



About the picture essays · JOHAN KÄRNFELT

Traditionally, even though scientific remains are full of pictures and objects of all kinds, historians of science have tended to disregard them. The reason is apparently simple; if, for example, one is to portray the history of the Academy of Sciences, then the foundation of this work unavoidably comprises minutes, annual reports, manuscripts, correspondence and other types of written documents. However, in recent decades, research in the history of science has focused attention on science's visual and material cultures. A number of studies examining different historical periods have illuminated the ways in which pictures and objects have been central to the production, communication and circulation of scientific knowledge. Inspired by this research, we will take an in-depth look at the material remains of science in the second part of this book.

Close to forty picture essays follow. The subjects are extremely varied, but the starting point for each essay is a picture that is somehow linked to the Academy of Sciences' history. The majority of the pictures are from the collections that are available at the Center for History of Science. In some cases, the material has come from other archives. We have endeavoured to select pictures that represent as much as possible of science's very varied remains: photographs, diagrams, watercolours and maps, but also objects, instruments and much more. We must emphasise that our ambition has not been to conduct exhaustive picture analyses, but rather to use them as a kind of peephole into history. Nor have the pictures primarily been chosen for their visual qualities, but because they have something interesting to tell from the perspective of the history of knowledge.

The essays have been grouped into four overarching themes, all related to the history of knowledge: the first deals with the circulation and medialisation of knowledge; the second with the practices and materialities encompassed

BOYS OBSERVING the 1954 solar eclipse through sooty glass.

by knowledge formation; the third with the organisation of knowledge that is created and re-created through history and which establishes orders and hierarchies; the fourth and final one with the practices of memory that may not produce so much new knowledge, but which manage the memory of that which was. These themes should not be perceived as separate stages in the process of knowledge formation, but rather as more or less integrated aspects of it. In the same way as, for example, the circulation of knowledge requires an order of knowledge, techniques for remembering, saving and preserving are integrated in the practice of knowledge formation.

Each section begins with a short presentation of the theme, followed by around ten essays. Of course, bearing in mind the character of each theme, they are in no way exhaustive – instead they offer a selection of ideas and gateways to the relevant field.