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HARALD PIEPER

"Z" – the breadfruit author identified

Abstract

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The enigmatic secondary or actual author, depending on the nomenclatural view taken, of *Sitodium altile (Moraceae)* and *Aniotum fagiferum (Fabaceae),* hitherto only known by his initial "Z" is identified as Friedrich August Zorn von Plobsheim (1711-89), an elusive naturalist from Danzig (Gdánsk), whose biography is briefly outlined.

Key words: James Cook's voyages, botanical nomenclature, biography, Friedrich August Zorn von Plobsheim, *Artocarpus, Inocarpus.*

Introduction

On 27 November 2004, shortly before these lines were written, the 250th birthday of Georg Forster (1754-94) was celebrated. Together with his father, Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-98), he laid the foundations for the knowledge of flora and vegetation of the South Pacific islands, travelling as companion of James Cook during the latter's second circumnavigation of the earth. On this occasion exhibitions dealing with the life and work of this great explorer were shown and several new studies on Georg Forster's collections published (e.g. Nicolson & Fosberg 2004).

At the same time, in 1774, when the two Forsters visited the South Pacific islands from Easter Island via Tahiti and New Caledonia to New Zealand, far away in Halle/Saale, then belonging to the Kingdom of Prussia, a translation into German with editorial changes, botanical corrections and annotations of the chapter on the useful plants of Tahiti of Sydney Parkinson's treatise of Cook's first voyage with the "Endeavour" (Parkinson 1773) appeared in the then rather youthful journal Der Naturforscher (Z 1774). Since then this publication has troubled the botanists because its author has not been known by his full name. He had signed authorship only with "Z". Therefore he happens to be the only one among thousands of botanical authors, besides Linnaeus, whose name is abbreviated with only one letter (Brummitt & Powell 1992: 722). This is not because his contribution to botany is especially splendid but due to the fact that nothing more than an initial of his name was handed over to the scientific community.

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"Z" – the mystery unsolved

A number of scientists were disturbed by this open problem. However, it must be stated that subsequent authors rather gave priority to the question whether the scientific names published in the original English edition (Parkinson 1773) or in the German edition (Z 1774) of that publication are valid, and whether they are all or for their most part invalid. In the case certain names are considered validly published only in the German edition, those must be attributed to "Z" as the author. In this nomenclatural issue very different opinions were expressed (Fosberg 1941, Fosberg & Sachet 1983, St. John 1972, Degener & Degener 1978). The latter authors, in their discussion, which was ingeniously published on April Fool's Day, propagated the idea that the actual author of *Artocarpus altilis* (Parkinson) Fosberg *(Moraceae),* based on *Sitodium altile* Parkinson (or: Parkinson ex Z, see St. John 1972), and *Inocarpus fagifer* (Parkinson) Fosberg *(Fabaceae),* based on *Aniotum fagiferum* Parkinson (or: Parkinson ex Z, see St. John 1972), should be identified with the Brunswick botanist Johann Philipp du Roi (1741-85). As Fosberg & Sachet (1983) remarked later, this presumption was "possibly facetious" and the Degeners did not give reasons why they had rejected the authorship of Parkinson or "Z", respectively. Nevertheless that proposal was swiftly taken as proven and cited for the taxa implied in the 13th and 14th editions of the renowned Zander dictionary of plant names (Encke & al. 1984, 1993) and is still distributed, seemingly as a nomenclatural option, by the International Plant Index (IPNI 2005), where, however, the more serious option attributing authorship to "Z" is omitted.

However, the question of the identity of "Z" receded as compared with the nomenclatural discussion. Therefore it is not surprising that after the times of St. John (1972) no new findings came to light. St. John had contacted several famous botanists in E and W Germany seeking for help in this matter, but all efforts to raise the veil of the mystery were in vain. Since "Z" never decoded himself, one is depending on circumstantial evidence, i.e. taking advice from the literature outside botany.

"Z" – the mystery unravelled

About the time when St. John (1972) made his fruitless attempt to clear up "Z's" identity, two authors smoothed the way for the possible solution of the problem, viz. Geus (1971) and Dance (1971, 1972). In the membership list of the Naturforschende Gesellschaft in Halle, St. John (1972) had found only one person with the initial Z. This was a geologist named Zepernick, who joined the society not earlier than in 1791 and this is much too late to make him fit our case.

A look into the compilation of all articles published in Der Naturforscher from 1774 to 1804 (Geus 1971) shows, that the list starts with an anonymous study (Anonymus 1775) dealing with some molluscs in the Danzig Natural History Collection, but no author with Z as initial is cited. The anonymous article of 1775 was not known to Dance, when dealing with the mollusc collections from James Cook's voyages (Dance 1971), but was added a year later in a supplement (Dance 1972). Evidently, as derived from malacological literature sources, this publication, like another South Sea mollusc study published in Neue Sammlung von Versuchen und Abhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft in Danzig (Zorn von Plobsheim 1778a), are from the pen of a certain F. A. Zorn von Plobsheim. These and other contemporary publications on Cook's molluscs are discussed in detail by Andrews (1987).

