

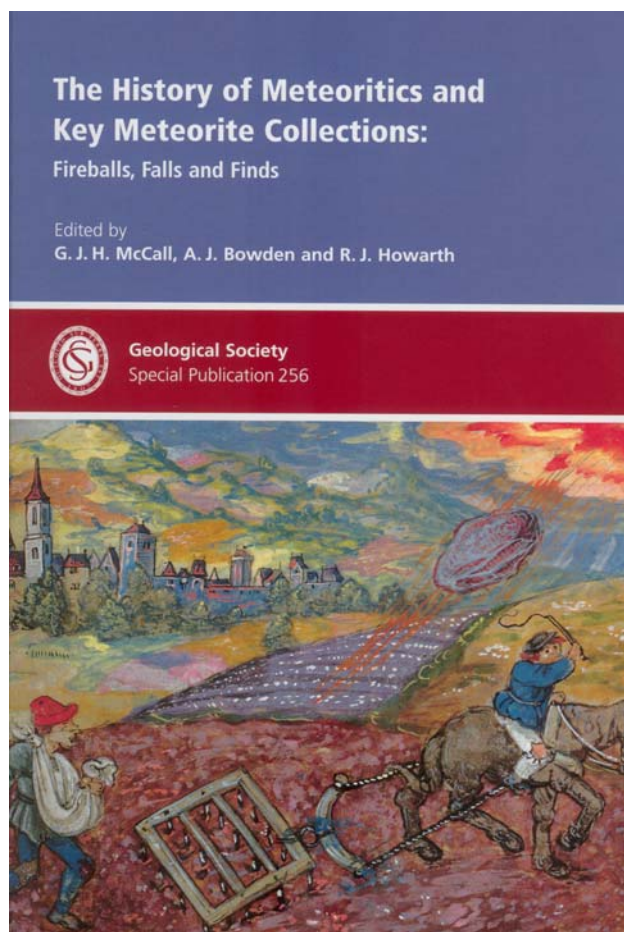
Book Review

The history of meteoritics and key meteorite collections: Fireballs, falls and finds, edited by G. J. H. McCall, A. J. Bowden, and R. J. Howarth. The Geological Society of London, 2006, 520 p., \$190, hardcover (ISBN 1-862-39194-7).

When Agnieszka Baier contacted me and asked if I would be interested in reviewing *The history of meteoritics and key meteorite collections: Fireballs, falls and finds*, I jumped at the opportunity. At that time, I knew only that the book was published and that several of my friends and colleagues had written chapters for it. I was very eager to learn what they had written and what else the book had to offer on the history of one of my great passions in life: meteoritics.

Before I go any further, I will state clearly that the book is a must-have for anyone interested in the history of meteoritics and important meteorite collections. The major strength of the book is the diversity of the chapters and authors. The editor's vision for this book was to allow the authors to follow their own path in communicating what they believe is important to the history of meteoritics. This style provides important insight into the cultural systems of the authors, making the book far more than a simple documentation of the facts. Overall, the style of the book works extremely well and it is a valuable contribution to history of science, and the history of meteoritics in particular.

The book opens with an outstanding overview of the history of meteoritics written by Ursula Marvin. I have come to expect outstanding work from Dr. Marvin, and I was in no way disappointed. The book then flows into a number of chapters that review specific people and times in the history of meteoritics. I admit that when I read through the table of contents, I was a bit skeptical about these chapters. To my great delight, these chapters are very interesting and complemented the flow of the book. The chapter by Gounelle in particular stuck in my mind while I was reading the remainder of the book and writing this review. I will return to this thought later in my review. The next section discusses key meteorite collections through 10 diverse chapters. The section contributes the bulk of history of collections, ranging from describing the people that founded the collections to a listing of the number of samples in collections. This section is not a comprehensive overview of the history of all the world's meteorite collections. Remember the book is, in part, about key collections. The fact that the book is about key collections is my only major disappointment. This disappointment



reflects more my desire to learn the history of other collections than the editor's vision for the book. It is too bad that, for whatever reason, chapters on the history of every major collection are not included. The last section of the book is a mix of history, some key elements of current meteorite research, and closing remarks. John Wood has a piece in the epilogue and, having a great love for John Wood's writing, I confess that I read through his chapter first and was not disappointed that I did so.

I find much of the information within the book utterly fascinating, especially those areas that discuss the key players in the history of meteoritics whom I am familiar with. I am left wondering if these areas of the book will have the same effect on someone who did not know Marty Prinz or Paul Pellas. Perhaps for this reason, these sections of the book meant considerably more to me than some random book about

the history of a science. I predict it will carry equal weight for many who read it. Again, for anyone in the profession, whether scientist, educator, dealer, or collector, this book is a must-have.

Many of the authors are colleagues and some are very close personal friends. It is difficult for me not to single out each one of their chapters and write about them, but that would not be fair. I feel compelled, however, to share with you a few chapters that really caught my attention. The chapters by Russell and Grady, Consolmagno, Clarke et al., and Ebel really touched me for so many reasons. I have read each of them several times and still find I am delighted every time I read them. It is, however, the chapter by Gounelle that most stays in my mind. When I first started to read his chapter, I was not sure of the direction he was taking. It seemed as though I might be reading something written shortly after the end of the Napoleonic era that was motivated by some need to remember lost glory. But Matthieu Gounelle carefully and skillfully paints an image of Jean-Baptiste Biot and his profound contributions to the field of modern meteoritics and science, *sensu lato*, with the elegance and fascination of a painting by Claude Monet. We have all read numerous papers that document scientific achievements or catalogs of important meteorite collections. It is important to remember the obvious—without those people who had the vision to explore an important scientific problem or who added samples to a collection so that future generations could marvel at and investigate these rocks—there would be no book on the history of meteoritics. Make no mistake: this book is about the achievements and contributions of people, however small or vast these contributions maybe. This book honors those people, both living and dead, who made outstanding contributions to meteoritics. It also describes how

a sample-based science evolved through the work of so many people. It is important not to lose sight of the simple fact that the authors of the book chapters continue the traditions, lineages, education, research, and curation of those that came before them. Matthieu Gounelle's chapter is a poignant reminder of the gratitude we should feel toward all those who have contributed to the field, and a reminder that we should not forget them or their contributions. When I first started to write this review, I was not sure what direction it would go. Gounelle's chapter helped me to remember what is important—the people who build the collections, recover the meteorites, and produce the science. I do not know the editors of this book, but I take my hat off to them and look forward to meeting them. As I stated in the first paragraph, this is a must-have book for all those interested in meteoritics, especially those who are writing the future history of the field.

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