Review of Poskett, J. (2019) Materials of the mind: phrenology, race, and the global history of science, 1815–1920

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Dietz also pays special attention to the publication history of Linnaeus's works as a collaboration with coauthors and contributors. Translators of the works were also effectively coauthors, as they did not simply translate the works into other languages. Rather, they actualized, modulated, and localized Linnaeus's works (p. 151). After his death, these translators even changed his texts significantly in some cases, creating a "Textmontage" (p. 147). Dietz is also keenly attentive to communication practices, picking up on the typography and illustrations as well as publishers' catalogues and stock lists. She describes the "Frage-Antwort-Technik" as decidedly the "zentrales Verfahren der Informationsbeschaffung" (p. 77) and the "Fehlermeldung" as "Informationstechnik" (p. 80). Through these discussions, she formulates the Foucaultesque question "Was ist ein botanischer Autor?" and concludes that it cannot be answered (p. 173).

A closing comparison between the development of Linnaean botany and the Linux operating system seems weak and poorly integrated with the rest of the book's comprehensive historical discussions.

Exchanges between botanists of the eighteenth century have already been dealt with by several historians of science (see, e.g., Staffan Müller-Wille, *Botanik und weltweiter Handel: Zur Begründung eines natürlichen Systems der Pflanzen durch Carl von Linné (1707–78)* [VWB, 1999]; and Regina Dauser *et al.*, eds., *Wissen im Netz: Botaniktransfer in europäischen Korrespondenznetzen des 18. Jahrhunderts* [Akademie, 2008]). So Dietz's work cannot be considered novel. Nevertheless, the focus on the actual processes of these collaborations and exchanges, as well as the actors discussed, is certainly illuminating. The fact that Dietz's monograph focuses only on the botany of Linnaeus and his coauthors—but not on zoology and mineralogy—represents a typically discipline-oriented view more evocative of the ways in which scientists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries work. Linnaeus's own world worked differently. His project was to establish a complete taxonomic system of the whole of nature. To miss that and focus exclusively on his botany is not only a methodological flaw; it misjudges the project, especially the scale of abstraction Linnaeus and his scientific colleagues had to struggle with.

Yvonne Maaß

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James Poskett. *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815–1920.* 373 pp., notes, bibl., index. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2019. $45 (cloth); ISBN 9780226626758.

Materials of the Mind is a book about the global history of phrenology, the controversial nineteenth-century science that claimed it could predict the character of an individual, and that of different "races," based on the shape of the skull. James Poskett has taken two new approaches in the history of science—a focus on materials and a global approach—and successfully applied them to phrenology: the book moves the historiography of phrenology in a new direction and places the discipline of phrenology firmly in the nineteenth-century context of globalization, imperialism, and racial thinking.

The main claim of the book is that the history of the material culture of phrenology is inextricable from the history of its concepts. Following the skulls, busts, letters, and photographs of phrenology, according to

Poskett, also means tracing the history of how phrenologists conceptualized themselves and the world. This claim is insightful when juxtaposed against the earlier historiography of phrenology (basically a focus on the influence of the social on phrenology and an emphasis on its quality of "reform science") but works less well at the level of the chapters. That a chapter about letters (Ch. 4) is also about the movement of ideas borders on the obvious, and that Inuit burial rituals encountered when collecting skulls influenced ideas about Inuit character (Ch. 1) is also not very surprising, as phrenologists were happy to use every bit of information that confirmed their hypotheses (but were equally happy to dismiss contradictory evidence).

What the book does best is connecting all sorts of places where phrenology was practiced. "Global" in this book still means mostly the United States and the British imperial world, but there are also fascinating sections about Indian nationalists who admired phrenology and a section in the epilogue—which I wish had been an entire chapter—about enthusiasm for phrenology in China in the early twentieth century.

Each of Poskett's six chapters deals with objects from the material world of phrenology: skulls, casts, books, letters, periodicals, and photographs. The best chapter for historians of science, partly published earlier as an article in *History of Science*, is the one about books; it is a must read for anyone working on the history of discipline formation. It charts, sometimes hilariously, attempts by phrenologists and ethnologists (mainly James Cowles Prichard) to incorporate Samuel George Morton's new book *Crania Americana*, and the visual language of skulls in general, into the new disciplines they propagated. Prichard used the lithographic plates to claim it as an ethnological book at the 1839 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The phrenologist George Combe, on the other hand, went out of his way to make sure the book was received as a phrenological book by actively managing its reception. Morton's book is now usually read as a classic in the history anthropology, but Poskett shows that it belongs in histories of phrenology too.

The other chapters discuss fascinating stories about skull collecting in Ceylon, the Arctic, and Egypt (Ch. 1); the changing meaning of the bust of the Haitian slave Eustache Belin (Ch. 2); George Combe's letters (Ch. 4) about topics as diverse as prison discipline in the Pacific and the foundation of a phrenological school on the banks of the Hooghly River in India; the publishing empire of the American Fowler family (Ch. 5); and the lives of photographs from the 1873 book *A Phrenologist amongst the Todas* (Ch. 6).

Poskett is right to mention the uneven circulation of objects: the failure of phrenology to find a foothold in some regions and the ships that sank with important phrenological works on board. Adding to this, *Materials of the Mind* made clear to me that there were really two kinds of phrenology: on the one hand, the kind that was keen to insist on individual improvement and the possibility of reform; on the other hand, the kind more akin to anthropology, which defined the minds of different "races" and left very little room for the "improvement" of non-Europeans. This unevenness would have merited special mention.

Overall, this book shows that phrenology is an excellent discipline to think with. Poskett's book brings the historiography of phrenology up to date with the latest insights and paints a rich and varied picture of how phrenology worked.

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