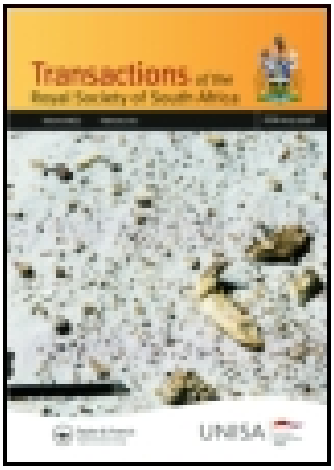
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NOTES ON *ALOE SUCCOTRINA*, Lam.

By R. Marloth, Ph.D.

(Read June 28, 1905.)

On a previous occasion I drew attention to the fact that the real habitat of most South African succulents is not known or recorded, they having been introduced into European gardens one or two hundred years ago, and figured and described from cultivated plants.

One of the most striking examples of this kind is the species of Aloe called *Aloe succotrina*, because it was thought at the time that this plant furnished the drug which came from the island of Socotra. That error has been rectified since, for the plant which bears the name does not occur at Socotra, quite another one supplying the drug.

It was then surmised that the plant to which this name had been given by mistake, and which is still being cultivated at home under this name, might have come from South Africa, but as no botanist had ever recorded it from here, its origin remained a puzzle.

Some thirty years ago Dr. Bolus collected a plant in the Eastern Province, which Mr. Baker at Kew took at first to be the real *A. succotrina*, Lam., as figured by Commelinus * in 1697. Later on he recognised it to be *A. pluridens*, Haw. (Flor. Cap., vol. vi., p. 323); hence the true *A. succotrina* remained as unknown as before.

Unfortunately the matter has been complicated a little more in Dr. Schönland's paper referred to above. The author, not knowing the real *A. succotrina*, came to the conclusion that both names

* I am taking these statements from Dr. Schönland's paper "On some South African Species of Aloe," published in the Records of the Albany Museum, vol. i., p. 292, 1905.

referred to the same plant, and he gives consequently the latter name as a synonym of the former. That is a mistake, for Baker's identification of Bolus's plant as *A. pluridens* is correct, and *A. succotrina* is quite different from it, as the fresh specimens and photographs of both species which I am exhibiting here will show. The foliage is quite different, for the leaves of *A. succotrina* are erect with a slight backward curve at the end only, while those of *A. pluridens* are quite recurved, almost hanging down. There are other points of difference of course, but they are not so easily noticed.

The specimens of *A. pluridens* came from Zwartkops, near Port Elizabeth, and those of *A. succotrina* from the slopes of Table Mountain. It is rather surprising to find that the home of a plant of such conspicuous size and such special interest should have remained unknown for two centuries, although it grows in profusion a few miles outside of Cape Town. So far one spot only is known to me, which, however, is well hidden. It is situated about 1,200 feet above Newlands, on an immense field of boulders which must have been formed by the falling of an enormous cliff from the mountain above. There are hundreds, nay thousands, of boulders of all sizes, some as big as a house, with abysses between them that seem to lead into the interior of the earth. Where the spaces between the boulders have become filled with *débris* and leaf-mould, trees have succeeded in establishing themselves and are at present overshadowing some large groups of Aloes. These are doomed, for the trees must win in this struggle for existence. But where the boulders are freely exposed to air and light, where the aloes have been able to find a little soil in a crack or on a ledge, they have taken full possession of the place.

That no botanist or collector of the last century should have come across the plant is evidently due to the difficulty of access to the locality, for it is out of the track of the ordinary rambler. Only mountaineers who want to try the Window Gorge would pass it.

But it is a spot well worth visiting. The boulders alone are a sight, piled up and spread out over a field several acres in extent. Some portions are overgrown with bushes and trees, and their rotten trunks form dangerous bridges over some of the yawning spaces, but others are occupied by hundreds of these Aloes, adorned at this time of the year with tall spikes of red flowers.

In conclusion I may add that the only species of Aloe hitherto known from the Cape Peninsula, viz., *A. gracilis*, grows also at one spot only, which is not far from the station Glencairn on the Simons-

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town line. I look upon them as relics from a period of greater dryness than the present.

P.S.—A few days after the reading of the above notes, Mr. E. Dyke found a variety of *Aloe succotrina* among the rocks of the so-called Little Lionshead near Houtbay.

This locality is as much out of the way as the other one, for few people only will venture into the very rough ground and the cliffs which skirt the Little Lionshead on the seaward side.

It is also probable that a plant growing on rocks near the mouth of the Kleyn River is this species or its nearest ally *A. purpurascens*, Haw.

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