

The Uncertain History of an Early Illustration of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti*

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A high-quality, unattributed illustration of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti* is held in the archives of the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Hannover, Germany. We investigate its possible creator, its purpose and connection to the palm botanist Hermann Wendland.

During the course of our research on the great German palm botanist Hermann Wendland (1825–1903), we accessed the archives and library holdings of a number of institutions in Germany. One of the major archival collections relating to the Royal Gardens of Herrenhausen at Hannover, where Wendland was the Royal Gardener and where he undertook all his work on palms, is held in the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek (here after as GWLB). There we located an unattributed illustration, produced as a steel engraving, of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti* H.Wendl. (Fig. 1) and two fragmentary preliminary drawings, in pencil, associated with it (Figs. 2, 3). The working drawings were annotated by Wendland and include the

species name and numbering on individual flowers, parts of flowers, fruits and seeds. The unattributed illustration is of exceptional quality and is certainly the work of an accomplished illustrator. Although there are superb contemporaneous illustrations of *C. ernesti-augusti*, such as those by Walter Hood Fitch in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* of plants grown at Kew Gardens (Hooker 1855a, 1855b), the high quality of the unattributed illustration has prompted us to investigate the identity of the artist, the purpose of the illustration and the connection to Hermann Wendland.

To commence the investigation, we established some historical context of the palm including details of its discovery, early cultivation and taxonomic description. Wendland (1852) described and named *C. ernesti-augusti* in honor of the then recently deceased King Ernst August of Hannover (1771–1851) (Fig. 4) who had reigned from 1838 to 1851 and was personally supportive of both botanical and horticultural activities undertaken at Herrenhausen Gardens. In the protologue, Wendland (1852: 74) wrote that (translated from German):

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1. Illustration of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti* (steel engraving on paper, 390 × 280 mm). Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Hannover, Germany: Catalogue no. KGBH 43.4.

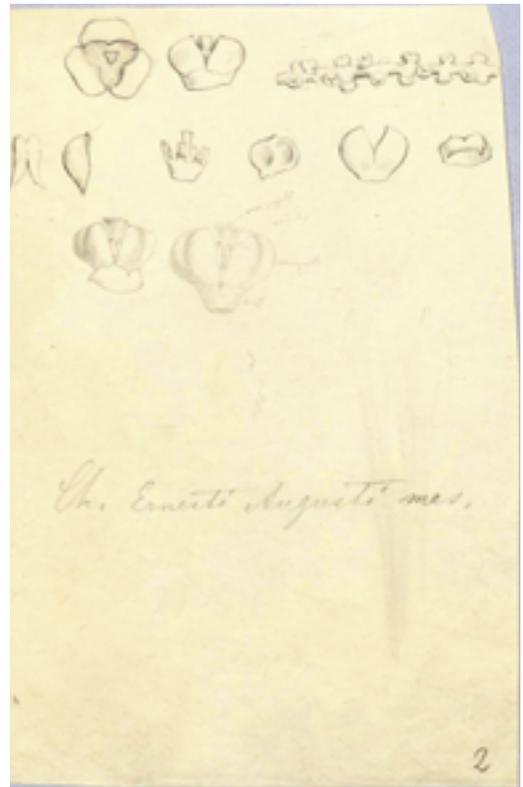
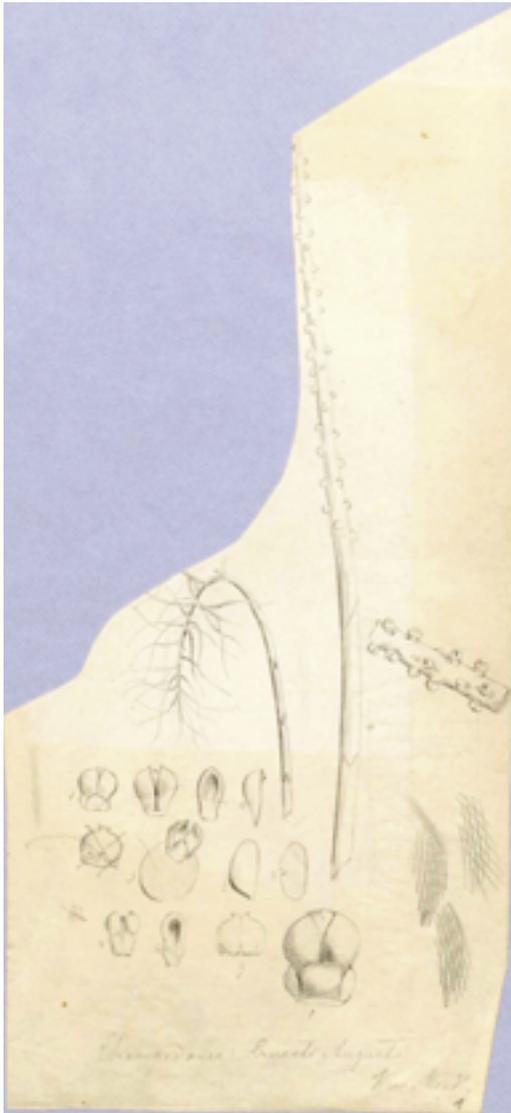
According to Mr. J. Linden of Brussels, he found this species at Tabasco in New Granada [correctly Mexico] and introduced it into European gardens. This species occurs in the French and Belgian gardens

