

## Jean-Jacques Rousseau's copy of Albrecht von Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768)

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**ABSTRACT:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau sold his botanical texts to Daniel Malthus (father of Thomas Malthus) about 1775. Two of these are now in the Old Library, Jesus College, Cambridge, but all the rest have long been thought lost. However, a copy of Albrecht von Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768) in The Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, London, bears Rousseau's name and seems to have been annotated by him. The volume contains the bookplate of Jane Dalton, a cousin to whom Malthus willed "all [his] Botanical Books in which the Name of Rousseau is written". Haller was well-known to Rousseau, who, while in exile in the Swiss Jura (1763–1765), studied under one of Haller's collaborators, Abraham Gagnebin. Rousseau cited Haller's entry 762 when describing a species of *Seseli* to the Duchess of Portland.

**KEY WORDS:** *Seseli* – Swiss botany – Abraham Gagnebin – Daniel Malthus – John Ray – Sauvages de la Croix – Linnaeus – Duchess of Portland.

The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who studied botany for 15 years, collected a substantial library of botanical texts during the 1760s; of these texts, all but two (discussed below) have long been thought lost.<sup>1</sup> When he sold his library in 1767, Rousseau retained his botanical texts (Leigh, 1978: 198). However, he eventually disposed of them when he despaired of making any further progress in botany.<sup>2</sup> In *Dialogues* Rousseau (see Gagnebin and Raymond, 1959: 832, n.\*\*\*) alluded to the sale of his botany books and miniature herbaria<sup>3</sup> to Daniel Malthus (1730–1800)<sup>4</sup>, who corresponded and botanized with Rousseau in England in 1766–1768. This sale probably occurred around 1775, when Malthus visited Paris (Gagnebin and Raymond, 1959: 1687, n. 5; 1969: 1888, n. 1)<sup>5</sup>, for in a letter dated 11 July 1776 Rousseau informed the Duchess of Portland that "Je me suis défait de tous mes livres de botanique ... [I no longer have any of my botany books]" (Leigh, 1982: 77; Cook, 2000: 248).

Daniel Malthus in turn bequeathed "all [his] Botanical Books in which the Name of Rousseau is written" to his first cousin and orphaned ward, Jane Dalton (c. 1742<sup>6</sup>–1817) (Pullen, 1983: lx). Malthus described her, in a letter to Rousseau, as his "small cousin, who is a botanist to the death", and who "has aided me in my [botanical] researches" (Leigh, 1980a: 54). The fate of Rousseau's books bequeathed to Dalton is equally obscure: while Rousseau's copies of the third edition Ray's *Synopsis* (1724) and Sauvages' *Methodus foliorum* (1751) (Cheyron, 1986) were donated in 1949 with the Malthus library to Jesus College, Cambridge (Leigh, 1977: 113 n. (c)), "some or all of [Jane Dalton's] inherited botany books apparently went elsewhere" (Pullen, 1983: lx). Jane Dalton bequeathed her books to her brother Henry.<sup>7</sup>

I have identified another very important book in the Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, London, that seems to have come from Rousseau's collection: Albrecht von Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768) (hereafter referred to as *Historia stirpium*). If my theory is right, this is the only book known to be extant from

# STIRPIUM INDIGENARUM HELVETIÆ INCHOATA.

TOMUS PRIMUS.

PLANTÆ FLORE COMPOSITO. DIDYNAMIÆ. PAPILIONACEÆ.  
CRUCIATÆ. MEIOSTEMONES. ISOSTEMONES.

DIPLOSTEMONES.

