

# Georg Meister: A Seventeenth Century Gardener and His Reports on Oriental Garden Art

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In Dresden, Germany, in 1692, there appeared a book titled *Der Orientalisch-Indianische Kunst- und Lust-Gärtner*<sup>1</sup>. The title suggests that the book is about oriental gardening but its scope is wider. It is in fact a richly varied account of a gardener's journey to the Far East (Fig. 1). Its author, the German Georg Meister (1653-1713), was a gardener by profession. With his book Meister became the first European garden specialist to report extensively on gardening in the Far East. The title of the book is in fact the honorific title that was bestowed upon him after his return. It refers to Meister's specific 'Oriental-Indian' skill in horticulture and in the more artistic aspects of ornamental gardening. The title can therefore be translated as 'The Oriental-Indian Art and Pleasure Gardener'. The book appeared in a few subsequent editions, but is at present somewhat forgotten as a source of garden history.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, besides being a curious personal document, it contains a lot of factual information on Asian horticulture and on the introduction of information and material, namely plants, to Europe. Moreover, it has a chapter on aesthetics in Japanese garden art which is of historic importance.

The present article intends to discuss the setting in which the book came about and to treat the parts on Japanese plants and garden art in more detail. It contains some quotations from the book in my English translation.

**Keywords:** HISTORY OF GARDEN ART (-JAPAN, -EUROPE), NATURALNESS IN JAPANESE GARDEN ART, HISTORY OF BOTANY (-EUROPE), PLANT FOLKLORE (-JAPAN).

- 1 See the bibliography for the full title of Meister's book. According to the bibliography in *Deutsches Forschungsinstitut* (1940), pp.234-235, Meister's book was reedited in Dresden, 1710, and Dresden and Leipzig, 1731. The bibliography in Duncker & Humblot, (1885, Neudruck, 1970) *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 21ster Band, p.254, mentions also editions dated 1713, and 1730. The library of the Agricultural University, Wageningen, the Netherlands contains in its Special Collections Division two again different editions. One is the 1692 edition bound in one volume with Theodorus Phytologus, *Neue Garten-Lust*, Leipzig, 1714 and Heinrich Hessen, *Neue Unterweisung*, Leipzig, 1712. The other edition in this collection is Meister's 1692 edition in which a little paper that reads: *Dresden, zu finden bey Christoph Hekel, 1710* is pasted at the lower end of the title page covering the last two lines: *Dresden/In Verlegung des Autoris, druckts Johann Riedel/Anno 1692*.
- 2 As a source of garden history Meister had the attention of Leonard Springer, see: L. A. Springer: *Zijn onze tegenwoordige villatuinen oorspronkelijk Europeesch. Onze Tuinen*, 1932 p.2. Meister is also discussed in: Koch, Hugo, (1910): *Sächsische Gartenkunst*, Berlin, pp.115-116.

## GEORG MEISTER, ORIENTAL GARDENER

### Early Career

Most of our information about Meister is derived from his own book, which even includes his portrait (Fig. 2). In fact the book gives so much personal information, including a testimonial and recommendations by others, that one is inclined to believe that self-promotion was one of the main motives in writing it. There is, for instance, a sonnet in the book that lauds his person, indulging in wordgames on his name (Meister=master). The same wordgame appears in the subscript to his portrait. Georg Meister must have been a somewhat complacent personality, for which he can

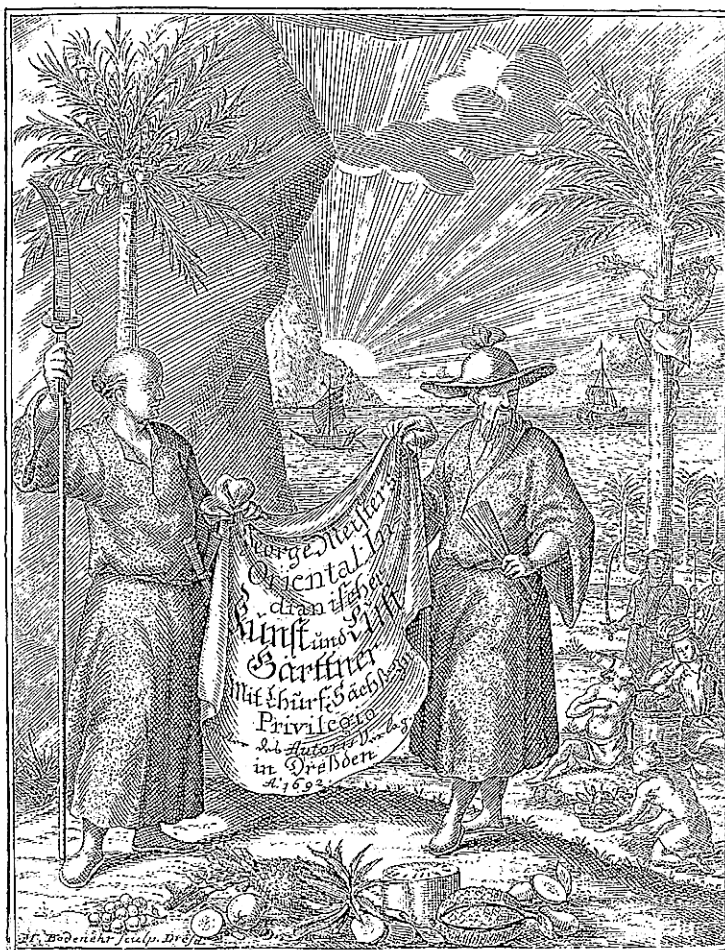


Fig. 1. Frontispiece of 'The Oriental-Indian Art and Pleasure Gardener', showing a Japanese samurai (left) and another 'oriental-indian' (Chinese, Korean?), standing behind some 'exotic' fruit. The background shows sunrise or sunset over a bay with mountainous islands (Nagasaki?) with a tropical setting of palm trees and 'indians' with fruit.

hardly be blamed. After all, it was only as a gardener, that he visited the remote East Indies, and after his safe return even continued his studies up to the point of publishing a book. After he returned to Europe, the title 'Oriental Gardener' was bestowed upon him; he carried it with pride.

