

# "Introduction"

Objektyp: **Chapter**

Zeitschrift: **Boissiera : mémoires de botanique systématique**

Band (Jahr): **30 (1979)**

PDF erstellt am: **29.06.2024**

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"How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service."

"I have an old belief that a good observer really means a good theorist."

*Ch. Darwin,  
cited by  
Philip V. Tobias  
in Trans. Roy. Soc. South Africa  
40: 246. 1972.*

Domine, ... exaltabo te... quoniam  
fecisti mirabilia, cogitationes antiquas  
fideles.

*Isaias, 25.*

Taxonomic revisions are made by a hard and fast rule. The best examples, since the second World War, are to be found in "Blumea" from Leiden. All begin, of course, with an "Introduction" and "Acknowledgments" to the institutions from whom botanical samples were obtained (and exceptionally to the rare-as-a phoenix Maecenas who sponsored the work); after that a short historical review of the taxon, which obviously was previously inadequately reviewed; eventually we are informed at length about the method and technique employed here. All that, for the pious reader, could be pictured as a Cathedral narthex, guiding us towards the dichotomous keys, the hard sculptured Portal... And soon we are between the sacred walls! There we catch sight of the colonnade of the species, described in diligent uniformity but naturally differing in part, as do the capitals of a Romanesque or, if you prefer, Norman Cathedral. The illustrations or Icones, as well as the stained glass, reproduce the same subjects as the capitals; we can sometimes find, as a Jesse window, a presumed genealogical or phylogenetical tree of the taxon. In alas, too few instances, perhaps an added baroque chapel, we agree with the collector's list and the synonym index. At the transept of the "Conclusions", there are optional doors, one on each side: to the left, the Splitting one, opening to the churchyard of the "Nomina supervacanea", to the right, the Lumping one, giving on to the sacristy of haughty Tradition.

The revision so made should have all the strength of cut stone edifice but, sadly, far from it all too human shadows and doubts are to be expected! Its

proud author most usually seems completely free of them, and the reader (if there are readers of taxonomic works), can only admire the stupendous work, apart from some rare heretical fellow, devilish iconoclast. However, the lists of the "Species excludendae" and "Species minus notae" could sound to a sensitive ear as a cracked bell. Left out of that Paradise Garden, where are they to go, those taxa? Outside that supposedly well-constructed taxonomic building, what a waste land, what a jungle of never-seriously-revised-taxa, what a crowd of deep wells of exquisitely worked but all miniature specialised works. Oh the pity of our taxonomic standing! Are we really Architects of solid things, or blind moles with pursed lips boastful of our humid, friable, grubby mole-hills?

Facing *Ferulago*, I was soon in a bad mood; this genus was saying nothing of value to me, or conversely, I was deaf to its message. I was inclined to see it as an unpleasant companion; its botanical samples were presenting me with some mean characters with few divergences, a tedious song: what poor jingle! I visualised it as a splenetic travelling Lord, articulating a few syllables every thousand miles. I felt as if I were Theseus in a small maze but without any helping Ariadne. And I was dreaming about the clearly "speaking" austral *Schefflera*, the gifted *Ocotea*, the delicately-scented American *Nectandra*: for all that scavenging what had I but that poor little yellow-flowered umbellate genus? I thought then, and I still do think that the revision of any taxon should afford something of value to the revisor on the level of knowledge. *Ferulago* instead sounded, at first, like a poor stuttering beggar, not at all an illuminating Mentor. But I thought again: which is indeed the beggar of the tale? *Ferulago* or me? Assuming the idea of Leibniz, since it is wholly true, that in its smallest part all the Universe is reflected, I was forced to admit that *Ferulago* too would be a marvelous and forthcoming speaker to a keen ear. But, how was I to obtain a keen "ferulaginous" ear? By knowing in advance all the *Umbelliferae* family? Time, Talent and Thoughtfulness were likely to fail me... Setting apart the megalomaniac presumption of swallowing easily, as the whale his plankton, just that family which as they say (cf. BERNARDI, 1975) defeated the great Linnaeus. And more: in these days, the concept of family (of plants indeed, but not of plants alone) is so frequently debated, that before paying the toll to the *Umbelliferae*, I should have to search for its actual boundaries. Supposing I found them, I would have in front of me so big a monument, more or less mutilated Colosseum, that for a poor fellow like myself, wishing to scrutinize a small genus like *Ferulago*, just a stone of that massive marbled building, the beautiful sight of the whole should have to disappear again. I was eventually forced to restrain my imperialist wishes of enlarging my work, in order to begin somewhere. I chose for myself in my proposed mole-hill-cathedral, the right hand door, opening on "haughty Tradition"; through it will trust my *Umbelliferae* (in-)comprehension and (in-)competence to old, famed, worthy personalities, such as BAILLON (1879), BENTHAM & HOOKER (1867), DRUDE (1898) and also KOROVIN (1947) and SCHISCHKIN (1951). All of them agreed in thinking *Ferulago* akin to *Ferula* (reduced to its subg. by Bentham & Hooker) and also

