

Presentation of the donation of “The Linnaeus Apostles – Global Science and Adventure” to the University of Cyprus by H.E. Ambassador of Sweden, Mr. Klas Gierow

It is indeed a privilege to be here this morning, at a distinguished and well known academic institution like the University of Cyprus. The occasion for which we are gathered is something that lies close to my heart, as representative of the Swedish government here on Cyprus but also as simply a Swedish national. Focus will be on a person that might not be so well-known globally these days but may arguably be the one single Swedish person who has had the biggest influence worldwide, at least in the domain of natural science. The person I am referring to is the natural scientist Carl Linnaeus, who lived and worked in Sweden in the 18th century.

His humble origins did not stop him from making an extraordinary career attaining the status of nobility in 1757. Due to his exceptional and groundbreaking achievements he was given nicknames like “The Pliny of the North” or “the Second Adam”. The works and methods of Linnaeus will be presented by Dr Rita Severis in a little while so I will not dwell on this.

The legacy of Carl Linnaeus is deeply rooted in the Swedish mentality. The beauty and harmony of being in the nature is a way of life in Sweden. From a young age Swedish children are taught to respect nature and appreciate it. Foreigners living in Sweden sometimes come to the conclusion that, for Swedes, nature is more important than other human beings. It is an observation that cannot totally be dismissed but I think that nature for Swedes, despite our cold climate provides a perfect setting for getting together, be it with family, friends, working colleagues, or meeting new acquaintances.

Linnaeus was indeed a modern professor, with excellent contacts in the community at large. He was capable of inspiring his pupils to great deeds and he knew the right strings to pull when money was needed. His charisma was especially bestowed upon an inner circle, known as the Apostles who were sent forth on voyages of exploration, literally in all directions of the world. There were 17 of them. Their mission, which took place between 1745-1799, was to document local nature and culture. One large group voyaged eastward in the direction of East Indies and China. Once in China their movements were severely constricted Apostle Osbeck was hounded back to his ship by Chinese boys throwing stones. Apostle Kalm went on a long voyage to North America, where he met with Benjamin Franklin and visited the Niagara Falls of which he penned the first scientific description. Apostle Martin travelled to The Arctic Ocean, suffered frostbite in his legs with grave consequences for the rest of his life. Two of the apostles actually travelled with Captain James Cook in the Pacific Ocean. Linnaeus favorite apostle Löfving died in Venezuela after successful researches there. Peter Forsskål, maybe the most outstanding of them all, went to Arabia with a Danish expedition where he and other members died of malaria. So many of them actually suffered martyrdom in the field, sacrificing their lives for science. Of special interest is the apostle Fredrik Hasselqvist who had spent time on Cyprus on his way to the Holy land. Here again, I leave the details to Dr. Severis.

This leads us to the donation I am announcing today. Thanks to the IK Foundation and Company, an extraordinary publication has seen the light of day. It contains 11 books and over 5500 pages under the overall title The Linnaeus Apostles Global Science and Adventure. All the accounts of the apostles journeys to every continent have been published for the first time in English; those of the

apostles who left no travel journals are described through their correspondence or other sources. So the main authors of volume 2-7 are the apostles themselves, but also other leading scientific writers of relevance contribute. The first volume called introduction will give the reader a deeper understanding of the world in which Linnaeus and his apostles lived. It was a time when ideas of the modern world, as we know it today, were introduced on a broader scale. The last volume contains factual information like maps etc.

Former prime minister of Sweden Ingvar Carlsson was made Project Ambassador to support and spread knowledge about the project. In his introduction speech to their Royal Majesties, King Carl Gustav and Queen Silvia at the Drottningholm Royal Palace in 2007 he specially referred to the director of IK Foundation, Lars Hansen. Thanks to him we see the concrete results of 8 hard years of international collaboration. To make all this knowledge and history available to wider audience through its translation into English is indeed a remarkable achievement.

It is with great satisfaction that I now can report to my authorities and other stakeholders in this project that a set of these invaluable volumes has found a home in Cyprus. It will be a source of immense knowledge for anybody on the island interested in the history of natural sciences. I see this donation also as a link between our two countries, hopefully contributing to future contacts between scientists and laymen wanting to share ideas and insights within the areas where Linnaeus and his apostles were active. So let me with these words hand over the certificate that comes with the donation to the Rector of the University, professor Christofides, and thank him for his willingness to participate in this venture. A word of thanks goes as well to Dr. Severis, who will soon have the floor, for her willingness to share with us her deeper knowledge of Carl Linnaeus and his works.