Georg Meister's early career as a gardener comes into focus in the year 1675. At that time he was living in his homeland, Thüringen, in the town of Sondershausen, in the south west of what until recently was East-Germany. There he received an invitation to come and work for Ernst Albrecht von Eberstein (1605-1676), who was an important military man in the service of the Elector of Saxony, Kurfürst Johann Georg II. However, shortly after his appointment, Von Eberstein died and Meister found himself in the position of either entering the service of his master's son, or leaving. He decided to leave and travel because, in his own words, '... I had formed this firm resolution to visit, with Divine support, strange countries out of curiosity...' (Meister, 1692: 3).



Fig.2. Portrait of Georg Meister in Meister (1692), unnumbered page 8.

## To The East

Initially it was his intention to go on a journey through Holland, England, France and Italy. However, once in Amsterdam, by sheer chance he ended up signing a contract with the V.O.C., the Dutch East India Company, and came to serve as a soldier on a Batavia bound ship, the 'Ternaten'. Before leaving the port of Amsterdam, the captain had four small cases built on the deck and filled them with soil to grow plants. According to Meister, these plants were for use as vegetables and herbal medicine during the trip.<sup>3</sup> Meister took this as an opportunity to announce his professional background, and was put in charge of the ship's box gardens. They left Amsterdam on the 18th of May, 1677 and arrived without too much trouble at the Cape of Good Hope on the 14th of September. Meister was impressed by the rich natural world of the Cape, just as he was impressed again eleven years later on his way back. The primitiveness of the indigenous people left such a deep impression on him that he devoted several chapters, and three plates, in his book to the subject.<sup>4</sup> They stayed a few weeks, during which time Meister studied the Company's Cape garden, in which mainly fruits and vegetables for consumption were grown. Meister remarks that: '... I can certify that I have hardly seen a place that God and Nature have favoured better and in a more beautiful way than this place. And one may say whatever one wants of the famous waterworks in Versailles of the King of France, where water has been drawn over many miles at unusual cost, but here (at the Cape wk.) the clearest and most healthful water could be led into the garden from a distance of 300 to 400 paces, with very little expense ...' (Meister, 1692: 22). Water ran through small canals along the main garden paths.<sup>5</sup> Meister's negative evaluation of Versailles is discussed elsewhere in this article.

They arrived in Batavia, Java on the 24th of December of the same year, thanking God that they had only lost nine men. The box gardens on deck, no longer necessary,

3 See: Meister, 1692, p.9.

4 Meister, 1692, on the Hottentot people: Chapter IV, pp. 24-38, and part of Chapter XVIII, pp. 244-255, and plates on opposite pages 25, 26, and 252.

5 Meister, 1692, pp.21-23, gives a rather detailed description of the Company garden at the Cape. The garden's design is clearly Dutch. It measured 300 by 1000 rods (about 1100 × 3800 meters) and was encircled by a wall and a ditch. Inside the garden, sections were separated with double hedges of laurel kept at the height of a pike (several meters high) and about 2 or 3 ell thick (about 1 to 1.5 meter). No garden buildings were present. The edgings of the beds were low hedges of clipped rosemary, hyssop, and sage (*Rossmarin, Isoppen, Salbey*). Meister names some of the herbs, fruits and vegetables that were grown. Meister's 'rod', *Ruthe*, would have been the *Rheinländische Ruthe*, as he specifies that it was reckoned at 12 *Schuh* (12 feet for a rod). 1 *Rh. Ruthe* = 3.766m. the garden measured 300 × 1000 *Ruthen* which equals 1129.8 × 3766 m. The hedges were *einer guten Picke hoch*, higher than a pike, at least 2 meters, but maybe more, pikes carried at ceremonies could be up to about 4 meters long. They were 2 or 3 ell thick. Meister would have had the ell of Saxony in mind, which measured 0.5664 m., making for a hedge of 1.1328 to 1.6992 meters thick. The measure 'pace' *Schritt* was usually not very precisely defined, it is about 75 cm., 300 to 400 paces equals about 225 to 300 meters. The German mile was 7.5 kilometers.

were destroyed, the soil was thrown overboard, and Meister was a soldier again. He spent some time and experienced a few minor adventures as a Company soldier on Java. Then, to his great luck, he attracted the attention of his countryman Andreas Cleyer (1634-1698?). Cleyer was one of the elders at Batavia. As well as being enthusiastic about horticulture, plants, herbs and medicine, he was also an enterprising personality, and was, in the course of 1678, put in charge of the Company's drugstore.<sup>6</sup> Cleyer employed Meister, sometime during the second half of 1678, as the head gardener in charge of the drugstore's herb garden. Again he was released from military service. He had to manage a group of about 50 'slaves', Malay or Javanese garden workers '... to whom my order should be as their law, otherwise I have the right to have them tied to a pole and beaten thoroughly ...' (Meister, 1692:46). They were charged with collecting as many plants as possible from the wild as well as from other people's gardens, and to obtain as much practical information as possible about all of the plants, e.g. local names, uses, cultivation, etc. Invaluable to his later career as an 'oriental gardener' in Europe must have been the experience he gained in the care and maintenance of these exotic plants.

### To Japan

Meister visited Japan two times. In the summer of 1682 Cleyer departed for Japan and took Meister along. Cleyer would serve a term as the V.O.C. director of the Dutch trading post on Dejima, the man-made island off Nagasaki. Their ship reached Japan on the 6th of August, and they landed on Dejima the next day. They would leave Japan again at the end of 1683, and arrive in Batavia, after a three months sojourn in Malacca, on the 1st of March, 1684. The second visit began on the 30th of August, 1685. Cleyer's official service ended this time on the 5th of November, 1686, and they returned to Batavia early in the summer of the next year. It is not exactly clear when they left Dejima. Both times that he visited Japan, Meister, and the other members of the mission, stayed on Dejima island. Only on rare occasions did they gain permission to leave it. On the island there was only a small herb and vegetable garden and native garden workers were hardly, if ever, working in it.<sup>7</sup> Work was done by Malay

6 See Kraft (1985), -an excellent study on Cleyer's Japanese diary of his first stay- pp. 40-41.

7 Meister, 1692, p. 193, gives a short dialogue in Japanese, with a German translation, in which two Japanese decide to take a walk in the garden. One hears in fact Meister asking a Japanese to accompany him to take a look at the Company garden on Dejima. The word for 'garden' used by Meister is 'hana batake' (Meister: 'Fannavvattaky'), which indicates a field to grow flowers, rather than an ornamental garden. The word 'hana batake' applies to the Company garden on Dejima as depicted in historical illustrations. The word 'hana batake' and the illustrations give the impression that the garden was used to keep (and study?) plants other than vegetables.

