Notes R.B.G. Edinb. 38(3):486 (1980)

BOOK REVIEW

A synopsis of the Middle East flora. This important new floristic work* has evidently been made possible by Professor M. Zohary's life-long acquaintance with the flora of the Middle East. Although an octogenarian, the passing years have done little to diminish his dynamic energy. The present volume serves to illustrate once again his particular interest in the phytogeography of the area.

The joint authors point out that the various Floras of the Middle East (completed or in progress) fail to give an adequate idea of the overall richness of the area—a phenomenon partly due to the enormous number of species confined to the Irano-Turanian region—a phytochorion unrepresented in Europe. The area covered by the *Conspectus* is smaller than that so bravely adopted by Boissier's *Flora Orientalis*. The new work comprises Egypt (including Sinai), Arabia, Palestine (Israel-Jordan), Syria-Lebanon, Cyprus, Turkey with the islands (mostly Greek) off its west coast, Iraq, and Iran.

The system adopted is that of Melchior's in Engler-Diels 12th edition of the *Syllabus der Pflanzenfamilien* (1964). Within each genus the species are arranged alphabetically. The work is being published in a series of handsomely printed fascicles (10 in all are proposed) whose order of publication is that of the *Syllabus*, but will (very sensibly) appear in relation to the publication of the 'Floras, monographs or other relevant studies of the countries concerned. Personal communications, unpublished studies and data from the Herbarium of the Hebrew University will also be used'. Can we assume that, if one wants to check a puzzling record, Jerusalem can provide it from their data bank?

Fifteen families are covered in the first fascicle, of which the largest are Papaveraceae, Cruciferae, Crassulaceae, and Rosaceae. The following information is given for each species: valid name, authority and reference; basionym (where relevant), name used by Boissier, and some very restricted synonymy. The local distribution of each species is given and infraspecific taxa are presented in accordance with the 'natural division' of the countries concerned (shown as districts on Map 1). The general range of each species is presented as the 'chorotype', which characterises its phytogeographical nature. This is presented by the abbreviation of each phytogeographical region concerned (e.g. W Ir.-Tur.; or Medit.–Euro-Sib.). Additional abbreviations are used for extensions outside the area directly covered by the *Conspectus*. The principles used for delimiting the chorotypes are discussed by M. Zohary in Davis, Harper & Hedge, *Plant Life of South-West Asia*, and are those adopted in N. Feinbrun & M. Zohary's *Flora Palaestina*. It is a system with which many will not find themselves in full agreement.

The weakest part of this brave venture is the inclusion of the Arabian peninsula which covers at least one third of the total area covered by the *Conspectus*. With the flow of new material coming in from Arabia, the floristic coverage is very much less complete than that from the other areas. In Cruciferae, for example, as a result of recent exploration, there are at least six genera now known to occur in the Arabian peninsula which are not given in the *Conspectus* (*Arabidopsis*, *Arabis*, *Cardamine*, *Clypeola*, *Raphanus*, and *Rorippa*); furthermore, the inclusion of *Aubrieta* as an Arabian genus is based on an incorrect record. Might it have been more helpful, at least in an Irano-Turanian context, to have included Afghanistan instead of Arabia?

The three authors must be congratulated on the enormous amount of effort and care that has evidently gone into compiling this synopsis—although we suspect that subsequent fascicles will pose many more problems than this one. All those who work on the plants of the Middle East will certainly need it in their libraries as an important work of reference. It is going to be extremely useful for Flora writers summarising external distributions and to those botanists concerned with phytogeography. There will, however, be a considerable overlap with OPTIMA's checklist of the Mediterranean flora, in active preparation, though the aims of the two projects are rather different.

Although within its limitations this is a most accurate work, very clearly printed and presented, it seems fair to question its aims and functions. One turns to the Preface for enlightenment, but although a model of brevity, it does not come up with all the answers. What, for example, are the guide-lines followed in deciding which taxonomic treatment should be adopted in cases where treatments vary appreciably in different Floras or revisions? To what readership is it aimed? What is the estimated time for completion? What is its long-term function? Is the *Conspectus* really going to be a basic reference work when it comes to collating the taxonomic information contained in the various SW Asian Floras and producing the much-needed overall monographs of, for instance, *Isatis*, *Papaver*, or *Cousinia*?

P. H. DAVIS & I. C. HEDGE

* M. Zohary, C. C. Heyn, D. Heller. *Conspectus Florae Orientalis: An Annotated Catalogue of the Flora of the Middle East*. Fascicle 1. Papaverales: Papaveraceae–Moringaceae. Rosales: Platanaceae–Neuradaceae. Pages iv + 107 pp, 2 maps. Quarto, paperback. $15. Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, P.O. Box 4040, Jerusalem.