyclopedias at their time of writing. It may be of interest to point out that two other incunabula in the collection of the VMHM were described previously : [Albertus Magnus](#) (1476) and [Hortus Sanitatis](#) (1497). The third newly introduced book in our virtual museum was published in 1690 and is a landmark of science.

The superb and rare [De Proprietatibus Rerum](#) by Bartholomaeus Anglicus (English theologian; ca 1190-1250) is the first important ordered encyclopedia written in the Middle Ages and covers all sciences of the time. The 19 books of Bartholomeus' text may be classified in four distinct sections: concerning God (books 1-3); the life of man (4-7); the universe (8-18); and, miscellanea (19). Metals, stones and minerals are treated in the 16th book including considerations on precious and semiprecious stones, sand, coal, bezoar stones, etc. *De Proprietatibus Rerum* was the most popular encyclopaedia of the thirteenth century (see Schuh).

Our [Plinii Secundi Naturae Historiarum Libri XXXVII](#) is a scarce edition published 1497/98. The editor, Hermolao Barbaro, was an Italian humanist of the Renaissance ; he edited and translated many classical works. The *Historiae Naturalis* of Plinius Secundus (ca 23 A.D. – 27 August 79 A.D. as he died during the first recorded eruption of Mount Vesuvius) may be considered the very first encyclopedia of knowledge and the author rightly claimed that his work of compilation and personal observations was a novel one. The complete treatise consists of 37 books; the final four books concerned minerals and geological processes, the last of which deals with precious stones.

The [Traité de la lumière](#), of Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) is a scientifically very important and rare book. The author considered light as an undulatory movement of ether. Based on his wave theory, he was able to deduce the laws of reflection and refraction and even to explain the birefringence in calcite as observed in Iceland spar. Due to the great reputation of Newton who adhered to his corpuscular theory of propagation, supporters of the wave theory received a great deal of resistance from many of their fellow scientists. It would take more than 100 years before the undulatory theory was accepted when Thomas Young used it to explain optical interference.

We wish you happy holidays !

Claude Hootelé, Paul Tambuyser