

Sir Hans Sloane's name is familiar to many people who live in the UK. It graces street signs, Tube stations, whole areas of London. Sloane himself, on the other hand, is not as present in the modern day. James Delbourgo, in his new book *Collecting the world: the life and curiosity of Hans Sloane*, aims to shed light on this historical figure whose life and works have largely been eclipsed by his most famous accomplishment: the establishment of the British Museum.

The majority of the book focuses on Sloane's time in Jamaica and London, emphasising his position not as the sole producer of the collection that went on to become the heart of the British Museum, but as the center of a network of collectors, scholars, physicians and gentlemen that all contributed to an encyclopaedic collection of natural history that "anticipated key aspects of the renowned encyclopaedic publishing projects of the eighteenth century" like Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (p. 271). Delbourgo insists that it is only as the center of a network like this one that Sloane could have developed his collection as "very often ... acquisitions resulted from the judgment *others* made about Sloane's curiosity, showing how decisions made by many other people helped constitute the content of his collections" (p. 191). Delbourgo refers to an older, even better connected Sloane as more than "just a man, he was an operation: his genius lay in his capacity to respond when the curious world came calling and ... to make new collections spectacularly public" (p. 229). This seems an important touchstone to remember as we discuss the histories of our own collections — the vast numbers of contributors and huge amounts of work required not only to acquire collections, but also to organize them and make them available for use.

Practices and technologies of naming, identifying, and organizing are woven into every part of Sloane's story. As a physician and collector experiencing Jamaica for the first time, Sloane became a "master of the form" of the commercial list, even listing all "eighty of Jamiaca's rivers one by one, as though the English owned these too...". Delbourgo explains this seemingly odd behaviour as "a tradition that dated back to Pliny's encyclopaedic Roman natural history ... as a ceremony of imperial possession. To list was to claim ownership..." (p. 69). The book does not shy away from Sloane's status as a slave owner or his participation in Britain's imperialism, presenting a fuller picture than the one with which most people are likely to be familiar.

Chapters 5 and 6 — The World Comes to Bloomsbury and Putting the World in Order — will probably be the most interesting for those whose work involves knowledge organization. The detailed relationships that Delbourgo draws between the items and their catalogues are fascinating, and in particular "three encounters stand out from his half-century of collecting that show how, more than simply buying or selling — though there was plenty of that — the assembly of his museum entailed forging intricate personal relations through which the status of both objects and people was negotiated and contested" (p. 246). Stories about Sloane's relationships to William Dampier, Benjamin Franklin, and Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and the reflections of those relationships in Sloane's collection demonstrate the importance of the interplay between an item, its entry in the catalogue, and the history of its acquisition and description. In this way, the catalogue can reveal, in addition to records of past library practice, traces that open the door to complex questions of social and cultural history, allowing the catalogue to be "a site of historical investigation" (Whaite 2017).