under the names *Chamaedorea simplicifrons*, *Geonoma latifrons* and *Hyospathe elegans*. Both sexes are cultivated in the royal Berggarten at Herrenhausen near Hanover. I have considered this palm,

one of the most beautiful and splendid *Chamaedoreas* cultivated in the gardens, worthy of bearing the name of His Majesty the most blessed King Ernst August of Hanover. A look at the Royal Gardens teaches us how garden art and especially the plant collection in Herrenhausen owes its thanks to the illustrious deceased. May the recognition that he has received for it be as well expressed through this humble sign of my homage.

The recorded natural range of *C. ernesti-augusti* is in southern Mexico, northern Guatemala,

2. Sheet 1 of the two working drawings of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti*, with annotations by Hermann Wendland. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Hannover, Germany. Catalogue no. KGBH 43.5.



3. Sheet 2 of the two working drawings of *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti*, with annotations by Hermann Wendland. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Hannover, Germany. Catalogue no. KGBH 43.5.

southern Belize and north-western Honduras (Hodel 1992, Cibrián-Jaramillo et al. 2009). The first scientific collection was made by Belgian botanist Jean Jules Linden, although there is some vagueness regarding exactly when but certainly within the 1830–1840s. In the protologue of *C. ernesti-augusti*, Wendland (1852) stated that the palm was collected by Linden in Tabasco, New Granada, though correctly Mexico. New Granada was the term used for the northern part of South America and parts of Central America encompassing Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, areas where *C. ernesti-augusti* is not known to occur. Linden visited Mexico in 1837–40 and 1844. According to field notes on botanical specimens of other plants collected by him, he was active in Tabasco 1839–40. It was during this period that he would most likely have first collected the palm and facilitated its establishment in many collections and gardens. Wendland (1852, 1854) wrote that it was also cultivated under the names *C. latifrons*, *C. simplicifrons*, *Geonoma latifrons* and *Hyospathe elegans*. In



4 (left). Portrait of King Ernst August of Hannover. Ernst August Album (Molthan et al. 1862). 5 (right). Plate by Carl W.E. Fink in the Ernst August Album (Molthan et al. 1862). An exact rendition of the unattributed illustration (see Fig. 1) can be seen in the lower left sector.

time it was exhibited at horticultural exhibitions in Europe (Anon. 1869, 1884, Morren 1878) and described as an exceptionally ornamental palm suitable for indoors and glasshouse cultivation (Seemann 1856, Williams 1870, Schaedtler 1875, Kerchove 1878, Robinson 1879). It was also used in hybridization, a discipline that became very active in the horticultural sphere during the late nineteenth century. Hybrids between *C. ernesti-augusti* and *C. schiedeana* were reported on in detail and claimed to be fertile (Hildebrand 1889, 1890). Presently, *C. ernesti-augusti* is used commercially in horticulture as an indoor plant and in floriculture for its decorative cut leaves. In some countries in Central America, the extraction of leaves from the wild has led to over exploitation and presents a considerable threat to population stability and viability (Bridgewater et al. 2007, Williams et al. 2012).

The taxonomy and nomenclature of the species is relatively straightforward. In the 1852 protologue, Wendland provided a detailed description of both staminate and pistillate plants. It is most plausible that Wendland described the species from cultivated plants at Herrenhausen Gardens as

he referred to it as one of the most beautiful palms in the collection. Hodel (1992) accepted the holotype as a specimen held at the Herbarium of the University of Göttingen (GOET). This specimen consists of 12 separate sheets under a single barcode number and includes a mixture of both staminate and pistillate plants. There are two labels associated with the 12 sheets, both of which are in Wendland's hand and he is therefore accepted as the collector. One label is for staminate plants and the other is for pistillate plants. The parts appear to have become mixed in the remounting process. Both labels are headed as *Morenia ernesti-augusti*, a name published in 1853, and which suggests that these specimens post-date the publication date (i.e., 1852). However, there is no evidence to directly connect the specimen with Wendland's protologue and a reassessment of typification status is warranted, but investigation of this is beyond the scope of this present work.

Solving the mystery

In regard to solving the mystery of the creator of the unattributed illustration of *C. ernesti-augusti*, it is pertinent to note that there are four identical copies of the steel engraving in the GWLB collection, and of which only one



6. "A view of a tropical winter garden with palm trees and exotic birds" [oil on canvas, 430 × 510 mm] by Carl W.E.Fink (1862) features *Livistona australis* as the centerpiece. (Private collection).

has an inscription, this being "CFL 43" placed within a circle in the lower right corner. This type of inscription, differing only in having a different number for individual items, is found on other objects held at GWLB and is thought to be a catalogue number associated with auction listings, and is in no way related to the artist or being initials pertaining to any person (pers. comm, Werner Ganske).

