



Bird collection of Johann Rudolf Sporck (1694-1759) in Prague, Bohemia

Jiří Mlíkovský

Department of Zoology, National Museum, Václavské náměstí 68, CZ-115 79 Praha 1, Czech Republic;
e-mail: jiri_mlikovsky@nm.cz

Abstract. Bird collections were very rare in the early 18th century. Evidence is presented that Count Johann Rudolf Sporck (1694-1759) possessed such a collection in Prague, Bohemia. A catalog of his collection is presented and its historical importance is discussed.

Keywords. Bird collections, 18th century, Central Europe, ornithology.

INTRODUCTION

Bird collections were very rare in Europe in the first half of the 18th century (Stresemann 1923, Steinheimer 2005). In Bohemia, ornithology became a neglected field following the publication of Balbín's¹ (1679) work on the Bohemian avifauna until the local revival of science in the 1780s (Sandberg 1786, Voigt 1786; see also Jungmann 1825), and it is generally assumed that it was virtually non-existent in that period. In this paper I present first piece of evidence that ornithology was not dead in Bohemia in the first half of the 18th century, because Count Johann Rudolf Sporck possessed a small collection of birds in Prague in the 1730s.

Johann Rudolf Sporck (1694-1759; also Spork or Špork) was an auxiliary bishop and capitulary at the Saint-Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle in Prague, Bohemia (Podlaha 1903, 1904). He was apparently interested in arts and sciences, because he created a private *cabinet of curiosities*. He is known as a significant collector of arts (Dlabáč 1815, Podlaha 1903, 1904, Slavíček 1993, 1996, 2004, 2007), but his natural history collections would have passed away unnoticed if he would not create, probably during 1719-1741 (Anonymous 2010), a catalogue illustrating specimens in his possession. This catalogue, known as *Delineationes Sporckianae*, is deposited in the library of the Královská kanonie premonstrátů in Prague, Czech Republic. It includes Sporck's sketches of specimens in his collection, from human statues and coins to birds, turtles and shells, but also independent drawings. Bird drawings are included in volumes IV and VI of the *Delineationes*, which were created during 1719-1734 and 1739-1740, respectively (Anonymous 2010). It is

1 Bohuslav Balbín (1621-1688), Czech scholar.

unknown whether Sporck depicted in his *Delineationes* all specimens from his collection or just a selection. In spite of that, the *Delineationes* provide first piece of evidence that a bird collection existed in Bohemia in the first half of the 18th century.

Below I present a list of bird specimens from the Sporck collection shown in the *Delineationes*, and briefly comment on other bird drawings. Sporck's legends to his drawings, written in Latin or German, are given where available. I identified the birds according to the drawings, taking names used by Sporck as supplementary pieces of evidence. If species within species complexes could not be identified with certainty, I assumed that the species occurring in Central Europe was illustrated. Ornithological taxonomy and nomenclature follow Dickinson (2003). For the spelling of authors' names see Mlíkovský (2010).

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Ostrich *Struthio camelus* Linné, 1758: "Ovum struthionis" (Vol. IV, fol. 95r), i.e. "an ostrich egg".

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Linné, 1758: "Lefel-Oenterich" (Vol. VI, fol. 65r), i.e. [drake of] "Löffelente" in modern German.

Duck *Anas* sp.: "Leffel-Oente" (Vol. VI, fol. 64r), i.e. "Löffelente" in modern German. Sporck apparently believed that this is a female of the bird shown on fol. 65r (see above), but bill shape indicates that this was a female (?) of another, currently not identifiable *Anas* species.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (Linné, 1758): "Sperberräub" (Vol. VI, fol. 67r), i.e. "Sperberraub" (attack of a Sparrowhawk) in modern German. This is a panorama showing a Sparrowhawk attacking a small unidentified songbird.

Common Coot *Fulica atra* (Linné, 1758): "Blass-ändten" (Vol. VI, fol. 5r, fig. 1), i.e. "Blässente" in modern German (see Suolahti 1909: 304, 306).

Toco Toucan – *Ramphastos toco* Müller, 1776: "Rostrum avis rapacis americanae, apud alios rarissimum & ab incolis nuncu: tocan" (Vol. IV., fol. 122r), i.e. "Bill of a very rare American raptorial bird, called by local inhabitants: tocan". Sporck was apparently attracted by this specimen, because he added on the verso of the folio (122v) a description of this bill adopted from "Allg. Lexicon" [= Jablonski 1721]. This toucan species is limited to north-eastern part of South America (Short & Horne 2002). Its oldest description was provided by Oviedo y Valdés (1526; see Smith 2007: 77), but first figures available to Europeans were printed only in the 1550s by Belon (1555: 184), Thevet (1558: fol. 91) and Gessner (1560: 130; note that Gessner 1555 did not know the bird). In the early 18th century, toucan bills still belonged to rarities in Europe, although their number increased (cf. Smith 2007). Nevertheless, their peculiar shape and structure continued to attract attention of scholars (e.g. Spalowsky 1795, Traill 1815; see also Tattersall et al. 2009)².

