

Book Reviews

Juan Bautista Bru de Ramón, *El atlas zoológico, el megaterio y las técnicas de pesca valencianas 1742–1799*, ed. José M López Piñero, Colección Científicos Valencianos, Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1996, pp. 348, illus., no price given (84–88639–86–4)

Juan Bautista Bru de Ramón (1742–1799), Valencian anatomical painter and dissector at the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural of Madrid, should have legitimately occupied a place in the history of the natural sciences at least for having drawn, described and assembled for the first time the skeleton of a fossil mammal, a megatherium, in 1789. Despite the praise of Georges Cuvier, who referred very positively to the Spaniard's work, the figure and importance of Bru de Ramón as both a zoological illustrator and a popularizer of anatomical knowledge have remained practically unrecognized in contemporary Spanish and international historiography. Professor López Piñero, who has been working on different aspects of Bru's production for more than a decade, here provides the first account of the life of this unjustly ignored man and an outline of his work. The book, an anthology of three sets of Bru's artistic works, begins with a detailed one-hundred page introduction, in which López Piñero combines Bru's biographical details with the academic and social conditions of an eighteenth-century anatomical painter and taxidermist. Centred on the Real Gabinete of Madrid, the work of Bru reflects the personal anxieties and technical difficulties that an illustrator of natural history had to encounter at the end of the eighteenth century.

The first of Bru's works contained in this volume, the *Colección de láminas que representan los animales y monstros del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid*, published initially between 1784 and 1786, includes 71 illuminated engravings of dissected specimens and a brief description of each of them. As in many other similar collections published during the Enlightenment—beginning with Claude Perrault's *Histoire naturelle des animaux*—Bru's *Atlas zoológico*

was also intended to inform the public of things “as they are seen in this Real Gabinete” (p. 117). The absence of references from classical or medieval sources, avoiding the accumulation of unfounded curiosities and the dissemination of unreliable beliefs, turns the *Atlas* into “the first title of zoological popularization with a modern scope published in Spain” (p. 31). Following this is a selection of Bru's prints for the unpublished ichthyological treatise of Antonio Sáñez Reguart, ‘Colección de producciones de los mares de España’ (1783–96), and for the *Diccionario histórico de las artes de la pesca nacional* (1791–95), “the most important work of its kind published in the century” (p. 83). Finally the volume also contains the complete set of plates and the anatomical description of the megatherium produced by Bru and published by José Garriga in 1796. Like the previous sections, this one is also introduced by a precise historical account in which López Piñero explains not only the circumstances of its production and publication, but also the academic discontinuities that led to its being overlooked. Accompanied by a bibliographical appendix and profusely documented, this edition of Bru's works should interest anyone dealing specifically with the history of palaeontology and appeal to those concerned with the history of zoological and scientific illustration.

Javier Moscoso, Harvard University

Piero Camporesi, *The land of hunger*, trans. Tania Croft-Murray with the assistance of Claire Foley, Oxford, Polity Press, 1996, pp. 223, £39.50, \$49.95 (0–7456–0888–4).

Time may prove Piero Camporesi, Professor of Italian Literature in the University of Bologna, a prose-poet as well as social anthropologist of *food*: these designations are more likely than “empirical” or “cultural historian”. Not that the functions are exclusive, but Camporesi relies intensely on the power of narrative and embroidered description over