

# Three symposia on the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea

IB FRIIS

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Three symposia on the flora, plant geography, vegetation and other botanical aspects of north-eastern tropical Africa have been arranged since the Ethiopian Flora Project was initiated in 1980. The first, entitled *The First Ethiopian Flora Symposium*, was held at Uppsala University in 1984. The second, entitled *The Second International Symposium on the Flora of Ethiopia and Plants of Eastern and North-Eastern Africa and Southern Arabia*, was held at Addis Ababa University in 1986. These two universities are the places where the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea is edited and published. The third, entitled *The Third International Symposium on the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea and its relationship to adjacent Floras*, was held at the Carlsberg Academy in Copenhagen in 1999. This institution belongs to the Carlsberg Foundation, which has had traditional links with botany since its foundation in 1876 by J.C. Jacobsen. The Foundation has supported Danish botanical field work in Ethiopia since 1970. The main aim of the symposia has been to put in perspective new research that is related to work with the Ethiopian Flora Project, but can not be published within the rigid format of a modern scientific flora. The major features of the three symposia are described. Some events of importance to the Flora since the second symposium and some special features in association with the third symposium are also outlined.

*Ib Friis, Botanical Museum and Library, University of Copenhagen, Gothersgade 130, DK-1123 Copenhagen K, Denmark. E-mail: ibf@bot.ku.dk*

## Introduction

The "Third International Symposium on the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea and its relationship to adjacent Floras" was held at the Carlsberg Academy in Copenhagen, 25-27 August 1999. It was with great pleasure that the organisers, Olof Ryding and myself, on behalf of the Editorial Committee of the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea, could welcome the participants to Copenhagen where we live and have our daily work. Nearly all the *c.* 35 scientists or students, coming from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, United Kingdom

and the U.S.A., have previously visited the Botanical Museum and Library in connection with their studies. Nevertheless, it was an exciting opportunity for all to meet for three days with the chance to discuss scientific and practical problems of joint interest in the secluded Carlsberg Academy.

## The first Flora symposium in Uppsala

The tradition of organising Ethiopian Flora Symposia started with a symposium held in May 1984 at Uppsala University, Sweden, a few

years after the initiation of the Ethiopian Flora Project. Uppsala University was one of the two places where the Flora was to be edited and published. Dr. Inga Hedberg was, and still is, in charge of the Swedish editorial office. At the first Flora symposium there were papers on Ethiopian vegetation, physical geography and plant geography, in short, subjects which would benefit the forthcoming work with the Flora of Ethiopia. There were also a number of taxonomic papers, especially papers dealing with families relevant to Volume 3 of the *Flora of Ethiopia*, the first volume of the Flora to be published. These families were Fabaceae, Rosaceae, Umbelliferae, and Burseraceae. Other taxonomic papers dealt with families to be written up in future volumes, including Dioscoreaceae, Rubiaceae and Compositae. There were also studies of cultivated plants and their wild relatives, for example the natural populations of *Coffea arabica* in Ethiopian evergreen forests. The symposium lasted for 4 days, and about a year later 21 papers appeared in the Proceeding volume which was published in Uppsala in the series *Symbolae Botanicae Upsaliensis* and had the title "Research on the Ethiopian Flora. Proceedings of the First Ethiopian Flora Symposium held in Uppsala May 22-26, 1984" (Hedberg 1986).

### The second Flora symposium in Addis Ababa

The second symposium took place two and a half years later in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 1986. It was held in the new building complex of the Faculty of Science at Addis Ababa University, a very appropriate place, as this complex is closely connected with the growing biological research in Ethiopia. Also, at Addis Ababa University the Flora was being edited and published, and the printed Flora volumes are in fact produced and bound by printers in that town. Ms. Sue Edwards was, and

still is, in charge of the editorial office in Addis Ababa (although for some time in the 1980s the office moved to Asmara University).

The themes of the symposium in Addis Ababa resembled those of the Uppsala meeting. There were papers on Ethiopian vegetation studies, pollen analyses, a phytogeographical study of the family Brassicaceae, and a number of taxonomic papers about families in the Flora volumes that were in progress, such as Poaceae, Euphorbiaceae, and Tiliaceae. There were also papers on utilisation of forest products, medicinal plants, and plant conservation. This symposium lasted for three days, and 20 papers appeared in the volume of proceedings, which was published in Addis Ababa as a supplementary volume to *SINET – an Ethiopian Journal of Science*. The volume appeared more than three years after the symposium with the title "Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the Flora of Ethiopia and Plants of Eastern and North-Eastern Africa and Southern Arabia." Although the proceedings of the second Flora symposium appeared approximately at the same time as the first published volume of the Flora of Ethiopia (Hedberg & Edwards 1989), they carried the year of the symposium on the title page (Mesfin Tadesse *et al.* 1986).