A. J. J.

Rousseau

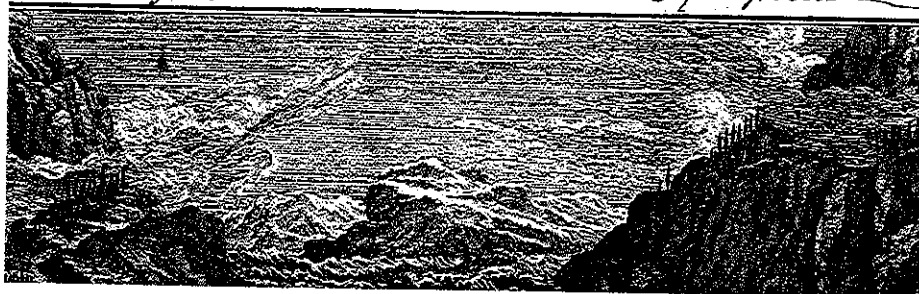


Figure 1. Detail of the title-page of Rousseau's copy of Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768), showing Rousseau's name (by courtesy of the Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, London).

among those willed by Daniel Malthus to his cousin, Jane Dalton. The title-page bears the notation (Figure 1) "A. J. J. Rousseau" indicating that the book was a gift either to or from Rousseau, depending on whether one construes "A" as French<sup>8</sup>, meaning "to", or as a Latin abbreviation meaning "from", and Jane Dalton's bookplate appears on front endpaper (Figure 2). More than a hundred synonymies to Linnaean names have been written in what appears to be Rousseau's hand throughout the volume (Figure 3). Given that Rousseau's botanical correspondence is in French, I believe it reasonable to presume that the dedication is also in French; this would mean that the book was given to Rousseau, probably by his friend and botanising companion, Pierre-Alexandre du Peyrou (discussed below). From Rousseau the book would have passed via Daniel Malthus to Jane Dalton; from her it would have passed in all likelihood to her brother Henry and then to subsequent owners by avenues at present unknown. These owners are identified in the front of the volume: Francis Element, William Osborn (whose signatures may be those on the front endpaper) and James Douglas. Information about the book's owners subsequent to Jane Dalton is sketchy: nothing substantive is known about Francis Element<sup>9</sup>, who gave the book to William Osborn, who "may have been the William Osborn (d. 1872) of the Fulham Nursery".<sup>9</sup> James Douglas, who donated the book to the Lindley Library on 24 November 1894, was, like Osborn, a nurseryman, who ran the Edenside Nursery, Great Bookham, Surrey, where he specialised in florists' flowers (Desmond and Ellwood, 1994).<sup>10</sup>

*Historia stirpium* is a magisterial work describing 2,486 species, the culmination of Haller's



Figure 2. Jane Dalton's bookplate from Rousseau's copy of Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768), representing "an elaborately scalloped handkerchief, diamond shaped, with a coarse darn in the middle" (James, 1979: 28) (by courtesy of the Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, London).

763. SESELI foliis duplicato pinnatis, pinnulis semipinnatis, lobalis lanceolatis.

*Phellandrium musellina*.

*Musellina*. CAMERAR. epic. p. 8.

*Daucus montanus* CLUS. perenn. p. 700. absque icone.

*Phellandrium caule subnudo, foliis bipinnatis* LINN. p. 366.<sup>11</sup>

Describit CL. JACQUIN. *Findob.* n. 24.

In omnibus alpinis abundat, & ex ejus frequentia fere pascuorum bonitas aestimatur.

Etiā in montanis, in *Mittlerberg* Bienenstium.

Radix crassa, ramosa, multiceps, capitibus fetis coronatis. Caules pene nudi, pedales, etiam humiliores. Folia durinacula, late viridia, longa magis, quam lata, duplicato pinnata, pinnulis semipinnatis, laciniis ultimis planis, peractis, simplicibus, bilobatis & trilobatis. Umbellae universales nude; peculiare subiecta habent folia plukula, longe lanceolata. Semen quasi circulo coronatum, semiovale, magnum, jugis ita eminentibus percursum, ut fere alatum sit. Petala fere purpurea, inflexo cordata, inaequalia; extremum majus. Semen alis majoribus membranaceis, crassis.

Ligulifico accenset CRANZII.

Plurimum aroma spirat.

