

Caspar Wolf and his personal public commitment to edit Conrad Gessner's unfinished history of plants (Part I: Essay)

Holger Funk

Summary

After completion of his *History of animals*, Gessner began an equally ambitious *History of plants*, which, however, he could not complete due to his premature death in consequence of a fatal epidemic. Immediately after Gessner's death, Caspar Wolf (c. 1532–1601), Gessner's former pupil, publicly announced his intention to edit the botanical legacy of his mentor. Wolf's announcement, entitled "Promise" (*Pollicitatio*), is of prime importance concerning the unfinished plant history and has influenced many researchers' views. However, it has often been forgotten that Wolf had written the announcement also for his own domestic purposes and that caution is therefore required. The present study, complemented by the first full translation of Wolf's text, is intended to reinforce the need for such caution. It is suggested that it was not only Wolf's failings that led to the final failure of the project, but also that Gessner himself may have failed to establish a body of text substantial enough to satisfy his own aspirations.*

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