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Of Plants and Books: Pre-Modern Experimentation with Plants from Cesalpino to Grew

Renaissance and early modern botanical studies are generally recognized as a significant section of the attention to particular bodies and their classifications, which mostly took the form of natural historical collections at the time. Although this feature, together with the study of *materia medica* was central in the attention scholars devoted to plants and specimens, a more theoretical and experiential attempt to deal with plants slowly developed at the time. In his foundational book, *A Science of Describing* (2006), Brian Ogilvie acknowledges this theoretical attention as one of the fourth moments in the transformation of natural history during the Renaissance—as leading toward natural philosophy and science. In my presentation, I would like to investigate this aspect further, exploring the ways scholars performed several observations on plants. While many of these observations aimed at discussing the medical virtues of plants, or aimed at testing the changes in the vegetal world through cultivation, for instance, scholars also focused on using experimentation to understand the causes of plants life, ultimately aiming at understanding the nature and activities of plants.

In my presentation, I investigate a few cases, from late Renaissance (Cesalpino) to the late seventeenth century (Grew and Malpighi), shedding light on their ways of experimenting with plants as a way to delve into their nature and construct a science of botany.