

The hand-colored herbal of Timothy Sheldrake, an unfinished magnum opus

Timothy Sheldrake, *Botanicum medicinale; an herbal of medicinal plants on the College of Physicians list*. London, 1756–59. 19 1/4 inches x 11 3/4 inches (489 x 298 mm), 111 hand-colored plates.

Timothy Sheldrake had ambitious plans for his highly ornate herbal. Published serially in parts between 1756 and 1759, it was to have contained some 400 plates, but the author's death brought the project to a premature end. As a result, copies are often found imperfect in their composition, lacking plates or (as here) the posthumous title page. Sheldrake wrote the text and drew the plants, relying on Cornelius Heinrich Hemmerich and James Basire (William Blake's teacher) for the engraving. Like Pine's celebrated edition of Horace, *Botanicum medicinale* is an engraved book, with each plant framed within an oval, surrounded by etched text, giving not only the properties of the species but its nomenclature in various languages, ancient and modern. The effect is distinctive: in spite of its color and strikingly decorative qualities, *Botanicum medicinale* is not in the least a canonical "Great Flower Book" with characteristic distribution of text and illustration, but rather a sort of attenuated rococco version of the Renaissance herbal.

This copy, from the Chicago Botanic Garden Library, is bound in late eighteenth-century half roan with marbled boards and bears the Massachusetts Horticultural Society bookplate ("Stickney Fund 1869").
Blanche Henrey 1312.

Octavo code: shebot