With Kaempfer, who was in Japan from 1690 until 1692, we find reference to a 'gardiner' (gardener) as one of the staff members of the 'kitchin' (kitchen) on Dejima, but it was not a fixed post. Kaempfer, 1728, Vol. I, p.333: 'There are besides some other people, who now and then, do some little service in and for our kitchin, such as a gardiner, a man to look after our cattle, (...) and some other menial servants.' Meister never mentions native gardeners.

slaves they had brought along, or by themselves. Most of the information Meister gained on Japanese horticulture and gardens reached him through the licensed Japanese interpreters, who were attached to the Dutch trade mission. These men were busy in their role as interpreters only when there were ships and when trading was to be done. After the trade that went with the arrival of ships was finalized, business activities came to a close and life became quiet and isolated again. Then there was plenty of time to talk and discuss things of common interest. One of the things to be discussed with the interpreters were plants and their use.<sup>8</sup> Plants were, in the Company garden, a matter for daily care and, in the form of vegetables, of daily consumption. If native plants in the form of seeds or saplings were brought to the confined world of Dejima, information on their use and cultivation had naturally to accompany them. Even more so, if professional plant people like Cleyer and Meister were eagerly seeking more information about them. Cleyer even managed to commission one or more Japanese painters to make paintings of plants, bringing a lot of information on Japanese plants to Europe. The larger part of this collection of paintings is now kept in the *Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz*.<sup>9</sup> Meister reports on almost 90 Japanese plant species in his book; plants for both practical and ornamental use.

Meister's book records several conversations in Portuguese, Malay, and other languages with a German translation, no doubt to impress the reader with Meister's language abilities. The contents of these conversations are light, if not silly. However, the one in Japanese is of interest in the context of this article. The fictitious conversation is between two Japanese, Ginnemon and Susaburo (first names). A chief cook 'Susaburo' and an interpreter 'Ginnemon' are known from records.<sup>10</sup> They visit a 'mountain gardener' near Nagasaki to see whether he has any rare plants for sale. Mountain means 'wild' or 'natural' in this case, so the gardener would have been a trader of plants collected from the wild rather than produced in nurseries. After climbing the mountain Ginnemon and Susaburo reach their destination. The 'moun-

8 Kraft, 1985, p.46 on the role of the interpreters, also referring to a letter by Cleyer addressed to a certain Scheffer (Kraft, 1985: 58, note 129). The interpreters also brought plants, or parts of plants, above all flowers, seeds and the like if these were at their seasonal best at a time when it was not allowed to leave Dejima. See also Thunberg, 1784; p.79: ... *ab interpretibus japonicis allatam* ...

9 Kraft, 1985, p.46, also p.58, footnotes 130, 131, on the routes and whereabouts of the paintings.

10 Susaburo and Ginnemon appear in the 'Dagregisters', the journals of the Dutch directors of the trading post at Dejima. Susaburo was the chief cook; likely, of course, to have provided Meister with information on edible plants. Several persons by the name of Ginnemon appear in the journals around the time of Meister's stay. Most likely Meister speaks about Imamura Ginnemon, at that time still a young man, who later many times appears in the journals as a helpful intermediate. He spoke reportedly excellent Dutch. See Vermeulen, 1986/7, Vol.I, folio numbers 1683-221/1684-72, 208/1685-38, 68, etc. on Susaburo, also spelled as Sosaber or Sosabro, and Vol.II, folio numbers 1695-297/1696-307/1697-78, etc. on Imamura Ginnemon, also spelled as Imamorach Ginnenom, Gennemon, or Genemon. Meister records the rough Dutch language of the sailors on board of his India-bound ship, he must have been able to communicate in Dutch.

tain gardener' shows them many types of *Chrysanthemum*, but they end up buying young tea plants. The dialogue, in its broken Japanese, sounds authentic and supports not only the suggestion that Meister could communicate in Japanese, but also the idea that he actually made such trips, accompanied by Japanese, to collect plants.<sup>11</sup> Cleyer and Meister took some tea plants to Batavia and, later, Meister took some to the Cape.

Both times that Meister lived on Dejima, there was an official trip to visit the Shogun in Edo. He did not join these trips. Leaving Japan for the last time, they returned to Batavia early in the summer of 1687.

### Back Home

Nearly half a year later, in the autumn of 1687, Meister decided to return to Europe, '... forced by religion and love of country ...' (Meister, 1692: 222). Part of the decision was motivated by his experience of heathenism in Japan. He had heard stories of the severe persecution of Christians, and had witnessed himself some of the cruel executions that several Japanese suffered who were supposedly guilty of illegal trading with the Dutch. He asked Cleyer to release him from his service. His request was granted and he received a written testimonial, (published in Meister's book) plus a bonus of 25 Japanese golden *cupan*, which, according to Meister, equalled 250 German thaler, or 625 Dutch guilders.

On the 10th of December, 1687, Meister embarked in Batavia on 'de Waalstroom'. During a short break in the journey at the Cape of Good Hope he delivered plants from the East to the Governour, among which were some tea plants he had grown himself from Japanese seeds. Again he studied flowers and plants, and even bought some bulbs collected for him in the mountains by Dutch guardsmen.<sup>12</sup> Meister arrived

11 Compare note 6 above. Two conversations in Japanese found in Meister, 1692, p.193-196. Included in Meister's book are two copper plate illustrations of Japanese texts, likely to have been copied by a European engraver from Japanese originals. The Chinese characters on p.310, *das Sinaische A.B.C.*, are copied from *Ta Hsieh Chang Chu*, the 'Great Learning' of the Chinese Chu Hsi (1130-1200). The book contains further a word list that gives a basic vocabulary of spoken Japanese, in a romanized version (Meister, 1692: 37, 38 and 310, resp. 185-192).