Coincidentally at this time, the artist Carl W.E. Fink (1814–1890) was actively involved with projects at Herrenhausen Gardens (Peters 2013). He had been commissioned by Hofgärtner Heinrich Ludolph Wendland (Hermann's father) to produce illustrations of unusual or rare plants then cultivated at Herrenhausen Gardens between 1856 and 1866, at the rate of 10–12 annually. According to surviving documents, Fink completed an album of 131 illustrations of plants (KGBH 2021). These were to be prepared as lithographs and published with accompanying text. Despite having proofs prepared by

Klindworth lithographers of Hannover the project was never completed. Recent searches by staff at Herrenhausen Gardens and the Welf archives in Göttingen have failed to locate either the originals or the proofs, and they must be presumed to have been lost or destroyed at least until information about their existence proves otherwise. Evidence of the names of species that were illustrated was also searched for, but similarly nothing in this regard appears to have survived. It must be noted that the mystery illustration lacks numbering on the flower and fruit details, thus indicating that it was most likely a proof that was yet to be approved for final printing. There is also no evidence to suggest that it was one of the 131 lost illustrations prepared by Fink.

Ostensibly, it is possible that Fink was the artist, but there is as yet no definitive proof of this. However, one piece of evidence that circumstantially links Fink with the illustration is to be found in some of the graphic design work that he completed for a dedicatory album



7. "Tropical landscape or palm garden" (pencil on paper board, 570 × 435 mm) by Carl W.E. Fink ([18]73), depicts Central American palms. Clockwise from lower left: *Geonoma* sp. or *Calyptrogyne* sp., *Synechanthus fibrosus*, *Hyospathe elegans*, *Socratea* sp., *Cryosophila warszewiczii*, *Welfia regia*, *Geonoma* sp. or *Pholidostachys pulchra*, *Bactris obovata*, *Reinhardtia gracilis*, *Asterogyne spicata*, *Geonoma* sp. or *Calyptrogyne* sp., *Geonoma* sp., *Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti*. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Hannover, Germany. Catalogue no. KGBH 29.

for King Ernst August that was published as part of the commemorations associated with the inauguration of a monument 10 years after the king's death (Molthan et al. 1862). In that

work, Fink provided the artwork for many of the plates, one of which incorporates an exact rendering of the unattributed illustration of *C. ernesti-augusti* as part of the design (Fig. 5).

Although Fink was most active as a graphic artist and theatre designer in Germany and Italy, a small number of conventional paintings and illustrations by him have survived. Two works unequivocally attributed to Fink directly relate to the palm collections at Herrenhausen Gardens, with both having been signed by him. Both include what appears to be *C. ernesti-augusti* in the compositions, as circumspectly identified by us. One, dated 1862, depicts the interior of the Laves Palm House at Herrenhausen Gardens featuring *Livistona australis* and bears the title “A view of a tropical winter garden with palm trees and exotic birds” (Fig. 6). In this painting, Fink presents a distinctly theatrical arrangement of the Palm House, replete with balconies, effect lighting and rare birds perched on palm petioles. A palm resembling *C. ernesti-augusti* is positioned left of center in the composition. Interestingly, the individual of *L. australis* depicted as centerpiece of the painting has a comprehensive historical record covering its acquisition, growth and eventual death and was one of the prized plants of the Herrenhausen Gardens collection for well into the twentieth century having survived a number of major relocations (Dowe & Schlumberger 2018, 2019). This painting was sold in 2005 when art works held by the House of Hannover at Marienburg Castle went to auction (Pesendorfer 2020), and it was acquired by an anonymous buyer.

The other work, in pencil on paper, is titled “Tropical landscape or palm garden” (Fig. 7), and depicts Central American palm species and is putatively dated as [18]73 by the library archivists, though this date is questionable considering Fink was most active in the preceding decades. Many of the individual palm species in this illustration are readily identifiable, with the central subject being *Welfia regia*. What we tentatively identify as *C. ernesti-augusti* is positioned in the right-side of the painting and recognized by the distinctive leaves. This illustration is held at the GWLB.

Although we have not been able to definitively conclude that the unattributed illustration was prepared by either Fink or Wendland, or possibly another artist, there is certainly circumstantial evidence to connect Fink most closely with it. In addition, the working drawings are undoubtedly associated with Wendland, given that he numbered and made some corrections to them in his distinctive handwriting. Without clear evidence, the

mystery must remain unsolved for the present but for the illustration to be otherwise appreciated for its technical merits and as a fine representation of one of the special palms that was held in the Herrenhausen Gardens collection.

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