close to *Peucedanum* (Baillon, in his peremptory synthetic concept of major taxa, put both *Ferula* and *Ferulago* in *Peucedanum*).

A monograph on the genus *Ferula* by KOROVIN (1947) and his later contribution to the "Flora SSSR" (vol. 17. 1951) had led me to hope that its taxonomy was definitive. *Peucedanum* on the contrary came forward with bad references, for instance that of HIROE & CONSTANCE (1958): "The boundaries between the species of this genus and some of those of *Angelica* are highly problematical... It is possible that all Japanese species [of *Peucedanum*] should be transferred to *Angelica*...". These illustrious authors expressed one "Angelicophil" point of view: could it be possible, dare I ask, for a "Peucedanist" to transform that to: "It is possible that all species of *Angelica* of Japan should be transferred to *Peucedanum* sensu lato (with *Lomatium*)?" Anyway, I feared that my search for a common measure for *Peucedanum*, *Ferula* and *Ferulago* had to take into consideration all the *Angelica* of the world also: notwithstanding that heavenly name, what a devilish task!

BURTT & DAVIS (1949: 225) for *Peucedanum* species growing not so far from us, wrote: "It is very difficult to generalize about the genus *Peucedanum*, which remains a vast assemblage of Old World species which show a wide range of general facies and a considerable variation in details of fruit structure. In this group (= genus!) generic and subgeneric limits are greatly in need of redefinition". Recently THEOBALD (1971) recalling word by word the Burtt & Davis observation, confirms that *Peucedanum* is still in shabby dress. He also adds something which might sound pleasantly to a Peucedano-imperialist ear: "It appears that many of the taxa within *Peucedanum* develop (the fruit) in a manner somewhat similar to that of *Lomatium*".

Accepting *Peucedanum* in spite of its ragged systematic clothes and *Ferula* apparently in well-fashioned dress (by Korovin), I had yet to find how to compare them, taking care of the quicksands: the never-ending investigations. Being alone in my work, I was forced to search for some easy macroscopical characters: enlarging the field I had to get some larger patterns. Fully conscious of the danger of that choice, today easily labelled as out-dated, I comforted myself with the old saying "All roads lead to Rome". More: with all respect and envious admiration for the up-to-date ultra-sophisticated micro- and inframicroscopic means of research applied here and there to systematics, it should be granted too that the Phanerogams are the meeting or gathering of "Things" (res naturales) that the naked eye and the human brain (or, if you prefer, human mind) can differentiate in conceptual categories. It should be accepted that long before our elaborate means of research, the species and genus concept was born in the human mind. It even seems questionable to me that the human mind could have developed far if completely devoid of the concept of categorising into divisions of at least the subtlety of species. Could human language have appeared? The Nominalists would have liked to reply "Yes" but at great length and with many qualifications. It is acknowledged that the men of New Guinea, Madagascar, New Caledonia, Fiji, Amazonia, etc., are known to

distinguish and denominate their Flora and Fauna to the species and in some instances down to the variety. I want to state that clearly, because if my following four chosen characters are to be labelled as “children of a Primitive”, I would have it known that I am not alone.