On the opportunities to make day trips outside Dejima, Kaempfer reports: 'The few Dutchmen, who remain at *Desima*, after the departure of our ships, are permitted once or twice a year, to take a walk into the adjacent country, and in particular to view the temples about *Nagasaki*: This liberty is oftner granted to Physicians and Surgeons, under pretence of going to search for Medicinal Plants. However, this pleasure walk falls very expensive for us, for it must be made in company of the *Otona*, of our ordinary Interpreters, and other officers in our service, who are handsomely treated by us at dinner, in one of the Temples of the *Ikosju Sect*, and we must on this occasion, even with seeming satisfaction, see our purses strongly squeez'd for the most common civilities shewn us by the Priests of that Temple.' (Kaempfer, 1728: 339). Meister had, at least on the second Japan trip, the rank of 'Hofmeester', which was more a title than a position. Because of the unimportance of his person it was easier for him, compared to Cleyer, to leave Dejima.

12 The governour at the Cape was Simon van der Stille. Meister, 1692, pp.22,243, the bulbs were

safely in Amsterdam on the 16th of August, 1688. At the office of the V.O.C. in Amsterdam he was paid for 134 months of service as a soldier. At ten guilders a month this amounted to 1340 guilders. With no deductions, the payment was made.<sup>13</sup> This income was apart from his earnings from Cleyer, and apart from his private activities, notably selling the imported tea, porcelain and lacquerware, and probably also plants. Meister was a rich man.<sup>14</sup>

After having settled his affairs, Meister delivered some letters and plants which had been entrusted to him. The governour at the Cape, and also Cleyer himself, had asked him to forward several letters, packets of seeds and live plants in bamboo caskets to various European botanists and plant collectors. Among these were not only wealthy regents of Amsterdam who collected plants as a hobby, like the V.O.C. lawyer Pieter van Dam in Amsterdam, but also botanists, like Mentzel in Berlin, and Jacob Breyn in Gdansk (Danzig). Cleyer particularly pressed Meister to visit the latter in person. Meister relates that he presented Breyn with '...300 beautifully painted Indian or Japanese 'herbaries' (*Herbarien* in the text) ...', that must have been part of the collection of illustrations acquired by Cleyer in Japan (Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered page 17). Breyn mentions Meister's name several times in his '*Prodromus Fasciculi*'.<sup>15</sup> He also met with the head gardener of William III and the gardeners of the botanical garden Hortus Medicus, in Amsterdam, giving them some plants, plus information such as plant names and advice on cultivation. Then, more as a tourist, he visited the gardens of the Prince of Enghien and the Viceroy in Brussels. He also went to the garden at Leeuwenhorst near Leiden, famed for its exotic plants, which was owned by Caspar Fagel, an important politician. The latter also was presented with plants from the East.

At the end of the year Meister realized that his savings were quickly dwindling. He left for Germany intending to try his luck in Dresden. Dresden was one of the centers of garden culture in Germany at that time. Meister's mail-coach entered the city on

collected from the Tafelberg, Meister, 1692, p.240. Van der Stelle's son Willem Adriaan possessed a garden at Heemstede, near Amsterdam. In 1697 Willem sold the plants he had collected since 1685. Two Japanese plants are on the list of plants sold. Did Meister visit him after his return to Europe? See: Wijnands, 1984, p.7 on Willem Adriaan and his garden.

13 Meister seems relieved that the V.O.C. paid him without any deduction. His employment for Cleyer might have been illegal according to V.O.C. standards, which may explain the fact that Cleyer never mentions Meister in the official Dejima journal. Cleyer's enterprising approach made for some serious misunderstandings between him and the V.O.C.

14 The text, (Meister, 1692: 289), is not clear on the question of whether Meister also imported live plants privately, although he surely did. He names 'tea', but it is not clear whether he means processed leaves, or plants. Two lists of 'officially' imported live plants are found in the book. A third one lists 425 names of plants of which Meister privately brought seeds to Europe. None of the names of the 90 Japanese plants he describes elsewhere is in this list. Anyhow seeds from '*Convolvulus*', '*Grisantumum*', etc. could have been Japanese. (Meister, 1692: 227-236).

15 Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered page 17, referring to Breyn, Jacob, (1689): *Prodromus Fasciculi rariorum plantarum (...) Anno M. DC. LXXIX. in Hortis Celeberrimis Hollandiae, (...) Gedani, Sumpitibus Auctoris, Imprimebat David Fridericus Rhetius. Anno M. DC.LXXX.* (Idem, *Secundus, Gedani, Anno M. DC. LXXXIX.*)



the 10th of December, 1688.<sup>16</sup> Through his skills, and helped by the recommendations he possessed, he entered the service of the Electors of Saxony as "*Orientalisch-Indianische Kunst- und Lust-Gärtner*".

The Electors were important sponsors of the arts. At one time their generosity extended to the point of endangering state finances.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that they also sponsored the publication of his book: with ingratiating words Meister dedicates his '*Oriental Gardener*' to Johann Georg IV, Elector of Saxony. Meister became attached to a garden known as 'the Turkish Garden', a favourite pleasure garden of the Court of Johann Georg. Through Meister's activities there were many oriental plants in its orangeries and flower-parterres that gave the garden added charm. And Meister's expert maintenance ensured his ever increasing fame.<sup>18</sup>

### 'THE ORIENTAL-INDIAN PLEASURE GARDENER'

#### Meister as a Christian in the Far East

Meister travelled for more than ten years during the early period of his life in the East. After his return it took some time, and a large part of his savings, to decide upon the future course of his career. It is understood that the book he wrote shortly after he returned was not only a recording of his observations, but also served as a kind of personal history and a testimony to his standing within the profession. Meister proves to be a devout Christian who viewed nature as an expression of God, its Creator. This is how he expresses it in his foreword:

'Honoured and kind reader,

That God, The Lord, should surely have a liking for the noble art of gardens and for gardening, is obvious and clear not only from the Divine Holy Scriptures but also from the works of profane writers. Where else did Divine Preordination lodge the most beautiful masterpiece of all his creations, the first human beings, but in Paradise or the Garden of Eden? ... All of mankind's bliss and salvation were at stake in the garden where Lord Jesus allowed himself to be caught and bound to do penance and pay not only the debt that Adam and Eve owed to the Garden, but also the debt that we owe again to it .... There you

16 The text (Meister, 1692: 290) reads '... den 10. Decembris Anno 1689 ...' But a few lines before this he relates how he left five full months after they arrived in Dutch waters, back from the East, which was August 1688 (see: Meister, 1692: 259). Therefore the year 1689 for his arrival in Dresden must be a mistake for 1688.

