



The Linnaean Correspondence

Documentation

- ↳ [Presentation](#)
- ↳ [Citation](#)
- ↳ [Guide to the site](#)
- ↳ [Editorial team](#)
- ↳ [Life of Linnaeus](#)
- ↳ [Linnaeus's seals](#)
- ↳ [People](#)
- ↳ [Sources](#)
- ↳ [Global search](#)

[Letters](#)

[Manuscripts](#)

[Editions](#)

[Links](#)

[Contact](#)

[C18](#)

Presentation

“This valuable collection of letters should be made public as it contains many hundreds of letters dealing with anything extraordinary that occurred from 1735 until his death. It is a pity that Linnaeus himself never took copies of his own letters, prevented from so doing by too much work.” Writing in the third person, this is how Linnaeus described his own correspondence in one of his autobiographies.

Nobody was more aware than Linnaeus of the scientific value of his correspondence. His correspondents were, he said, the most learned and distinguished in Europe, and they sent him the latest publications and kept him abreast of new discoveries. In an autobiographical text from the 1760s Linnaeus listed seventy-one correspondents, from Russia and Turkey in the East to America in the West. In subsequent years the number of letters and correspondents continued to grow and when Linnaeus died in 1778 more than 200 persons in Sweden and around 400 in other countries had been in contact with him. Over three thousand letters had been sent to him by scientists in Europe, America, Asia and Africa and by admirers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A significant part of the correspondence came from Linnaeus’s own students, who reported to their professor from their travels around the world.

After Linnaeus’s death his correspondence, manuscripts, books and herbarium remained in the possession of his family. Carl Linnaeus the Younger (1741-1783), who had succeeded his father as Professor of Medicine with responsibility for botany at Uppsala University, added his own correspondence, books and specimens to those of his father. When Linnaeus the Younger died in 1783, he left the natural history collections, books and manuscripts, including the correspondence, which he had inherited from his father to his mother, Sara Lisa Moraea (1716-1806). In need of money to provide dowries for her four daughters, she decided to part with the collections and, unable to find a buyer in Sweden willing to pay the requisite 1,000 guineas sterling, she sold them in 1784 to the young English medical student and naturalist James Edward Smith (1759-1828).

After Smith’s death the collections were transferred to the Linnean Society of London, which had been founded by Smith and other naturalists in 1788. The largest surviving collection of letters addressed to Linnaeus is now

in the keeping of the Linnean Society, together with Linnaeus's manuscripts, his herbarium and the greater part of his library.

Very little of Linnaeus's correspondence was published during his lifetime. James Edward Smith published a selection in two volumes, *A selection of the correspondence of Linnaeus and other naturalists from the original manuscripts* (London 1821). This was followed by a number of editions of correspondence with particular individuals: in 1829 the correspondence with Alexander Garden, in 1830 that with Johannes and Nicolaas Laurens Burman, in 1841 with Nicolaus Jacquin, in 1851 with Bernard Jussieu, in 1860 with François Boissier de Sauvages de La Croix, and in 1861 the correspondence with Johann Georg Gmelin. 265 Swedish letters were published in 1878-1880 by the Swedish botanist Ewald Ährling.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, interest in Linnaeus increased and his position as one of the national heroes of Sweden was established. In 1885 Ährling published the first printed catalogue of the Linnaean correspondence, *Carl von Linnés brevexling: förteckning* (Stockholm 1885). In the preface Ährling says that even in Sweden it was commonly recognised that the correspondence of great men demanded special attention.

It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that the idea of publishing the complete correspondence emerged, and in 1907, 200 years after the birth of Linnaeus, it was announced by the Swedish Parliament that the Linnaean letters were to be published in their entirety. After four decades about a quarter of the correspondence had been published in *Bref och skrivelser till och från Carl von Linné (Letters and written correspondence to and from C.v.L.)*, Stockholm & Uppsala 1907-1943, but for a variety of reasons the edition ceased to appear after 1943.

Fifty years later a new initiative was taken by the Swedish Linnaeus Society to resume and complete the publication of the Linnaean correspondence. In 1994 the Bank of Sweden through its Tercentenary Foundation agreed to support the project financially. A collaboration between the Swedish Linnaeus Society, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Uppsala University Library, the Linnean Society of London and the Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle of Ferney-Voltaire is now leading to the realisation of Linnaeus's wish to make public all of his letters.

The first phase of the *Linnaean correspondence* started in 1995. Details of some 6,100 letters and related documents have been recorded since then and requests for information have been sent to archives, libraries, dealers and private collectors throughout the world. The aim has been to locate letters and, whenever possible, to acquire copies of them.

Objectives and status

The ultimate objective of the Linnaean correspondence is to publish the complete text of the letters sent and received by Linnaeus, together with summaries in English. Facsimiles of the original manuscripts and of selected printed editions will be provided. The texts, summaries and facsimiles are linked to a master database of the correspondence and to files providing biographical and bibliographical information on the correspondents and their works. The texts and the summaries are searchable, as is the database.

A catalogue of all known letters to and from Linnaeus is now available.

Each letter is assigned a number by which it may be identified, for example L0182.

The edition is a work in progress and improvements are made and new material added on a continuous basis.

Further information about the publication of the *Linnaean correspondence* can be obtained from the project office ([email](#)).

Editorial policy

Where summaries or new editions have been provided by the *Linnaean correspondence* the following editorial policy has been applied:

New editions

The method of transcription employed is adapted to modern principles and techniques of textual editing. The orthography, punctuation and grammar of the original document are respected whenever possible. In cases where there are doubts about spelling, the use of capital letters, punctuation or grammar, editorial interventions are made. Square brackets enclose conjectural readings and details of any illegible passages.

Where Linnaeus or his correspondents have made alterations in the text the final version is reproduced and the original readings are given in the textual notes.

Paragraphs in the original text are respected. If the author of the letter has indicated a change of subject by leaving space in the text it is treated as a new paragraph.

Marginal additions are transcribed where the editors believe they were intended to be read, and the positions of such additions are recorded in the textual notes.

Punctuation marking the end of a clause or sentence is occasionally missing in the original texts. In such cases

it is inserted without comment.

The transcribed text follows as closely as possible the layout of the source although spacing and line divisions in the running text are not reproduced. Opening salutations and addresses are reproduced at the head and foot of the text respectively. The address is run on as a single paragraph.

Summaries

The summaries resume the principal content of the letters.

A [+] after a name or a book-title indicates a link to a biographical or bibliographical note.

In the summaries, the Latin names of animals and plants are those used by the authors, although they are spelled in agreement with present-day convention, i.e. the genus is written with a capital and the species with a lower-case initial letter, for example *Samolus africanus* . Names of organisms given in Swedish in the letters are substituted by English names when these are known.

Editorial comments are given in square brackets [thus].