### Ethiopia and Eritrea become independent states

The deterioration of the political situation in Ethiopia was undoubtedly one of the main reasons for delay in publication of the Addis proceedings. The increasingly untenable situation of the Ethiopian government also caused great difficulties for progress with editing and publication of the Flora. War between the Marxist Mengistu Wolde Mariam-regime and the guerilla forces that were eventually to form the new governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea was extremely serious, and affected life for every-

one. I will just mention a few personal recollections, as I kept visiting Ethiopia during these years of conflict, and went with Ethiopian colleagues on field trips to the ever-diminishing parts of the country where one could safely move. Throughout the period of conflict, the southern and south-western part of the country remained reasonably accessible, but I vividly recollect some of the difficulties of travelling in those days. Travel permits, which took a long time to obtain, had to be presented everywhere to the often suspicious security officers.

Ethiopia suffered a severe shortage of everything during this period, including, of course, fuel and spare parts for cars, as the country's resources were being strained in order to fight the guerrillas. There was also a general fear that new armed confrontations might break out in parts that had hitherto been peaceful. But my memories from visits are of course nothing in comparison with how it must have been to live permanently under these conditions. It should not surprise anybody that we did not think of organising more Flora symposia during this period, but instead endeavoured to proceed with basic tasks in order to keep the Flora Project running.

My colleague Olof Ryding also has vivid memories of this period, when he was employed as a teacher at the University of Asmara (now in Eritrea). He left this post in 1990, and the whole Ethiopian staff at the university was evacuated to Addis Ababa, when the fighting around Asmara made the situation for the Mengistu regime untenable.

After these terrible years it was positive that there was no fighting in Addis Ababa during the ultimate phase of the fall of the Mengistu regime and the transition to the new government in May 1991. From 1992 onwards one could travel to parts of the country which had for many years been inaccessible, even to the border area with the newly established state of

Eritrea. The first years after the change of government in Addis Ababa, and the Eritrean independence were full of activities during which we tried to cover previously inaccessible ground, and to recover lost time. A consequence of the political changes was also that the Flora from volume 7 and onwards changed its name to *The Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Edwards *et al.* 1995; Hedberg & Edwards 1995; Edwards *et al.* 1997).

### The third Flora symposium in Copenhagen

The thought of a new Flora symposium did not seem such a luxury in the second half of the 90s as it did towards the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s. A considerable amount of research had been carried out since the last symposium. New people had come into the group working with the Flora, and new plant families were being studied. One of the ideas behind the two first Ethiopian Flora symposia had been to compile data and review new research that could not be published within the rigid format of a modern scientific flora. There would be no lack of papers for a third symposium.

The notion of a third Flora symposium matured when the Carlsberg Foundation in October 1997 celebrated the inauguration of its new Carlsberg Academy as a place for small scientific meetings and symposia (Matthiessen 1998). This institution had been established in the large private home of the founder of the Carlsberg Foundation, J.C. Jacobsen, in the grounds of the Carlsberg Breweries. Jacobsen had built his home in the style of an Italian villa, and lived there from 1854 to his death in 1887. According to his wishes, the building was to be a place where prominent scientists, artists or politicians could meet. Jacobsen's will specified these ideas further. A prominent scientist or artist should have a residence of honour in

the building. After Jacobsen's death, the Foundation therefore made the fine building the home of a succession of outstanding Danish scientists, of which the best known is the prominent 20<sup>th</sup> Century physicist Niels Bohr, who received the Nobel Prize in physics in 1922 (Pedersen 1992). However, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was no longer possible for a scientist to employ the domestic staff necessary for living in such style. In 1997 the Foundation therefore decided that Jacobsen's intentions should be respected by establishing a place where scientific meetings and symposia in the sciences or humanities could be held.

The opportunity to have a Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea-symposium in the new Carlsberg Academy was irresistible. We had never had an Ethiopian Flora symposium in Copenhagen, in spite of nearly 30 years Danish association with the flora of Ethiopia. Such a symposium would involve somewhere between 20 and 40 people, which would be the right number for the capacity of the Academy. Moreover, the Carlsberg Foundation had steadily supported field work of Danish botanists in Ethiopia since the contacts began in 1970. In December 1997 Sebsebe Demissew and I wrote a letter from Addis Ababa to the Board of Directors, and soon afterwards we received a positive reply, which resulted in us all being able to meet in Copenhagen in August 1999.

The sources of funds we solicited fortunately all reacted positively. The Council for Development Research under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted the travel expensed for the Ethiopian and Eritrean participants. The Danish National Science Research Council, and the Niels Bohr-endowment under the Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters supported the European and American participants. Finally the Carlsberg Foundation supported the arrangements at the Academy.

It has been a tradition that nearly all participants in these symposia gave presentations;

we were very happy that this was also the case at the third symposium in Copenhagen. There were almost 30 presentations and posters, and 26 are represented in this volume of proceedings.