17 Johann Georg II (1613-1680) and son Johann Georg III (1647-1691), both great patrons of the arts, the latter guided an army against French Emperor Louis XIV in 1688. Son of Johann Georg III, Johann Georg IV. (1668-1694) ruled only two and a half years and was, reportedly, a frivolous personality. Meister's criticism of Versailles has of course its roots in the political atmosphere of Dresden.

18 See Koch (1910), pp.115-116 on Meister's career in Dresden.

see that God, the Lord, from the beginning to the end has employed gardens as an instrument and tool to establish the most elevated things in the world.'

The biblical garden is followed by an enumeration of the famous gardens of the world (including the 'magnificent Japanese at Miaco', present day Kyoto, Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered page 13). It ends with the conclusion that after all nature itself, not gardens, form an expression of the Lord's Bliss.

'The Bounty of Heaven favours one place more than another with the climate under which a land, a field, or a garden lies. But if one only considers this, then the places that are the work of God and Nature and not of man are to be preferred above all others. Thus, the Bounty of Heaven is above all to be perceived at the Cape of Good Hope, in Japan and in China, the most remote places of Asia and Africa, that express it miraculously' (Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered pages 10-14).

The wondrous and exotic nature of the East left a deep impression on Meister, proof of which is found in other sections as well.<sup>19</sup> Emotionally it was a profound experience of the beauty of nature; intellectually it could only be grasped as something more elevated than man, something Superhumang, or Divine. Consequently, caring as a gardener for the things of nature became a divine vocation, blessed and rewarded with Divine Guidance:

'In my younger days I applied myself to noble gardening (even though the profits, with which worldly children are usually preoccupied, are not so excessive). I could not imagine a more noble and glorious pursuit than gardening. While studying it, one can each and every moment think of the Great Creator of all this, and of the inexpressibly beautiful works of His Hands. This can be perceived miraculously in this or that exotic fruit, by means of which one learns to explore Nature (Nature=God wk.). (Fig. 3)

Once I entered my profession, I decided, through singular Divine Disposition, to develop it also in a special way. Most men of my trade travel through Italy, France, Holland and Germany to polish their skills. However, our most useful spices, fruits, roots, herbs and flowers, yes, most of our medicines are brought to us from the Orient and India, of which the regular gardener usually, as most botanists should know, understands almost less than nothing. So I decided to see these places myself and to inform myself on the efficacies and effects and above this to observe also, whether seeds and fruits brought into our climate and horizon can be propagated. In this, I was partly successful. How, and in which way, I reached these remote places, through Divine Guidance, will be brought

19 See for instance Meister (1692), unnumbered page 7, p.22, etc.

to the kind reader in the present work ...

Finally, I thank the Highest, that He has given me not only the opportunity to investigate the magnificent and rare works, (nature, plants, wk.), that He has sown abundantly in the most beautiful fields, grounds, mountains, valleys, meadows and gardens of the Indies, but also shown me the benefits and virtues of the plants; (It is a thousand pities that the blindest heathens are allowed to enjoy these excellent things) and I thank Him (...) also that He would have let me learn various languages by which He enabled me to search out the origins and fundamentals of many plants in these regions.' (Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered pages 14, 15, 17, 18).

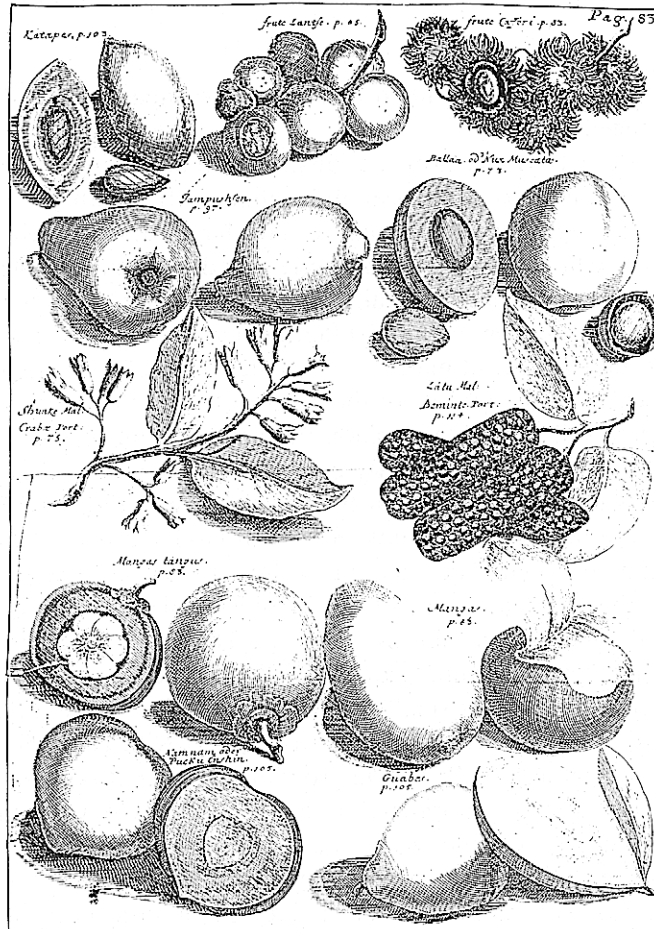


Fig.3. 'Indian' fruits, as wondrous workmanship of Nature (Meister, 1692, opposite p.82).