Figure 3. An annotation by Rousseau of no. 763 in his copy of Haller's *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae inchoata* (1768) (by courtesy of the Lindley Library, Royal Horticultural Society, London).

project to document the flora of Switzerland. Rousseau described it in one of his botanical fragments as Haller's "grand et excellent traité des plants alpinés [great and excellent treatise on alpine plants]" (Cook, 2000: 98).<sup>11</sup> I argue on contextual and temporal grounds that it is most likely that the Royal Horticultural Society's copy of *Historia stirpium* is likewise the same book on "Plantes des Alpes" that Rousseau mentions in a letter to Pierre-Alexandre du Peyrou of Neuchâtel (1729–1794) dated 19 December 1768:

Je me suis ruiné en livres de Botanique, et j'avois bien résolu de n'en plus acheter; cependant je sens que m'affectionnant aux *Plantes des Alpes*, je ne puis me passer de celui de Haller. Vous m'obligerez de vouloir bien me marquer exactement son titre, son prix, et le lieu où vous l'avez trouvé; car la France est si barbare encore en botanique, qu'on n'y trouve presque aucun Livre de cette science; et j'ai été obligé de faire venir a grands frais de Hollande et d'Angleterre le peu que j'en ai, encore ai-je cherché par tout ceux de Clusius sans pouvoir les trouver.

[I have ruined myself with books on Botany, and have resolved not to buy any more; nevertheless I feel that becoming fond of *Alpine Plants*, I cannot pass up that of Haller. You will oblige me by kindly letting me know its exact title, its price and the place where you found it; since France is still so barbarous in botany, one can find there almost no Book of this science; and I have been obliged to have the few that I have sent from Holland and England at great expense.] (Leigh 1980b: 211; Cook, 2000: 197; emphasis mine).

Du Peyrou apparently did even more, for in his subsequent letter of 21 July 1769 Rousseau thanked him for the "livre de M. Haller [the book of Mr Haller]" (Leigh, 1980c: 114; Cook,

2000: 201). The obvious question that arises from this statement of thanks is: which book of Haller does Rousseau mean, since Haller wrote four works on Swiss flora? While it may not be possible to prove definitively that Rousseau's letter of 19 December 1768 requesting information about Haller's book on "Plantes des Alpes" is referring to *Historia stirpium*, this nevertheless seems the most likely conclusion for the following reasons. The work, in three folio volumes, had just been published earlier that year, between March and August; the appearance of *Historia stirpium* was undoubtedly an important event within the Swiss botanical circles that Rousseau frequented; Rousseau is sure to have known about it since he was studying with Haller's associate, Abraham Gagnebin (see below); and, while Rousseau referred to a book on "Plantes des Alpes" in the letter quoted above, it seems likely that he equated Alpine with Swiss plants, since Haller's works were largely devoted to Alpine plants.

There has, understandably, been considerable confusion about Rousseau's ownership of, and access to, Haller's works. Leigh (1980b: 212, n. (d); 1979: 270, n. (k)) asserted that Rousseau's letter of 19 December 1768 expresses interest in another work by Haller, *Iter Helveticum anni 1739* (1740). Yet Leigh's suggestion seems unlikely, given that in a letter of 28 December 1767 Rousseau had already requested his Amsterdam publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, to obtain Haller's *Iter Helveticum* for him; while we do not know the outcome of this request, it is reasonable to presume that Rousseau would not need to ask du Peyrou in his letter of 19 December 1768 for the "exact title" of Haller's work on "Plantes des Alpes" if he was actually seeking *Iter Helveticum*, for he had already supplied this title to Rey (Cook, 2000: 246, 197). Leigh's note (1980b: 29–30, n. (c)) to Rousseau's letter of 21 July 1769 further compounds the confusion, claiming that Rousseau is acknowledging receipt of Haller's *Nomenclator ex historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiae* (Cook, 2000: 321, n. 253). I can only conclude that Leigh drew somewhat unfounded conclusions about which work or works of Haller was or were in question. In contrast with Leigh, de Beer and Gagnebin (the latter was also an editor of Rousseau's collected works in French) asserted that by 21 July 1769 Rousseau owned *Historia stirpium*, although they advance no evidence for this claim, simply inserting "*Historia stirpium*" within brackets after the phrase "non plus que du Haller [nor about the Haller either]" when they quoted Rousseau's letter of 21 July 1769 (de Beer and Gagnebin, 1957: 69; Cook, 2000: 201).

Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777) was an important botanist for Rousseau, who spent his Swiss exile (1762–1765) learning botany in the countryside surrounding Môtiers in the Jura with Abraham Gagnebin, one of Haller's close collaborators in compiling a Swiss flora. Haller, the foremost expert on Swiss flora of his day, was Professor of Anatomy, Botany and Surgery at Göttingen (1736–1753). He first began studying botany in 1728 as a way to obtain exercise and thereby improve his poor health (at 20 he already suffered from haemorrhoids); in Basel, where he was studying mathematics, he was able to examine the important herbarium of the Swiss botanist Caspar Bauhin (1560–1624) in which Bauhin "attempted to group plants scientifically according to their relationships in family groups" (Zoller, 1958, 218). As a result, Zoller (1958: 219) argued, Haller succeeded in producing "extraordinarily tidy plant descriptions". That same year, 1728, Haller undertook an extensive journey on foot through a large swathe of Switzerland with his friend Johann Gesner (1709–1790), Professor of Physic at Zürich. Haller and Gesner divided up Switzerland between them, intending to collaborate on a complete flora of the country. Gesner was unable to see the project to completion, however, while Haller continued it, engaging virtually every naturalist in Switzerland "to scour the various nooks and crannies of the Alps to find new plants, often at his personal

expense" (de Beer, 1953: 3). The collections Haller and Gesner made in the course of this journey formed the basis for Haller's own private herbarium (now at Paris). At Göttingen he began a collection of Alpine plants under the patronage of A. J. Hugo, Royal Physician in Hannover, and continued to make collecting trips in the Alps. These collections provided the raw material for Haller's first work on the Swiss flora, *Enumeratio methodica stirpium Helvetiae indigenarum* (1742) (de Beer, 1953: 1–3). *Enumeratio* was superseded by subsequent extensive field research by Haller and his many collaborators such as A. Gagnebin and W. de La Chenal. Zoller (1958) noted that in 1759 "a new, great period in the investigation of Alpine flora" began while Haller was director of the Bern salt works in Roche (canton of Vaud/Waadt) (1758–1764). The culmination of these efforts was "that great monument of plant description", *Historia stirpium*, published (as de Beer (1953) noted) exactly 40 years after Haller and Gesner's journey through Switzerland.

Haller opposed the virtual dominance of Linnaean systematics in most of Europe (except France), preferring his own cumbersome system, based on that of the German botanist A. Q. Rivinus (1652–1723). Haller and Linnaeus exchanged plants and corresponded for a time (Zoller, 1958: 219), but they had very different views concerning variability, the fixity of species, and the importance of an efficient, simplified nomenclature; Haller's knowledge of the great variety of alpine habitats and species made him an ecologist *avant la lettre*, with a keen eye for environmental influences, whereas Linnaeus created classifications based on a discrete set of invariable characteristics—the number and position of the stamens and pistils.

Despite being as deeply religious as his Swedish rival, Haller developed an awareness of variation that seems to have made him less wedded to the Creationist doctrine of the fixity of species. Yet notwithstanding these very modern biological perspectives, Haller lost out to Linnaeus, who for all of his traditionalism had created a taxonomic system well-suited to the practical aims of eighteenth-century botanists intent on cataloguing the earth's plant wealth so that it could be exploited for human ends. Linnaeus's binary nomenclature, coupled with his artificial sexual system of classification, provided simplicity, efficiency and ease of access, whereas Haller's was cumbersome and difficult to use. Thus, while a botanist of undisputed merit, Haller was overlooked and excluded from mainstream botany (Stafleu, 1971: 246–248).

Haller therefore only referred to Linnaean taxonomy and nomenclature as secondary to his own. Rousseau, on the other hand, was a stalwart defender of Linnaean names (although he sometimes employed the classification of Jussieu), but while Haller's approach inconvenienced him, he preferred it to that of the French botanist, Michel Adanson (1727–1806), who categorically refused to relate his names to those of Linnaeus at all.