² Johann Theodor Jablonski (1654-1731), German scholar; Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdés (1478-1557), Spanish scholar; Pierre Belon (1517-1564), French naturalist; André de Thevet (1516-1590), French scholar; Conrad Gessner (1516-1565), Swiss naturalist (see Pyle 2000 for the spelling of his name); Joachim Johann

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (Linné, 1758): 66r – “Nussgötzer” (Vol. VI., fol. 66r).

This German name was not recorded by Suolahti (1909) and Stresemann (1941).

Penduline Tit – *Remiz pendulinus* (Linné, 1758): “Nidus avium. dic. remis. // Nest” (Vol. VI, fol. 54r), i.e. “Nest of a bird, called remis // Nest”. The drawing shows an unfinished nest of the Penduline Tit. In the 17th-18th centuries, Penduline Tits spread through Central Europe from the north-east toward the southwest (Kinzelbach 2002), and their hanging nests, unlike those of any other European bird, awaked great interest (cf. Balbín 1679: 180-181, Albin 1738: 53, Monti 1745, Klein 1750: 86, Tietz 1755, Brisson 1760: 565)³.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula* Linné, 1758: “Amsl” (Vol. VI, fol. 15r, fig. 2), i.e. “Amsel” in modern German.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* C.L. Brehm, 1831: “Trossl” (Vol. VI, fol. 5r, fig. 2), i.e. “Drossel” in modern German.

Island Canary *Serinus canaria* (Linné, 1758): “Canari” (Vol. VI, fol. 37r). I identified this bird only on the basis of its name; the Sporck’s drawing being useless in this respect. Canaries were first recorded from Central Europe in the mid 16th century (Gessner 1555: 234, Birkhead et al. 2004). Schwenckfeld⁴ (1603: 298) knew the bird as a great rarity from Silesia. In the second half of the 17th century, Canaries were probably well known in Bohemia, because Balbín (1679: 163) reported on hybrids between Canaries and European Goldfinches produced in captivity. Jirásek (1786) knew from Bohemia only wild-colored Canaries. These scanty data indicate that Canaries were kept in captivity in Bohemia in Sporck’s times. The drawing of a Canary in the *Delineationes* provides no proof that Sporck himself held these birds in captivity, but lends support to such a possibility.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (Linné, 1758): “Stieglitz” (Vol. VI, fol. 37r), i.e. “Stieglitz” in modern German.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (Linné, 1758): “Gimpl” (Vol. VI, fol. 37r), i.e. “Gimpel” in modern German.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* (Linné, 1758): “Dikkopf” (Vol. VI, fol. 5r, fig. 3). This German name was not recorded by Suolahti (1909) and Stresemann (1941).

OTHER BIRD DRAWINGS

1. Vol. IV, fol. 119r, shows “Avis synicae plumae varii colores” (“variously colored plumes of a Chinese bird”). The figure shows four pieces of skin with attached plumes. I was not able to identify them and I suspect that they might have been a fake.
2. Vol. VI, fol. 71r and 72r, shows drawings of dead, probably recently killed birds (hunter’s bags?), among which ducks and snipes are tentatively identifiable.

Nepomuk Anton Spalowsky (1752-1797), Austrian naturalist; Thomas Stewart Traill (1781-1862), British naturalist.

3 Eleazar Albin (1680-1742), English naturalist; Gaetano Lorenzo Monti (1712-1797), Italian naturalist; Jacob Theodor Klein (1685-1759), German naturalist; Johann Daniel Tietz (1729-1796), German naturalist.

4 Kaspar Schwenckfeld (1563-1609), Silesian naturalist.

3. Vol. VI, fol. 20r, shows “Gal. domes.”, i.e. a domestic cock, standing next to a cup.
4. Vol. VI, fol. 96r (untitled), shows (re)drawings of four pictures with birds. The upper left figure shows herons and ducks; the upper right figure shows domestic chicken and a Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* (Linné, 1758); and the lower right figure shows a Peregrine (?) Falcon *Falco cf. peregrinus* Tunstall, 1771. All four figures show also birds that I was unable to identify.

