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BOOK REVIEW

Flora of Egypt*. More than forty years have passed since the initiation of the *Flora of Egypt*, a work envisaged as 11 volumes covering 175 families of vascular plants. Sadly, only four volumes containing 29 families were produced, the first in 1941, the last, 1969. So it is with interest and expectation that we witness the recent issue of three fascicles from Cairo University. Prof. N. El Hadidi and his editorial team have undertaken the task of continuing the Flora, originally started by G. and V. Täckholm, and produced an introductory outline of the project as well as separate accounts of the Amaranthaceae and Globulariaceae. These are the first dicotyledonous families to be treated systematically since the publication, according to Engler's system, of Casuarinaceae and Piperaceae in 1969. To avoid delays it was decided that future issues will appear once annually in the *Taeckholmia Additional Series* as separate family, or part of larger family, fascicles (à la *Flora Iranica*, *Flora of Libya*) rather than await publication sequence as parts of complete volumes.

The 'new' Flora aims to provide an easily accessible and basic source of information on classification, nomenclature, typification and distribution of native, naturalised and cultivated species in Egypt. Before a useful account can be written, some revisionary work will be necessary and systematic treatments will be accommodated in a parallel publication, *Taeckholmia*. An *honorarium* of 300 Egyptian pounds and an invitation (including airfare) to visit herbaria or conduct field studies in Egypt await 'selected' external contributors so that the Flora might benefit from their expertise.

The Amaranthaceae (fascicle 2) with c. 20 native and introduced species and the Globulariaceae (fascicle 3), represented in Egypt by one species, were deliberately chosen as 'models' to be followed by authors of future accounts. As I have little first-hand knowledge of Egyptian Amaranths except that almost all are introduced species, I cannot do this account the justice it deserves. The treatment by A. El Hadidi is very similar to that adopted in *Flora of West Pakistan* and the account undoubtedly had the benefit of its help. The citation of a more extensive synonymy has no obvious advantage and though generally accurate where references are concerned, the occasional slip occurs, e.g. for *Amaranthus graecizans* and subsp. *sylvestris*. Inconsistency in the usage of terms has also not been eliminated, e.g. perianth segments in *Achyranthes*, tepals in *Alternanthera*, *Gomphrena* and *Iresine*, and the adoption of both terms in *Psilotrichum*.

I found some of the descriptions excessively long and hesitatingly unravelled complexities such as 'filaments filiform, longer or subequalling the alternating, fimbriate subquadrate pseudostaminodes, apex of the pseudostaminodes curves slightly inwards as a narrow, crenate or entire, often very delicate flap, while from the dorsal surface arises a fimbriate-ciliate scale extending across the width of the pseudostaminodes; usually, however, this is reduced to a stag's horn process at the centre of the dorsal surface or even becomes small and filiform . . . '. As the Flora is not written in the native language of the authors one should not question style, grammar, misspellings or editorial expertise, but this is one area where specialist-collaborators well-versed in English can help. Several excellent Floras of neighbouring regions also exist to aid identification and distribution of taxa, and not least in importance, are more concise and better presented.

For each species type material and its location when known have been cited. Relevant synonymy, references, detailed descriptions and habitat notes are provided. Internal distribution is by ecological territories; the external distribution is summarized. Spot maps are provided for nearly every taxon. New records and plants of economic or historical interest are asterisked. A list of references and an index completes the fascicle. No chromosome counts are given (important as several species are taxonomically difficult cosmopolitan weeds in need of cytological and biosystematic work) nor a summary of the flowering period, however, the latter is to some extent obviated by the dating of specimen citations.

Line drawings (habit and floral dissections) are numerous, nearly every species is accounted for. No acknowledgement of the anonymous artists J.C. and M.G.(?) appear. In general, composition and detail of the illustrations are good; some fruits and seeds are drawn 'naturally' dark and therefore are lacking in clarity. The binding is adequately strong, and printing, on high quality paper, good. Considerations of space do not appear to have dictated the format for reference citation. I would have sacrificed the excessively wasteful layout of some pages (pp. 15, 18 and 74 provide extreme examples) for an inclusion of places of publication beside the taxon instead of having to refer repeatedly to an end-list. I would also question the choice of cover design, no doubt antagonizing those who discern the visual and poetic allusions to the Nile.

*Flora of Egypt. ed. N. El Hadidi, Vols 1, 2 & 3 being *Taeckholmia Additional Series* 1: 1–97. Flexible covers. Otto Koeltz Science Publishers, W Germany, 1981. Price not available.

All in all, the continuation of the *Flora of Egypt* by local and foreign botanists will arouse interest in compilers or would-be compilers of SW Asian Floras. Its renewal is of particular significance in the light of the extensive floristic activity already occurring in neighbouring regions. It would not be untimely at this moment to mention the proposed *Flora of Arabia*, currently in its embryonic stages. This work, to be undertaken jointly at Edinburgh and Kew will cover the whole Arabian peninsula plus Socotra; the project-area thus adjoins the Isthmic Desert and Sinai territory of the *Flora of Egypt*. Such 'neighbourly existence' should engender co-operation and collaboration.

Volumes 1–4 of the *Flora* took nearly three decades to complete. The *Flora* revives after a long dry spell and the support and encouragement of institutions abroad would be much appreciated. Let us hope publication delays will be brief and few and that the project can be speedily accomplished before enthusiasm flags and resources disappear.

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