M. Haller cite toujours les genres et quelquefois les phrases des especes de M. Linnaeus, mais M. Adanson n'en cite jamais ni genre ni phrases. M. Haller s'attache à une synonymie exacte, par laquelle, quand il n'y joint pas la phrase de M. Linnaeus, on peut du moins la trouver indirectement par le rapport des synonymes.

[M. Haller always cites the genera and sometimes the species phrases of M. Linnaeus, but M. Adanson cites neither genus nor phrases. M. Haller adheres to an exact synonymy by means of which, when he does not include the phrase of M. Linnaeus, one can at least find it indirectly by the relation of the synonyms.] (Gagnebin and Raymond, 1969: 1208; Cook, 2000, 98).

Thus, in *Historia stirpium*, Haller did not employ Linnaean names or the artificial system of classification that Rousseau usually used, but he did provide synonyms to Linnaean genera citing Linnaeus's *Genera plantarum* in a purported edition of 1766 (Haller, 1768: 1040).

perhaps meaning the sixth edition of 1764 (Stearn, 1957: 22).<sup>c</sup>

Rousseau would have learned early in his botanical studies of Haller's importance, since he studied botany in Switzerland with the physician Abraham Gagnebin (1707–1800), one of Haller's collaborators and an expert on the botany of the Jura; Gagnebin likewise served as botanical guide to Rousseau and his friends in the Swiss Jura (Cook, 2000: 320, n. 236), and Rousseau studied with Gagnebin in his village of la Ferrière in June 1765 (Cook, 2000: 196). At du Peyrou's request, Gagnebin obtained plant samples from Haller for Rousseau (Cook, 2000: 197); however, he reassured Haller that he was not acting on a direct request from Rousseau: "je ne le fais qu'à la sollicitation de Mr du Peyrou ["I am doing this only at the behest of M. du Peyrou]" (Cook, 2000: 200), because Haller was well-known to have a low opinion of Rousseau and his works. Haller, a political conservative who was active in the official and political life of the canton of Bern from 1753 onwards, was horrified by what he took to be Rousseau's political radicalism, writing to a Mme Hartmann in 1763: "Ce n'est qu'à présent que je vois clairement que Rousseau est un scélérat" [It is only now that I see clearly that Rousseau is a villain]" (quoted by de Beer and Gagnebin, 1956: 66).

The importance of Haller's *Historia stirpium* for Rousseau's botanical studies is attested by references in his correspondence to "no. 762", described by Haller as follows:

SESELI foliis linearibus, triplicato pinnatis, caule vaginosis *Emend.* I. n. 114. *Daucus petreus, glauco folio, similis Faniculo tortuoso* I. B. III. P. II. P. 58. qui circa montem *Beligardum* eodem loco a Cl. BERDOTO lectus sit, quo I.B. suum legerat. [There follow synonyms to Richer, Jacquin, Cranz, Rivinus, and Linnaeus]. Synonyma difficilis: planta ipsa circa Aquilejam abundant, in herbis prope *Verchier*, qua ab arce Auilejensi adscenditur: in Insula etiam Mondeni, cum limitibus cum Valessæ Legatis componerem, copiose reperi. *Agauni*, versus *sedem Eremitæ* (Haller, 1768: 1: 334–5).

Rousseau also called this plant "Seseli Halleri"<sup>12</sup>, a binomial of his own invention that has no taxonomic validity; he made no marginal annotations to 762 for the reason explained in a letter of 21 December 1769 to the Duchess of Portland:

