

The Van Heurck Collection: a phoenix rises from its ashes

Bart Van de Vijver, Christine Cocquyt & Jan Rammeloo

National Botanic Garden of Belgium, Department of Bryophytes and Thallophtyes, Domein van Bouchout, B-1860 Meise, Belgium. (bart.vandevijver@br.fgov.be)

Introduction

Henri Ferdinand Van Heurck (1838-1909) is considered to be the most famous Belgian diatomist of the past 200 years. During his life, Van Heurck maintained an intensive correspondence with almost all contemporary diatomists such as de Brébisson, Grunow, Kützing, Janisch, H.L. Smith and Walker Arnott. The exchange of material and information between Van Heurck and his colleagues resulted in the creation of an immense diatom collection, comprising nowadays about 19.000 microscopical slides. Among these slides, a lot of type material can be found, making this collection even more valuable. Van Heurck was not only a collector of interesting slides. His bibliographic oeuvre comprises a wide variety of papers dealing with various diatom and microscopical topics such as the important "Synopsis des diatomées de Belgique" (1885) and the report of the diatoms of the Belgica expedition (published several months after his death in 1909).

Besides the impressive diatom collection, Van Heurck established also a very important herbarium, a collection of dried spices, bezoars, plant models and insects. His collection of microscopes, including one of the last remaining Van Leeuwenhoek microscopes, was world famous. His book "Le Microscope" (1878) became a standard work in microscopy of which several editions were published.

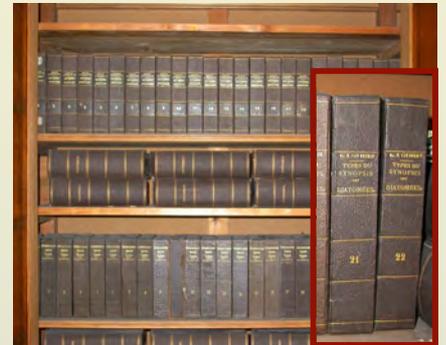
After his death, the Antwerp Scientific Collection (AWH) was established based on the material Van Heurck collected and later additions. Following long negotiations between the city of Antwerp, the Antwerp Zoo and the National Botanic Garden of Belgium, all botanical parts of the Van Heurck collection are transferred to the Botanic Garden on permanent loan.



The Van Heurck diatom collection is one of the most important in the world

The collection contains amongst others:

- Van Heurck's own important collection of Belgian gatherings and type slides made by Thum used for his Synopsis (1885)
- a set of slides of diatoms from the Antarctic 'Belgica expedition' (1909) prepared by Klavsen
- the originals of the Typenplatten figures in Möller's Lichtdrucktafeln
- the *Universum Diatomacearum Moellerianum*
- Kützing's original collection of material in 700 tubes.
- the personal collection of reverend William Smith including the gatherings cited in the Synopsis of British Diatomaceae
- the Janisch collection containing the original specimens of his guano papers and his Gazelle-Expedition-Illustrations
- the original collection of Walker Arnott (about 2000 tubes) including gatherings by famous diatomists such as Gregory, Greville, Kitton, de Brébisson and Eulenstein
- the famous collection of Weissflog, comprising about 2500 preparations of rare diatoms
- the Theodore Eulenstein slides representing material gathered by Kützing, Hilse, de Brébisson and Rabenhorst and his original collection of 1500 tubes (*Diatomacearum Species Typicae, Centuries I, II & III*)
- a collection assembled by Albert Grunow



Organisation of the diatom collection

1. Slide collection

Part of the slides are stored in 13 antique wooden cabinets arranged by collector or geographic locality.

Several entire slide collections were acquired by exchange or purchase (e.g. collection of Tempère & Peragallo), stored in their original collection boxes.

2. Raw material

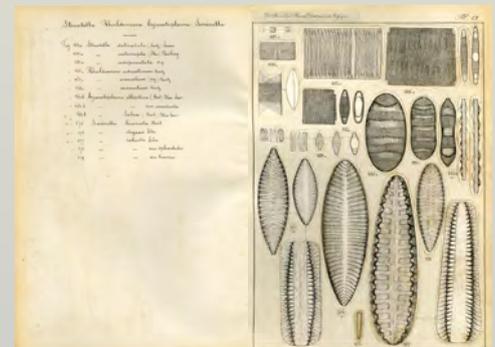
3. Unmounted cleaned material

Stored in bottles and tubes or dried on paper.

The entire collection has been catalogued on index cards (by species name, author or geographic locality) and is easily consultable.

The entire AWH collection in the Botanic Garden comprises more than diatoms

- a general herbarium of 350.000 flowering plants
- a collection of botanical models and didactic wall-pictures
- a herbarium of Belgium
- an important cryptogamic collection
- part of his scientific library
- a collection of pharmacological drugs



Original drawings by Van Heurck (from 'Le Traité des Diatomées')

The Van Heurck diatom collection will be open to all interested scientists.

Visitors are welcome only on appointment at the Botanic Garden.

No material can be loaned but need to be consulted *in situ*.
(microscopes equipped with digital cameras are available)

For all information contact Bart Van de Vijver or Christine Cocquyt
bart.vandevijver@br.fgov.be or christine.cocquyt@br.fgov.be

Acknowledgements: The city of Antwerp and the Antwerp Zoo are thanked for their help in the transfer of the Collection to the Botanic Garden.