DISCUSSION

Johann Rudolf Sporck’s collection included mounts of at least 11 bird species (the Sparrowhawk prey not included), pieces of feathered pieces of skin of a “Chinese” bird, an ostrich egg, and a nest of the Penduline Tit. The collection might have been much (?) larger, however, because the *Delineationes* possibly do not contain drawings of all specimens from the Sporck’s collection and I was not able to identify some species shown in the *Delineationes*.

Most of the specimens were probably of local origin, but the Ostrich egg was imported from Africa or the Middle East, the Toucan bill was imported from South America (Brazil or the Guyanas), and the *Avis synicae plumae* were possibly imported from China (if they were not a fake). In addition, the Canary originated from Macaronesia, but the species was held in captivity in Central Europe in Sporck’s times (see above). The composition of Sporck’s collection shows that he collected not only enigmatic, extravagant or rare specimens, but also less attractive, common birds, such as Blackbirds or Thrushes.

The presence of exotic birds in the Sporck’s collection indicates that he was in contact with foreign collectors or international natural history dealers. Collecting birds was a rare activity in the first half of the 18th century (Stresemann 1923). Nearest contemporary collections of birds included those of Georg Wilhelm Beyer (ca. 1675-1741) in Kahla, Thuringia (Jencquel 1727: 143) and Friedrich August I von Sachsen (1670-1733) in Dresden, Saxony (Eilenburg 1755). The Sporck collection was unknown to Stresemann (1923).

Sporck’s reference to Jablonski (1721) indicates that he was acquainted, at least to some degree, with scientific literature of his time. His excerption of notes from Jablonski (1721) on the toucan bill further indicates that was interested in natural history specimens he had in his collection. On the other hand, Jablonski (1721) was a general encyclopedia and Sporck did not refer to any zoological or ornithological work available in his time. His interest in ornithology thus was marginal.

All bird specimens illustrated by Sporck were mounted on (wooden?) stands. Most were mounted solitary, but the Sparrowhawk was mounted together with its prey and fol. 37r (Vol. VI) shows four birds (Canary, Goldfinch, Bullfinch and an unidentified woodpecker) mounted on a little tree. All birds were apparently mounted in a natural position or nearly so. This implies that the person who prepared the mounts was acquainted with live birds and their behavior. Some folios show non-avian specimens in glass containers. Placing bird mounts in glass containers was the only mean known in Sporck’s times

how to save dry bird specimens from the attack of insects and rapid decay (Farber 1977, Piechocki 1982, Schulze-Hagen et al. 2003). It is thus possible that Sporck conserved his bird mounts in this way. Stands, on which birds were mounted, bear labels with names of the species (in Latin or German). This indicates that Sporck's collection was built on the "scientific" basis.

Although no ornithological papers are known to have been published in Bohemia in the 18th century prior to the 1780s (Sandberg 1786, Voigt 1786), Johann Rudolf Sporck's *Delineationes* indicate that scientific (in the then sense) interest in birds was not dead. Next oldest bird collection is known to have existed in Bohemia in the early 1780s in the village of Zbiroh, ca. 50 km southwest of Prague (Jirásek 1786, Mlíkovský 2007). This was a state collection, supervised by king's Supreme Hunter. In that time, this function was held by Johann Karl Sporck (1722-1790), nephew of Johann Rudolf Sporck.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Luboš Antonín (National Museum, Prague) and Olga Kotková (National Gallery, Prague) for valuable comments on the manuscript. This paper was supported in part by grants from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (MK DE06P04OMG008 and MK 00002327201).

REFERENCES

- Albin E., 1738: A natural history of birds. Vol. 3. – London: [Author], 96 pp.
- Anonymous, 2010: http://beta.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=semantic_search¶m=&client=&ats=1280321960&global_settings=+!T+!*+!S~0+!G+&query_history=Find+documents+with+%25%25%25+in+any+field.&q11{%25x%25aip%25}=Delineationes+Sporckiana&field_num_1=FNUM_GLOB [Last accessed on 27 July 2010.]
- Balbín B. [Balbinus B.], 1679: Miscellanea historica Regni Bohemiae. Liber I. qui historiam naturalem Bohemiae complectitur. – Praga [= Praha]: Georgius Czernoch, 194 pp.
- Belon P., 1555: L'histoire de la nature des oyseaux. – Paris: Guillaume Cauellat, [27] + 382 pp.
- Birkhead T.R., Schulze-Hagen K. & Kinzelbach R., 2004: Domestication of the Canary, *Serinus canaria*: the change from green to yellow. – Archives of Natural History 31: 50-56.
- Brisson M.J., 1760: Ornithologia – Ornithologie. Vol. 3. Paris: Joannus-Baptist Bauche, 734 + lxxxii pp. [Parallel text in Latin and French.]
- Dickinson E.C., ed., 2003: The Howard and Moore Complete checklist of the birds of the world. 3rd rev. ed. – London: Christopher Helm, 1039 pp.
- Dlabáč B.J., 1815: Allgemeines historisches Künstler-Lexikon für Böhmen und zum Teil auch für Mähren und Schlesien. Vol. 3. – Prag [= Praha]: Stände Böhmens, 448 cols.
- Eilenburg C.H., 1755: Kurzer Entwurf der königlichen Naturalienkammer zu Dresden – Description du Cabinet Roial de Dresde touchant d'histoire naturelle. – Dresden: Waltherische Buchhandlung, 103 pp. [Parallel text in German and French; pagination separate for each language version.]
- Farber P.L., 1977: The development of taxidermy and the history of ornithology. – Isis 68: 550-566.
- Gessner C., 1555: Historiae animalium liber III, qui est de avium natura. – Tigurum [= Zürich]: Christoph. Froschoverus, 779 pp.