Vous trouverez, Madame, une ombellifère à laquelle j'ai pris la liberté de donner le nom de *Seseli Halleri* faute de savoir la trouver dans le *Species* au lieu qu'elle est bien décrite dans la dernière édition des plantes de Suisse de M. Haller n°. 762. C'est une très belle plante qui est plus belle encore en ce pays [Monquin, France] que dans les contrées plus méridionales parce que les premières atteintes du froid lavent son verd foncé d'un beau pourpre et surtout à la couronne des graines, car elle ne fleurit que dans l'arrière saison, ce qui fait aussi que les graines ont peine à mourir et qu'il est difficile d'en recueillir. J'ai cependant trouvé le moyen d'en ramasser quelques unes que vous trouverez, Madame la Duchesse, avec les autres: Vous aurez la bonté de les recommander à votre Jardinier, car, encore un coup la plante est belle, et si peu commune, qu'elle n'a pas même encore un nom parmi les botanistes. Malheureusement le Specimen que j'ai l'honneur de vous en envoyer est mesquin et en fort mauvais état; mais les graines y suppléeront.

[You will find, Madam, an umbellifer to which I took the liberty of giving the name of *Seseli Halleri*, in spite of not finding it in the *Species plantarum* of Linnaeus], even though it is well described in the last edition of the plants of Switzerland of M. Haller, no. 762. It is a very beautiful plant, which is even more beautiful in this country than in more southern climates, because the first frosts bathe its dark green in a beautiful purple, and especially on the crown of the seeds, since it flowers only in late season which also means that the seeds scarcely reach maturity and that it is difficult to collect any. I have nevertheless discovered a way to gather some that you will find, Madam Duchess, with the others. You will have the goodness to commend them to your Gardener, for, once again the plant is lovely, and so uncommon that it still does not have a name among botanists. Unfortunately the Specimen which I have the honor of sending you is paltry and in a very bad state; but the seeds will make up for it.] (Leigh, 1980c: 190–191; Cook, 2000: 187, 318, n. 209.)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau consulted the works of at least seventy botanical authors, but given the disappearance of his library, it is difficult to determine which books he owned as opposed to those he consulted in various private libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau subsequently resumed his botanical interests at the age of 65 (see *Rêveries* in Gagnebin and Raymond, 1959: 1: 1061).

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau described the project of "petits herbiers en miniatures" in letters to the Duchess of Portland, dated 17 April 1772, and Lamoignon de Malesherbes, dated 18 April 1773 (Leigh, 1981: 39: 42, 139). Rousseau pursued this project with dedication for some time, intending his herbaria to inspire an interest in botany among the uninitiated. He wanted each miniature herbarium to include 600 specimens from the environs of Paris, but poverty and age forced him to reduce this project to a more modest goal. One of these herbaria, comprising 53 pages of moss and lichen specimens in a very small bound volume, is preserved at the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris (Mabille, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Malthus was father to the economist and population theorist, Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834).

<sup>5</sup> Rousseau's last patron, the Marquis de Girardin, claimed that Rousseau donated his botany books to "Louis Dutens" (presumably Vincent-Louis Dutens (1730–1812), who corresponded with Rousseau). (See Gagnebin and Raymond, 1969: 4: 1888, n. 1; Leigh, 1991: 321).

<sup>6</sup> Dalton's year of birth is uncertain. James (1979) stated she was born in 1742 and died on 10 December 1817, supposedly at the age of 75.

<sup>7</sup> J. Pullen, pers. comm., 16 and 20 February 2001.

<sup>8</sup> The "A" need not carry an accent in order to mean "to" in French; D. Meyer, pers. comm., 2 September 2002.

<sup>9</sup> B. Elliott, pers. comm., 30 August 2002.

<sup>10</sup> My purpose is not to investigate the history of the book's ownership, but rather, to show the significance of Rousseau's copy of this work.

<sup>11</sup> While Rousseau does not specify the title of the work in question, it seems reasonable to infer that it is *Historia stirpium*, since it is by far the most extensive and most recent of his works treating this subject; the only other work of Haller that approaches the scope of *Historia stirpium* is *Enumeratio methodica stirpium Helvetiae indigenarum*, published 26 years earlier, and superseded by *Historia stirpium*. There is no work of Haller dedicated exclusively to alpine flora, but much of the flora covered in his works on Swiss botany was of course alpine.

<sup>12</sup> I believe Rousseau's *Seseli Halleri* is *S. glaucum* L. (Cook and Kelly, 2000: 318, n. 209).

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