Thus, the plants he saw, and the nature he experienced in the East formed the ultimate evidence of God. And investigating nature was in fact a divine task. His great disappointment in Asia was the heathenism of the Far East that did not rhyme

with the surrounding nature that was so much an expression of his Christian God. In the end it provided a motivation to return to Europe.

### **Naturalness**

Seen from his personal point of view the exotic nature of the East, as exemplified for instance in fruit, was proof of the Creator's victory. It was his faith, rather than a modern empirical driving force that pushed him to explore nature in the East. Overwhelmed by this rich natural world, yet supported by his faith that nature was not antihuman but Superhuman, Meister was the right person to appreciate not only nature itself, but also naturalness in garden art. On this point Japanese gardens apparently impressed Meister. He reports extensively on this topic in one full chapter:

#### **'Chapter 11**

About the ornamental garden making of the Japanese and the Chinese and what is related to that.

Here I add with justice how the Japanese and the Chinese build their gardens and decorate them not with beautiful sculpture, but with rocks. These people can't imagine a greater delight than to have large rocks in their gardens, which were not placed there by Nature but were found by them and then moved. These rocks and pleasing stones, are taken from some place, and then transported to another place or garden, without suffering any damage. These stones serve them instead of statues made of marble or alabaster. They also are accustomed to erect a large rockery in the middle of the garden. This is then done as follows: they make a large soil mound and place, from the bottom to the top, all kinds of stones on it: stones that are partly covered with moss, or otherwise beautifully shaped by Nature. It is done in such a way that even a thousand Europeans who haven't seen it before, would think that it was God and Nature and not the hand of man that created it. They also know how to divide these rockeries artfully; there then they have all kinds of rare grottoes, holes, ravines and passages, out of which they have water fall as in nature. They also have all kinds of basins into which water runs: round, square, oval, and such. In these basins they keep all kinds of fish above all small ones that shine like gold and glitter like silver. Maybe half of the surface of the basin is covered with green plants of all sorts, plants that in nature usually would grow in this kind of pond or body of water. If the mountain doesn't supply water, then they supply it with pipes that are laid out in such a way that the water runs down through all the stones and rocks.

In the large rocks and stones they have round or elongated holes, a foot deep, that are filled with earth into which they plant little trees in their manner; sometimes it are trees that bear fruit, but mostly it are plants with all kinds of beautiful and fragrant flowers. Also all kinds of bulbs, which are a rare and pleasant sight. When one flower fades, already the next one is coming out. Hollows are also carved in all the rocks and all kinds of figures are placed there; out of the heads of these likewise grow and blossom trees and flowering plants, or the figures carry large round pots, out of which bloom various beautiful

flowers. They also have statues in the conventional sense, sometimes close to the rocks, and others around which it is possible to walk. In the ravines and grottoes they have all kinds of painted idols as well as other images. Also in the rocks are round holes in which they put bird-nests containing eggs, while others place eggs made of porcelain in them. They take these nests from the birds that nest in the forest, because these look much more natural than those made by the industry and hands of man. They lay their garden beds out well and pleasing, and edge them decoratively with cut or fired stones. Others take the grass *Duafingy* or *Gramen Bulbosum* (*jahige*, *janohige*, *Ophiopogon japonicus* wk.) and use it for attractive ornamental edgings, which are easily maintained with scissors, like our German box (*Buxus* wk.) when used in ornamental planting. It is used exceptionally well and is very decorative. Therefore, no European should believe that only we are intelligent and that these people are stupid beasts. If we look at their appearance, we may believe that we are dealing with poor blind people; and when they look at us they may fall to similar thoughts, as they, the Japanese, say rather unabashedly, that we don't have such contemplative minds as do they. They boast of it themselves in the following words, saying to the Dutchmen 'Dutchman clever, Japanese even more clever', or '*Hollande Fuckeyekeri*', which means as much as 'the Dutch are crazy fools', the same being said of whatever nationality one may be. The same may properly be said about them, considering their blind stupidity regarding true knowledge of God. But besides that I do not deny: they are a people under the sun of intelligent behaviour, of cunning maxims, in state, government and trade as well as showing bravery and intrepid courage in war. In reality the Japanese are not inferior in cleverness or intelligence to the ostentatious and supposedly very intelligent Frenchmen, as is sufficiently illustrated by their works of art, incomparable painting, laquerware, gold-work, exquisite swords, and beautiful porcelain' (Meister, 1692: 182-184).

It is clearly naturalness that strikes Meister most. But let us first discuss the outward appearance of the garden style that he describes.

To the modern reader acquainted with Japanese gardens it may sound as if Meister had lost his senses. Such is not the case. Our modern image of 'Japanese gardens', shaped by a now prevailing sophisticated design style, is of our century. Up to the opening of Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century this style was a higher form of garden art, reserved for the highest elite, and hardly, if ever, seen by Westerners like Meister. Nevertheless, he describes Japanese gardens (not Chinese, for he had never been there). These were not gardens of emperors or shoguns, but the folk gardens in and around Nagasaki. Gardens in southern Japan still employ hollowed rocks, into which indeed plants are set.<sup>20</sup> Garden figures—about which Kaempfer, the famous Japan traveller, visiting Japan after Meister, also reports—are still an important

20 See on the garden art in southern Japan: Oguchi (1979).

element in the popular Japanese garden.<sup>21</sup> I do not know of the practice of placing bird-nests in garden rocks, but why not? The Japanese garden plants that Meister describes in another chapter are enjoyed as flowering and fruit-bearing plants, or plants with some other practical use. His observations easily evoke the image of the garden at a Japanese country-inn today. It is the romantic naturalness of earthenware *tanuki* badgers, one of them carrying a basket of flowers; they stand in a movingly elaborate garden world of rocks, running water, goldfish, a bronze of a crane, a toad cut out of stone, all under a *biwa* or *kaki* tree and surrounded by an array of pots with *bonsai*, azalea's and other plants. Meister describes a popular enjoyment of gardens. With Meister one does not even encounter the slightest trace of the heavy literary connotations of plants that were favoured by the nobleman in Japan. It is evident that he had no contact with an intellectual elite. Accordingly, he does not theorize upon Japanese literary or philosophical backgrounds to the naturalness he perceived. Anyhow, Meister's account proves that popular gardens, like the gardens of higher classes, were also modelled after nature. The amazement expressed by Meister, who was not acquainted with man-made naturalness in garden art, sounds so honestly authentic that one is led to believe that he must actually have visited and seen the kind of garden he describes. His cannot but be an eye-witness account. In this respect it forms a valuable source material in the garden history of Japan. But the revelation to Meister of naturalness in the Japanese garden also has importance relating to the garden history of Europe.

