

BOOK REVIEW

## Matthew Wale, *Making Entomologists: How Periodicals Shaped Scientific Communities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022. Pp. 252. ISBN 978-0-8229-4751-6. \$55.00 (hardcover).

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Wale's book is a very welcome addition to the burgeoning field of the history of entomology. It does the essential job of filling gaps in the social history of entomology in Britain during the nineteenth century, an area in which only one book exists so far, John Clark's *Bugs and the Victorians* (2009), which, although fundamental to the field and quite broad, is, naturally, not comprehensive.

Wale approaches the Victorian entomological community through its periodicals. Borrowing Benedict Anderson's term 'imagined communities', Wale argues that entomological periodicals were a crucial site where the entomological community imagined and constructed itself. Eschewing the traditional narrative of professionalization, Wale argues that being professional was not what contemporary practitioners really cared about. Instead, he suggests the notions of expertise and of 'being scientific' as far more crucial for how entomologists viewed themselves, especially as they fashioned their personal identities and communities. It has become clearer that the traditional narrative of professionalization is too simplistic and sometimes just wrong, and entomology is a particularly interesting field in which to study this as it has retained a strong natural-history tradition well into the twentieth century. As Wale notes, 'Professionalization is best approached as one among a number of strategies adopted by practitioners in the pursuit of scientific status' (p. 12).

The book is divided into four chronological chapters, each named for a scientific practice: observing, corresponding, collecting and classifying. In these chapters, Wale follows the development of entomological periodicals between the 1820s and the 1890s, and through them the development of the British entomological community.

Wale starts with Henry Tibbats Stainton's establishment of the *Entomologist's Weekly Intelligencer* in 1856. This journal was meant to be both popular and learned, connecting individuals to a larger community of different classes, actively enabling the participation of working-class men. At this time, British gentility was being redefined as based on character rather than breeding, a change of concept with which some of the *Intelligencer's* participants engaged – at this point, collecting was the main practice of entomology, and by preparing specimens and exchanging them 'properly' and in the 'right' way, these lower-class entomologists used the *Intelligencer* to fashion themselves as gentlemen.

However, Stainton, who had previously encouraged the participation of all in his *Intelligencer*, dramatically ended its publication claiming the 'increasing evil of periodicals'

(p. 137). This was a harbinger of significant changes that occurred in the 1860s: the middle classes, having grown in size and confidence, had appropriated natural history as part of their urban civic culture. They made up a large audience, and natural-history periodicals and books were increasingly marketed to them. Meanwhile, Stainton and several other entomologists wished to reform British entomology and make it respectable, as well as to establish themselves as authoritative and – most of all – scientific. For them, this meant shifting the focus from collecting to classification and systematic work as the main, and most crucial – as well as respectable – entomological practices. Collecting for its own sake was frowned upon: it should only be a means to an end. For this aim, they founded, in 1864, the *Entomologist's Monthly Magazine*. From the start, it was their conscious decision to take the magazine in a different direction from the *Intelligencer* – they did not include light matter, or lists for exchanges, instead opting for serious articles on classification. The *Monthly Magazine's* editors did not distinguish between amateurs and professionals, but rather between ‘mere’ collectors and ‘scientific’ entomologists (that is, those who correctly classified and systematized). Not only that, but Wale argues that they posited the amateur as the ideal scientific practitioner in a clear act of amateurization.

Wale then makes an interesting comparison with another entomological periodical established in the same year, 1864 – the *Entomologist*, edited by Edward Newman. Very much reminiscent of the *Intelligencer's* style, the *Entomologist* was intended for an audience of collectors. This juxtaposition usefully illustrates not only that what constituted an ‘entomologist’ was being contested at this time, but also that periodicals played a large part in this process as the stage where the community’s shared values were negotiated.

Finally, Wale jumps to 1890, and the first publication of James William Tutt’s *Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation*. Tutt was motivated by his dissatisfaction with the two previously discussed periodicals because of their focus on descriptive work. By this point, systematics, which seemed so scientific in the 1860s, became old-fashioned and a sign of a narrow mind. The entomological community (or at least a non-negligible part of it) had finally internalized Darwin’s theory, and the new journal mirrored a shift in entomologists’ interests towards insect habits, physiology and, most of all, evolution. The most interesting part, though, is what has not changed – like the *Monthly Magazine* before it, the *Record* was also a tool of amateurization, and its actual structure was, in fact, not all that different from the *Intelligencer's*, being very much based on correspondence.

One of the most important contributions in Wale’s book is his argument that in the Victorian British entomological community it was not the distinction between amateur and professional which was meaningful, but that between ‘mere’ collectors and ‘scientific’ entomologists, however they were defined at different points in time. As a result, and as Wale shows, self-fashioning and the construction of imagined communities offer historians a much more satisfying way of exploring Victorian entomology than tracking its professionalization. In his discussion of class, Wale’s book also makes a strong case for social categories having been more influential within the entomological community than possessing a professional status. His analysis of the marginalization of working-class practitioners resulting from the middle-class takeover of natural history in mid-century, combined with the reformation of the entomological community by proponents of amateurization, is particularly illuminating.