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Sarah Easterby-Smith, *Cultivating Commerce: Cultures of Botany in Britain and France, 1760-1815*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. \$104.00 U.S. (hb). Figures, maps, bibliography, and index. ISBN 978-1107126848.

Review by Michael A. Osborne, Oregon State University.

This book offers a group portrait of “elite” seed merchants (p. 23), plant traders, and nurserymen in the era of André Thouin (1747-1824), the head gardener at the Jardin du Roi in Paris after 1764. The focus falls on London nurserymen James Lee and his partner Lewis Kennedy and on the Paris firm operated by Adélaïde d'Andrieux and Philippe-Victoire Lévêque de Vilmorin. These four, argues Easterby-Smith, were interested largely in “outlandish” exotic ornamental plants and distinguished themselves by combining a sophisticated scientific understanding of plants with practical knowledge of breeding and gardening (p. 2). Thereby, they developed a sort of hybrid expertise enabling them to commercialize their craft and participate in science. This expertise also enabled their participation in an international horticultural network and according to Easterby-Smith allowed the four to act as social intermediaries whose art vested then with practical, scientific and social knowledge. The book has much to do with commerce, the expansion of the “middling” classes (p. 2), and the diffusion of interest in horticultural products in the United Kingdom and France.

There are many interesting characters here, including James Lee, who walked to London from the Scottish lowlands. Easterby-Smith portrays Lee as a striver who by the end of his life had risen to the status of quasi-gentleman. Lee and his partner corresponded with Thouin, Linnaeus, and others in the botanical pantheon. Lee’s business partner Lewis Kennedy, who worked for the Dukes of Argyll and Somerset, expanded horticultural activities via referrals and contacts from these aristocrats. Their firm prospered by association with the wealthy and their fashionable interests. The commercial horticultural enterprise in and around London was robust with much competition among firms. Lee and Kennedy also catered to landscapers who served this elite.

In contrast to London, the husband and wife firm of d'Andrieux and Vilmorin dominated the Parisian horticultural trade. On balance, horticultural commerce in the UK was more varied and extensive in terms of varieties and numbers of plants offered than it was in France, where the trade was concentrated around the capital city. The book sorts through the multiple meanings of amateurs and professionals in commercial horticulture and certainly demonstrates that an amateur is not the opposite of a professional. Easterby-Smith refers to run of the mill seedsmen, florists, nurserymen, and gardeners as amateurs. Elite horticulturalists, on the other hand, won their elevated label on the basis of commercial success and skills in both botany, which means

largely taxonomy in this context, and horticulture, or the care of largely non-agricultural plants. These two elements together constitute the author's definition of hybrid expertise. This expertise was largely confined to males as the horticultural trade was predominately a male enterprise although, as in the case of d'Andrieux, a woman might rise to prominence through marriage to a male horticulturalist.

Readers may find it difficult to disentangle actors with mainly utilitarian motives focused primarily on agricultural plants from those driven primarily by devotion to ornamental plants and aesthetic novelties. Clearly, members of the Vilmorin clan did both from the beginning. For example, the founder, Pierre d'Andrieux (1713-1780), had the title of Botanist to the King and collaborated with Antoine-Nicolas Duchesne on a study of strawberry genealogy. Most of those who followed the founder also published seed catalogs of domesticated plants and kept their hands in scientific matters, horticultural pursuits, and commerce. Three members of the Vilmorin family would serve as presidents of the French Society of Agriculture. This may indeed be hybrid expertise as Easterby-Smith defines it, but it might also reflect that horticulture was simply an activity with few barriers to entry during a time when scientific specialization was less advanced than it would become in the mid-nineteenth century. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars disrupted the plant trade as they did many French and British cultural activities. Easterby-Smith also argues that the cosmopolitan ideal of science, partly summed up in Louis Pasteur's comment on science not having a county and belonging to humanity, has been over emphasized.

The author has done a good job of sifting the extant correspondence and displaying the location of senders and recipients of plants and letters on maps, and it is admittedly difficult to reconstruct correspondence networks when few letters survive, as is the case with the Vilmorin firm from 1793 to 1829. The book's comparative approach is valuable, and the study extends in time and space some of Emma Spary's studies of the transnational elements of French science.[1] The book corroborates in fine fashion some of the more recent studies on the Vilmorins.[2]

NOTES

[1] Emma C. Spary, *Utopia's Garden. French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[2] For a later period but valuable for the context and scientific trajectory of French horticulture see Jean Gayon and Doris T. Zallen, "The Role of the Vilmorin Company in the Promotion and Diffusion of the Experimental Science of Heredity in France, 1840-1920," *Journal of the History of Biology*, 31 (1998): 241-262.

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