Flora of Lebanon and Syria Vol. 2*. It is gratifying to record the publication of the second volume of this notable work which will surely long remain a just memorial to the endeavours of its author, Father Mouterde. This volume contains most of the Polypetalae (excluding the Centrospermae), including the Cruciferae, Ranunculaceae, Euphorbiaceae and Umbelliferae and the economically important Rosaceae and Leguminosae, as well as other, smaller families.

To have produced such a work in the space of the four years that have elapsed since the appearance of Volume 1 is indeed a remarkable achievement, even if it has been at the expense of perfection; it is often difficult to reconcile publishers' deadlines with the latter. The inclusions of extensive additions and corrections at the end of the volume exemplifies this problem. It is unfortunate that attention could not have been drawn to these in the main text as they can easily be overlooked.

This work is a vital link in the chain of Floras being prepared for regions within SW Asia, made all the more important as it provides a critical assessment of at least part of the extensive collections housed in the Bierut herbarium, not generally available outside the Lebanon. It is therefore annoying to find that the external distributions are confused by a sprinkling of place names such as 'Stamboul' and 'Efes' without any reference to the country of origin.

Father Mouterde clearly has a deep insight into the taxonomic problems presented by the plants of this area and has combined this with his considerable field experience to produce authoritative and complete accounts. Where comments follow the species descriptions (one could perhaps wish for more), they usually prove to be very useful. It is pleasing to note, for instance, that the present reviewer is not the only one who finds difficulty in separating *Sedum palaestinum* Boiss. from *S. pallidum* Bieb.

Of course, differences of opinion on taxonomic treatment are bound to occur but these become much less important if the reasons for them can be gleaned from the text and if the keys are adequate for easy identification of material. I particularly looked at the account for the genus *Astragalus* as a measure of the practicability of this work and found several irritating failings. The individual species are not numbered making it difficult to refer from the key to the descriptions; in a genus of this size this is a considerable drawback. There are at times serious discrepancies between the key and the species descriptions—as occurs in *Astragalus pentaglottis* (changed to *A. echinatus* in the addendum) where the leaves are described in the key as having 4–7 pairs of leaflets and in the description 7–10 pairs. Those unfortunate enough to be confronted with a spiny 'Tragacanth' will find the key almost impossible to use, partly because of an undue reliance on leaflet number. In general the plates, though hardly works of art, are adequate to give an impression of the habit of the plants illustrated and are of a higher standard than those of Volume 1. However if one turns to them looking for assistance with the thorny problems presented by the 'Tragacanths', one is assailed by an indistinguishable woolly fuzz which, though not entirely the fault of the artist, is of little use to the beleaguered taxonomist.

However, anyone who has the job of writing an account of *Astragalus* for any region within SW Asia has a major task on their hands, and in this context one is particularly relieved to find that the author has restricted himself to only two new species.

Despite the criticisms that can be levelled against the Flora, one is left with the impression of a worthy and much improved successor to the Floras of Post, Thiébaut and Bouloumoy. I for one hope that Father Mouterde's resolve and energy will last out until this work is completed.

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