Zorn von Plobsheim became largely forgotten through the centuries. In recent biographical dictionaries our hero is no longer listed. Fedorowicz (1968), in his history of zoology in Danzig/Gdánsk during the 17th and 18th centuries, does not mention him at all. In this respect we are mostly dependent on an older review by Schumann (1893), or have to search in such synopses of the early 19th century as those by Hirsching (1815) and Meusel (1816) to obtain a fragmentary picture of this many-sided but neglected author. Hindering the biographical inquiry is also the fact that "Z's" branch apparently died out early in the male line and therefore is not considered in modern issues of relevant peerage books.

Friedrich August Zorn von Plobsheim was born in October (Oettinger (1868) says 14[?]) 1711 in Danzig/Gdánsk, where he also died on 6 February, 1789. With the age of 2 he came with his

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family to Straßburg/Strasbourg (Plobsheim was formerly a village in the vicinity of that city and is now a part of it). Here he studied at the university already in the years 1726-30(!), thereafter travelled through France, lived for a while in Paris but returned to his native town in 1733, where he began, with the support of Jacob Theodor Klein (1685-1759), to live for his private interests, viz. the natural sciences. Later on he became an inspector of the Museum of the Naturforschende Gesellschaft Danzig, which he described in detail (Zorn von Plobsheim 1778b, according to Meusel 1816: 467). This society was founded on 2 January 1743 and Zorn was one of the founding members. Thereafter he enriched the society's collections in a generous way with conchylia, minerals and petrefacts. Especially valuable at this time were also the donations (Schumann 1893) from the Royal Society of London, viz. by Banks and Solander, in the form of natural history material from Cook's first voyage. According to another version (Whitehead 1969, 1978, Dance 1971), at least the molluscs came to Danzig directly or indirectly through the dealer George Humphrey. Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg were born in the vicinity of Danzig and the father was elected honorary member of the Naturforschende Gesellschaft Danzig in 1775 (Hoare 1976), like Banks and Solander some years later, in 1779.

Judging from Schumann (1893), malacology was the favourite field of Zorn's zoological studies, but he also worked on insects and mammals. Owing to his apparent inclination to anonymity (see his mollusc paper of 1775) another part of his interests remained in the dark, i.e. that of an author in botanical matters. According to Hirsching (1815), Zorn had a good knowledge of the English, French and Italian languages and, given the contacts to Banks, Forster, etc., it is not surprising that he became a translator of a part of Sydney Parkinson's botanical journal.

Although not particularly mentioned in Zorn's translation, perhaps the Danzig botanist Gottfried Reyger (1704-88) was of great help to him. At just that time he was engaged in manifold botanical enterprises, e.g. lectures on the Linnaean system and arranging the herbarium of the museum. J. R. Forster was likewise in contact with Reyger and made use of the society's collections and library and discussed his work with the Danzig botanist. For this see Hoare (1976) who does not tell us exactly at which time this exchange took place.

Concluding remarks

Unfortunately, it is not possible to add here a portrait of F. A. Zorn von Plobsheim, although Mr Klaus Bürger, Husum, the editor of the Altpreußische Biographie, informed me (Bürger, in litt. 2002) that such a portrait seems to have existed before the Second World War. This portrait is supposedly kept in a collection at Danzig/Gdánsk. Alas, Mrs Stefania Sychta of the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences at Gdánsk dispersed all hope to find it and thinks that actually no such portrait is available in Danzig/Gdánsk after 1945 (Sychta, in litt. 2002).

Finally it may be stated that, in spite of several details that are unsolved as yet, the decisive first step seems to have been taken herewith to unravel the mystery of "Z". In Brummitt & Powell (1992: 722) and in the author database of IPNI (2005), as a consequence, the entry "Z (Herr) (fl. 1774)" with the recommended standard abbreviation "Z" should be corrected to "Friedrich August Zorn von Plobsheim (1711-89)" with the proposed standard abbreviation "Z. Plobsh." as derived from the parallel case of F. A. Marschall von Bieberstein (abbreviated "M. Bieb.", see Brummitt & Powell 1992: 404), in order to avoid confusion with the existing author abbreviations "Zorn" for Johannes Zorn (1739-99) and "H. Zorn" for the phycologist Helmut Zorn (Brummitt & Powell 1992: 731).

It remains to be hoped that, perhaps in a future Polish-German cooperation, a more thorough analysis of the life and work of F. A. Zorn von Plobsheim will be elaborated.

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