- Gessner C., 1560: *Icones avium omnium, quae in historia avium Conradi Gesneri describuntur.* – Tiguri [= Zürich]: C. Froschoverus, 137 pp.
- Jablonski J.T., 1721: *Allgemeines Lexicon der Künste und Wissenschaften.* – Leipzig: Fritsch, 918 pp.
- Jencquel C.F. [Neickelius C.F.], 1727: *Museographia.* – Leipzig: Michael Hubert, [20] + 464 + [8] pp.
- Jirásek J. [Jirasek J.], 1786: Versuch über die Naturgeschichte einiger im Berauner Kreise gelegenen Kammeral-Herrschaften, besonders Zbirow, Tocznik und Königshof, und der anliegenden im Pilsner Kreise gelegenen Herrschaften Miröschau und Wosek. – *Abhandlungen der Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften für das Jahr 1786:* 60-106.
- Jungmann J., 1825: *Historie literatury české aneb saustavný přehled spisů českých, s krátkou historií národu, osvícení a jazyka* [History of Czech literature or a systematic list of Czech publications, with a brief history of the nation, its enlightenment and language]. – Praha: Antonín Straširypka, xiii + 703 pp. [In Czech.]
- Kinzelbach R., 2002: Areal und Ausbreitung der Beutelmeise *Remiz pendulinus* (L., 1758) vor dem 19. Jahrhundert. – *Ökologie der Vögel* 24: 65-95.
- Klein J.T., 1750: *Historiae avium prodromus.* – Lubeca [= Lübeck]: Ionas Schmidt, [16] + 238 pp.
- Mlíkovský J., 2007: Ptactvo Zbirožska v díle Jana Jiráka z roku 1786 [Birds of the Zbiroh region in a 1786 paper by Jan Jirásek]. – *Sluka* 4: 81-90. [In Czech.]
- Mlíkovský J., 2010: Spelling of authors' names: sources of variation and proposals for standardization. – In: Bauernfeind E., Gamauf A., Berg H.-M. & Muraoka Y. (eds.): *Collections in context (Proceedings of the 5th International Meeting of European Bird Curators):* 131-144. Wien: Natural History Museum Vienna.
- Monti G. [Montius C.], 1745: *De pendulino bononiensium sive remiz Polonorum.* – *De Bononiensi Scientiarum et Artium Instituto atque Academia Commentarii* 2(1): 57-63. [German translation in: *Allgemeines Magazin der Natur, Kunst und Wissenschaften* 2: 238-249, 1753.]
- Oviedo y Valdés G.F. de, 1526: *Sumario de la natural y general historia de las Indias* [Summary of the natural and general history of the Indies]. – Toledo. [Cited after Smith 2007.]
- Piechocki R., 1982: Über die Geschichte der Präparation von Vögeln. – *Falke* 29: 114-122.
- Podlaha A., 1903: *Kresby hraběte Jana Rudolfa Sporcka* [Drawings of Count Johann Rudolf Sporck]. – *Památky Archaeologické a Mistopisné* 20: col. 451-464. [In Czech.]
- Podlaha A., 1904: *Kresby hraběte Jana Rudolfa Sporcka* [Drawings of Count Johann Rudolf Sporck]. – *Památky Archaeologické a Mistopisné* 21: col. 59-70, 97-126. [In Czech.]
- Pyle C.M., 2000: Conrad Gessner on the spelling of his name. – *Archives of Natural History* 27: 175-186.
- Sandberg K. von, 1786: Versuch einer Beantwortung der von der böhmischen gelehrten Privatgesellschaft auf das Jahr 1784. aufgegebenen, die Naturgeschichte Böhmens betreffenden Preis-Aufgabe. – *Abhandlungen der Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 1: 1-42.
- Schulze-Hagen K., Steinheimer F., Kinzelbach R. & Gasser C., 2003: Avian taxidermy in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. – *Journal of Ornithology* 144: 459-478.
- Schwenckfeld C., 1603: *Theriotropeum Silesiae.* – Lignicium [= Legnica]: David Albertus Bibliopol. Vratisl., 565 pp.
- Short L.L. & Horne J.F.M., 2002: Family Ramphastidae (toucans). – In: del Hoyo J., Elliott A. & Sargatal J. (eds.): *Handbook of the birds of the world. Vol. 7. Jacamars to woodpeckers:* 220-272. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Slaviček L., ed., 1993: *Artis pictoriae amatores: Evropa v zrcadle pražského barokního sběratelství* [Artis pictoriae amatores: Europe in the mirror of Prague Baroque collecting]. – Praha: Národní galerie, 429 pp. [In Czech.]