Meister was one of the first Europeans who could enjoy and express, in words, a new appreciation of natural nature. He stands at the beginning of a revolutionary movement in European garden history that would denounce the formal Versailles-style as unnatural and would experiment with naturalness and informality, leading to the English landscape style. In this context his book makes a remarkably terse, though short, comment on French baroque garden art. This is, coloured by his political preferences, his criticism of the formal, 'unnatural', gardens of Versailles: '...There can be no doubt that in Versailles the present French tyrant (Louis XIV wk.) wants to set an example for the world and also to possess the most beautiful of all with his wonder-garden extorted from nature...' (Meister, 1692, Foreword, unnumbered page 13). Discussing the garden of the Dutch East India Company at The Cape, Meister likewise expresses his negative feelings about the high cost with which its waterworks had been laid out. The section is quoted above.

That he disliked Versailles' blasphemy of nature should not be overstressed as he only gives it little attention. But his comment becomes quite meaningful when seen in connection with his extensive discussion of Japanese garden art and its naturalness. We can only guess as to whether or not Meister after his return had any influence on garden aesthetics in Europe. He did not have enough formal schooling or theoretical insight to be able to put his thoughts into impressive garden treatises. Nevertheless, a profound essay on the subject appeared almost simultaneously elsewhere in Europe.

21 Kaempfer, 1728, Vol II, p.421. He also mentions the porous rock typical of southern Japan:

William Temple in England published his essay 'Upon the Gardens of Epicurus' in 1685. There he dwells extensively on irregularity in Chinese garden art. Temple got his information from a Far East-traveller; but it is plausible that Japanese, rather than Chinese, garden art was his source.<sup>22</sup> We do not know the source of Temple's information, but it must have been somebody who was around in East Asia at about the same time as Meister. William Temple's essay had a direct impact on garden aesthetics in Europe. It triggered a literary discussion on irregularity that came to play an important role in establishing the English landscape style.

## Plants

As a gardener, Meister's strongest point was not aesthetic theory, but rather plants and their maintenance. More than one third of the book deals with this subject. He reports in sufficient detail on sixty different plants from the Indies to fill eighty pages and about ninety Japanese plant species filling about forty pages. The section dealing with 'Indian' plants starts with an extensive chapter on the coconut palm, '...the most useful tree in the world ...'. Subsequent chapters treat a series of plants with economic value: spices like nutmeg, clove, cinnamon and fruit trees such as sirsak, durian, plimbing, mangosteen, etc. It was especially the fruits of these trees that revealed Gods' Creation to Meister; ten copper plate illustrations supplement the text (Fig. 3 on p.135). Names for 'Indian' plants are usually given in several languages. For example the paragraph on pepper is titled: '*Von Pfeffer oder Ladu, item Canaryn, von den Malabaren Molonga, von den Malaccern Lada, in Arabien Filsil, bey den Gusaretten von Cambey Meriche, von den Bengalen Moroy, und von den Portugisen Peminte genannt.*' (Meister, 1692: 114)

Almost without exception some economic use is given for each plant, be it as a spice or foodstuff, medicine, cosmetic, or the like.

Meister's section on Japanese plants begins with an introduction. He expresses again his admiration for the Japanese in spite of his disapproval of their heathenism.

### 'The Japanese Nursery

Here follow some rare trees, herbs and Japanese flowering plants, which I at both trips have observed and researched, in modesty and as an amateur, and explained in the course of time for my patron (=Cleyer wk.).

Just as the Cape of Good Hope lies under the Tropic of Capricorn, or 35 degrees towards the South Pole, so lies the great Kingdom, Imperium, or Gold

'... For a farther ornament of the same place, there is generally a flower-pot or two standing there. Sometimes they plant some dwarf-trees there, which will grow easily upon pumice, or other porous stones, without any ground at all, provided the root be put into the water, from whence it will suck up sufficient nourishment... A small rock or hill in a corner of the garden, made in imitation of nature, curiously adorn'd with birds and insects, cast in brass, and placed between the stones ...'

22 The idea centers around the word 'sharawaggi' that Temple employs to indicate Chinese irregularity, extensively discussed in Nakamura (1987).

Country Japan almost as many degrees in the northern latitude. Thus its climatic zone, in fertility and weather, is almost exactly the same. But, instead of Africa and its bestial and stupid creatures of Africans and wild Hottentots, Japan has been inhabited by an intelligent and bright people for more than a thousand years; although they persist in heathenry not out of want of understanding, but out of obstinacy ... Regarding art, science or worldly knowledge no Japanese needs any European, however educated he may be, as a teacher. Likewise regarding planting of trees, pleasure gardens, many kinds of flowers and herbs, not to mention noble medicine, this people has great knowledge. Yes, I say that they have done their utmost, and haven't skimped on money nor labour. With precious gold they were able to import what they needed from the Chinese, their predecessors, and other 'Indians' and close neighbours. The things that I have observed, limited by lack of time and freedom to only a shadow of what can be seen, are related below' (Meister, 1692: 144,145).

