

## K. H. Rechinger — a life devoted to botany\*

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**Abstract:** K. H. RECHINGER's great botanical life-work and its impulses on plant geography and taxonomy are estimated.

To the surprising things in life meetings belong, which we do not consider to be essential instantly, but which nevertheless bring about unexpected developments later on. Like this it was — on that 30th of April 1927, when we were brought together for the first time during our first fieldworks in the Aegean archipelago: at this time each of us two students was unable to foresee that in the course of the following years we would develop a friendship that would ultimately be confirmed by several joint scientific journeys to the Orient.

The impressions, that — during these days of spring — were created in you by the marvellous flora covering the Greek isles, will surely have influenced your later life, if you look back from today. From then on your botanical interest has mostly been centred to the eastern Mediterranean. Your interest in the botanical exploration of this area has been augmented by your several tours in the many islands of the Aegean, and your knowledge of it has been deepened. The necessary preliminary works were produced, which resulted at last, for a first highlight, in the comprehensive description of the Aegean flora in the *Flora Aegaea*, published in 1943. Despite the classical studies of BOISSIER, HALÁSCY and HAYEK, this floristically rich area had only been known rather fragmentarily in these times. A successful description of this central region of BOISSIER's *Flora Orientalis* was only made possible by your wideranging new findings. Your work did not pass unnoticed: in fact it initiated a rapid intensification in the exploration of this both phytogeographically and floristically so highly interesting eastern Mediterranean area.

Other important publications which were published at the same time or in short intervals, shall be only briefly referred to, since they illustrate your course of life and the priorities of your studies:

1939: *Zur Flora von Armenien und Kurdistan* (Notes on the Flora of Armenia and Kurdistan)

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- 1943: Neue Beiträge zur Flora Aegaea (New additions to Flora Aegaea)  
 1949: A supplement to Flora Aegaea  
 1951 Phytogeographia Aegaea, which is an extended survey of the phytogeographic aspects  
 1959: The series Reliquiae Samuelssonianae, comprising large areas of the eastern Mediterranean, i.e. Turkey, Cyprus, Syria and the Lebanon  
 1964: Flora of Lowland Iraq, which was the fruit of a fairly long stay at the University of Bagdad  
 1954–1964: Symbolae Afghanicae, showing a clear shift in your priorities in favour of the Middle East

All of these publications resulted from frequent travels and from studies in many herbaria. As can be seen from the concise and incomplete data just mentioned, the direction of your interest, now based on a well founded knowledge of the Aegaeon and combined with your far-sighted intuition, was more and more drawn further east to the Asian mainland. As this area was also insufficiently explored at this time, and then only known by scattered publications on single topics, it is most probable that you started already early to think about giving a complete description of the eastern half of the area of BOISSIER's Flora Orientalis. Early excursions to the Middle East confirmed the actuality of this idea. By and by the giant project of a flora of the Iranian highland—the wide territories situated between the rivers Euphrat and Indus—matured, in short the Flora Iranica was born. This extended area with the mountains and deserts of Iran and Afghanistan in its centre, presents a wide scenery of geomorphological variety and a highly diversified flora well adapted to many different habitats. Additionally, it is characterised by a high amount of species and by a large number of endemics. The enormous value of the “Flora Iranica” evidently lies both in the evaluation of the many evolutionary trends and their ecological implications and in the comprehensive description of the plant diversity in a single Flora which also acts as a stimulus and a challenge to all future research in this area.

Hard labour, daring and initiative, together with unbroken enthusiasm, made it possible that – 20 years after the publication of the Flora Aegaea – a first issue of the Flora Iranica was published. And it is this Flora which has since grown into a monumental work of 180 parts!

Yet still the total span of the jubilating person's scientific work is not covered by this already broad spectrum. Let us look back for an instant to the far-away past of Man's history. It should be undisputed, that one of the earliest occupations of human beings was the collection of plants, be it to furnish them with food or to discover medicinal herbs. In KARL HEINZ this characteristic, which our prehistoric ancestors developed, is still very much alive, one could even say passionately alive, although in a slightly different way: whenever possible, his interest in knowing and understanding his botanical environment arises. Consequently, he has always been an eager plant-collector which has resulted in rich collections. Exemplary, beautiful and ample herbarium sheets came into being, which prove to be valuable scientific documents. These activities may have been decisive for the fact that several difficult genera have been treated monographically by him besides his work on the large Floras. Especially complex groups, like *Alkanna*, *Phlomis*, *Rumex*, *Teucrium* and others have continuously been in your vision, dear KARL HEINZ. As with the floras

your uppermost goal in the exploration of the divers genera consisted of your wish to find the characteristics of them and to place them into higher context.

For KARL HEINZ RECHINGER an ever-present need was the necessity of completing and deepening the indispensable studies of herbarium material by way of an intensive contact with the living plant and by observing it in its natural environment. Numerous travels to most of Iran, of Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the company of your first or your second wife, who both always actively and indefatigably assisted you and made possible your wide comprehension of the many phenomena in the wonderland of Oriental plants.

Highlights of our mutual activities during this time were joint excursions to the countries of the Flora Iranica. According to my memory, these journies were the true optima of an ideal scientific partnership, in the course of which all matters of botanical fieldwork – like collecting at different altitudes, handling the collected plant-material, drying the pressing paper etc. – could be worked at without any troubles. Enthusiasm, together with diligence and humour often lead to important scientific results.

To all the above stated one has to add KARL HEINZ's view of life, that by far goes beyond his botanical interest, but really radiates a true humanistic erudition. Scientific and bacchantic qualities, inspired by the Muses and sublimated to a contemplative view of our environment, compose his personality.

Dear KARL HEINZ, youthful eagerness and joyful enthusiasm for the beauty of a rare plant in flower have never left you. May these gifts and components of your character and your present activity be preserved to you over a still very long succession of future years! Continue to be as active as ever! Now at the beginning of your ninth decennium I specifically wish for you, that you will still have the time to finish your opus magnum, the Flora Iranica, and that you may go on enjoying this beautiful and interesting life that you did live up to now, in the best state of health for a very long time to come!

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