The scientific programme of this meeting was put together in the style of the two previous Flora symposia. The choice of subjects reflected the fact that the situation in 1999 was rather different from that of 1984 and 1986, and that it was now possible to produce review papers on the history of exploration, broader studies in phytogeography, vegetation, etc. The programme was approved at a meeting of the Editorial Committee of the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea in Addis Ababa in 1998. There were general papers, studies of vegetation, useful plants, phytogeography, especially two papers on the phytogeography of monocotyledons (a group which appeared in the two recently published volumes no. 6 and 7), history of the study of the flora, and a number of taxonomic studies of families in the pipeline for the coming Flora volumes, *e.g.* Pedaliaceae, Scrophulariaceae and Compositae.

As on previous occasions, we publish a volume of proceedings, this time with 26 papers by 35 authors and co-authors (some of which not present in Copenhagen). We have decided to name this volume *Biodiversity Research in the Horn of Africa Region. Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea at Carlsberg Academy August 25-27, 1999*. We have chosen to shorten the formal part of the title by leaving out the words "and its relationship to adjacent Floras." The geographical scope of the papers is slightly wider than at the two previous symposia, reflecting that it is now possible to see the Ethiopian and Eritrean flora in a wider context. There is for example a paper on the flora of Yemen, and many papers touch on conditions in neighbouring countries, such as Sudan, Somalia and countries in East Africa (Fig. 1). We have

**Fig. 1.** The neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea. In this symposium various combinations of these countries, or parts of them, are referred to as the Horn of Africa, and the whole area as the Horn of Africa region.



stressed the wider geographical scope in the first part of the title, as well as the presence of one paper on the geography of the birds of the region.

The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, which is closely associated with the Carlsberg Foundation (the Academy elects the Board of Directors of among its own members), has kindly published the symposium volume in its series *Biologiske Skrifter* [Danish for "Biological monographs"].

Proceedings of symposia are published to make the papers known to colleagues world

wide. However, the particular importance of publishing the proceedings of the Flora symposia was made obvious when I spoke to students and scientists at Addis Ababa University and elsewhere. For these students and scientists, working without the facilities of scientific libraries of Europe or America, it had been very useful to have so many papers dedicated to scientific study of Ethiopian and Eritrean plants in one easily accessible place as in the two previous volumes of proceedings from the Flora symposia. This will encourage research in the Horn of Africa region, and increase our

knowledge of the flora. We hope that this third volume of proceedings may supplement the two previous volumes well, also in this respect.

### The Carlsberg Academy and botany

Because this symposium was held in the Carlsberg Academy, previously the home of J.C. Jacobsen, I will conclude by explaining the connection between Jacobsen, his home and garden, and an important event in the history of Danish botany. Jacobsen was interested in rare plants, and had in the 1860s, after his home had been built, developed beside it a large and beautiful garden planted with rare trees; now this is the garden of the Academy.

In 1870 Jacobsen was appointed member of a government committee for the planning of a new botanical garden at the University of Copenhagen, then the only university in Denmark. Jacobsen was a Member of Parliament, and in this capacity he was selected for the unusual post. He became chairman of the committee in 1871, and soon also chairman of the subcommittee for planning the buildings in the garden. Apart from Jacobsen, the committee consisted of the professors of botany, zoology, and geology, university administrators, and the head gardener of the old botanical garden. Jacobsen added to the committee two professional garden designers, not surprisingly those who had created his own garden at Carlsberg. He took part in the planning of most details in the new garden, drafted the first design for the new, large greenhouses, and later took a particular interest in their technical facilities. The new botanical garden of Copenhagen University was inaugurated in 1874 and still serves us well today. Jacobsen was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University at its 400 years jubilee in 1879. To receive the degree with justification, Jacobsen decided to write a thesis on his work connected with the new botanical garden, and produced an

impressive folio volume on the design and technology of the greenhouses in the Copenhagen botanical garden (Christensen 1924-1926; Glamann 1991; Jacobsen & Rothe 1879; Ostenfeld 1924; Wagner 1990).

There is no doubt that the botanical establishments in Copenhagen would not have such good facilities today without Jacobsen's enthusiasm and influence. Lange (1876), director of the botanical garden, has summed up Jacobsen's achievements very well: "That the plan, except for the building of the Botanical Museum, could be carried out ... is more than anything else due to the energy, knowledge and burning interest in the matter which was shown by captain, brewer Jacobsen, who was elected chairman of the building committee, and for a period of three years directed the whole establishment ..."

Jacobsen's indirect significance for Danish botany, through the research grant from the Carlsberg Foundation, is too complex to trace here. Jacobsen established this foundation in 1876 as the future owner of his brewery. The foundation should secure a scientifically based administration of the production, and support basic research in the sciences and in the humanities, especially the study of history and languages (Glamann 1976, 1991).

As mentioned above, a large proportion of the Danish field work abroad, including nearly all our field work in Ethiopia through 30 years, has been supported by the Foundation. We hope and trust that our work on botany in Ethiopia would have met with Jacobsen's approval.

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