Then follow the plants, one by one, concluding with an alphabetical index. No illustrations were included in the section on Japanese plants. However, Cleyer had more than a thousand paintings of Japanese plants prepared, 300 of which Meister presented on Cleyer's behalf to Breyn.<sup>23</sup> For some reason, Meister did not use these to get copper plates engraved for his section on Japanese plants. Cleyer published articles on Japanese plants from 1682 on, covering many of the plants listed in Meister's book. He employed the same romanized Japanese names, though sometimes slight differences occur. Almost all of his articles are illustrated.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the Japanese plants Meister lists are ornamental plants with no other use whatsoever. Such plants are few among his 'Indian' plants. Japanese plants in the book are mostly identified with only their Japanese name, with no names in other languages. Meister's work was a pioneer study, since no Western book regarding Japanese plants had yet been published. He recorded names as he heard them, applying his own, not very systematic, romanization. Below the name miscellaneous aspects of the plant in question are recorded. Unlike later European Japan-travellers reporting on plants, Meister did not have a botanical point of view. He was not

23 See: Meister, 1692, Foreword. unnumbered page 17.

24 See bibliographies of Cleyer's work in Deutsches Forschungsinstitut (ed.) (1940), pp.78-79, and in: Duncker & Humblot, (1957) *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Dritter Band, p.291. Deutsches Forschungsinstitut (ed.) (1940), pp.78, 79 gives a series of articles on Japanese plants by Cleyer. I gratefully acknowledge Dr. D.O. Wijnands of the Botanical Gardens, Wageningen, the Netherlands, who provided me with a set of copies of these articles, that largely appeared in the *Miscellanea Curiosa sive Ephemeridum Medico-Physicarum Caesario-Leopoldinae Academiae Naturae Curiosorum*, the proceedings of the Leopold Academy (Leopoldina, founded 1652 in Schweinfurt). Compared to Meister Cleyer's reports are more extensive, but he treats fewer plants. Both address plants not treated by the other. Reports on the same plants run, as for there contents, largely parallel with both.

Cleyer corresponded with Kaempfer. The latter employed again many of the romanized names as given by Cleyer and Meister. See Kaempfer (1712).



interested in detailed descriptions or systematic classifications, but rather in practical use or ornamental value. If he describes taxonomic details he does not do so using precise language. This is, to give at least one example, but without discussing details, what he reports regarding the Cycad palm, the first plant he treats (Fig. 4).

## De Arbore Schootitzu.

**S**eser Schootitzu ist ein harter Baum von Holze/ wächst hoch als ein Haus/ er stehet viel Jahr/ seine Blätter sind steiff / schmal und lang/ vorn an den Spitzen ein wenig stachlicht/ schön Safft/ grünig/ das Holz mit der Wurzel stampen die Japponner mit reinem Wasser/ denn wird es so dick/ als neugemachte frische Käse/ das können sie vor den Hunger essen/ man kan auch diese Bäume aus der Erden ziehen/ und wohl 10. und mehr Jahr hinhängen/ auch gleich in den Schorstein/ und denn wieder pflanzen/ so werden sie wieder grün und wachsen hoch/ welches in Warbeit

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## Der Orientalische

heit ein rares Wunder der Natur ist. Sie pflegen wegen dieser Unverweslichkeit / und edlern Nutzbarkeit / dieses Baumes Blätter bey ihre Götzen in die Tempel zu hängen / item wegen ihres obgedachten Nutzens halten / pflanzen sie solche auch auff ihre Festungen/ damit in Zeit von harter Belagerung vor alten Zeiten (denn diese Kaiser lassen diesem Könige keinen Krieg zu/ auch nicht viel Soldaten) solche an statt des Brodtes ihnen Unterhalt geben. Ihre Frucht ist klein und grünlich/ welche zu keinem sonderbaren Nutzen taugen.

Fig.4. *De Arbore Schootitzu*, Meister on the cycad palm (Meister, 1692, 145/6).

### On the Sotetsu Tree (*De Arbore Schootitzu*)

This Schootitzu (*Sotetsu*, *Cycas revoluta* wk.) is a tree of tough wood, it grows as high as a house and stands for many years. Its leaves are stiff, long and narrow, at the tip a little prickly, and of a nice, succulent green colour. The Japanese beat the stem and the root in clear water; in the end it (the water and tree sap, wk.) becomes as thick as freshly made cheese. They eat this substance in times of famine. One may pull these trees out of their soil and store them away for ten years or more, even in a chimney, and then, if replanted they become green again and grow high up. This is a veritable wonder of nature. Because of its persistency and noble benefits they hang the leaves of this tree beside their gods in the temple. Also because of its above-mentioned use they plant these in their fortifications. In times of prolonged sieges, in olden days, it would give them sustenance instead of bread. (Their present Emperor doesn't permit their kings to conduct war, or keep soldiers.) Its fruit is small, greenish, and doesn't

serve any particular use' (Meister, 1692: 145, 146).

Such is the nature of Meister's observations. He provides us with a valuable source on plant folklore in 17th century southern Japan.

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*Meistern/Dieser Zeit Churfl. Sächs. bestallten Indianischen Kunst- und Lust-Gärtner. Mit Churfl. Sächs. Durchl. gnädigstem Privilegio/Dresden/In Verlegung des Autoris, druckts Johann Riedel/Anno 1692.*

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# ゲオルグ・マイスター：17世紀の庭師および彼の東洋庭園論

ウィーベ・カウテルト

**要旨**：1692年、ドイツ・ドレスデンで東洋の庭園に関する初めてといえる詳しい本が出た。著者はゲオルグ・マイスター。ドイツ・テューリンゲン生まれの庭師でオランダ東インド会社の兵士として東洋の紀行を主に書いた“東洋園芸庭園師”という書物である。

園芸・造園の分野から見た東洋情報として非常に早い時期にヨーロッパに伝えられ、しかも多くの東洋園芸植物が紹介された。その中には日本国内で大衆が好んで植えていたと思われる植物が90種も紹介されている。彼自身が持ち帰った植物はヨーロッパ内の有力な植物蒐集家達に配られ、本とともにたいへんな関心と呼んだ。

本書の中でとくに注目しているのはマイスターの「発見」した日本庭園の自然らしさであろう。当時流行していたいわゆる整形式のフランス式庭園に反して、マイスターによる神がつくったであろうと思われるほどの“日本庭園の自然らしさ”についての情報は、ヨーロッパの庭園様式の主流がイギリス風景式庭園へ転回する影響を与えたであろう。マイスターがヨーロッパに帰った後の活動はまだ不明な点が多く、本稿はもっぱら植物学ならびに庭園史の資料として彼の著書を紹介する。