- Slaviček L., 1996: Visual documentation of the aristocratical collections in Baroque Bohemia. – *Opuscula Historiae Artium* (Brno) 40: 75-100.
- Slaviček L., 2004: Sběratelství a obchod s uměním v Čechách 17. a 18. století. Stav a úkoly českého bádání [Collecting and dealing art in Bohemia of the 17th and 18th centuries. State and tasks of Bohemian research]. – In: Fejtová O. (ed.): *Barokní Praha – barokní Čechie* [Baroque Prague – Baroque Czechia]: 491-538. Praha: Archiv hlavního města Prahy; & Dolní Břežany: Scriptorium. [In Czech.]
- Slaviček L., 2007: “Sobě, umění, přátelům”: kapitoly z dějin sběratelství v Čechách a na Moravě 1650-1939 [“For me, for the art, for friends”: chapters from the history of collecting in Bohemia and Moravia 1650-1939]. – Brno: Společnost pro odbornou literaturu – Barrister & Principal, 376 pp. [In Czech.]
- Smith P.J., 2007: On toucans and hornbills: readings in early modern ornithology from Belon to Buffon. – In: Enenkel K.A.E. & Smith P.J. (eds.): *Early modern zoology: the construction of animals in science, literature and the visual arts.* – *Intersections* 7(1): 75-120.
- Spalowsky J.A.A., 1795: Beschreibung und Abbildung des *Ramphastos viridis* und des *Momota* Linn. – *Neuere Abhandlungen der K[öniglichen] Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 2: 172-178.
- Sporck J.R., ca. 1719-1741: *Delineationes Sporckianae*. Vol. 1-6. – Unpublished; deposited in the library of the Královská kanonie premonstrátů in Praha-Strahov, Czech Republic. – URL: http://beta.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show_te_i_digidoc&virtnum=4&client= (Vol. IV.) and http://beta.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show_te_i_digidoc&virtnum=4&client= (Vol. VI.)
- Steinheimer F.D., 2005: The whereabouts of pre-nineteenth bird specimens. – *Zoologische Mededelingen* 79-3: 45-67.
- Stresemann E., 1923: Die Anfänge ornithologischer Sammlungen. – *Journal für Ornithologie* 71: 112-127.
- Stresemann E., 1941: Einiges über deutsche Vogelnamen. – In: Stresemann E. (ed.): *Festschrift Oskar Heinroth.* – *Journal für Ornithologie, Ergänzungsband* 3: 65-104.
- Suolahti H., 1909: Die deutschen Vogelnamen. – Straßburg [= Strasbourg]: Karl J. Trübner, xxxiii + 540 pp.
- Tattersall G.J., Andrade D.V. & Abe A.S., 2009: Heat exchange from the toucan bill reveals a controllable vascular thermal radiator. – *Science* 325: 468-470.
- Thevet F.A., 1558: Les singularitez de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amerique; et de plusieurs terres & isles decouvertes de nostre temps. – Paris: Les heritiers de Maurice de la Porte, [6] + 166 fol.
- Tietz J.D. [Titius J.D.], 1755: *Parus minimus Polonorum remiz Bononiensium pendulinus descriptus.* – Lipsia [= Leipzig]: Haeredes Lankisios, 48 pp.
- Traill T.S., 1815: Some observations on the bill of the Toucan. – *Transactions of the Linnean Society of London* 11: 288-289.
- Voigt A., 1786: *Abhandlung über die Naturgeschichte Böhmens.* – *Abhandlungen der Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 1: 43-104. [Also in: *Physicalische Arbeiten der Einträchtigen Freunde in Wien* 2(1): 85-128, 1786.]