

Book review: Georg Rosen. Notizen von einer Reise durch Serbien, Anatolien und Transkaukasien in den Jahren 1843 und 1844

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H. WALTER LACK¹

Book review: Georg Rosen. Notizen von einer Reise durch Serbien, Anatolien und Transkaukasien in den Jahren 1843 und 1844

Stache-Weiske A. & Meier-Barthel F. (ed.), Georg Rosen. Notizen von einer Reise durch Serbien, Anatolien und Transkaukasien in den Jahren 1843 und 1844. – Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2020 (= Conermann S. (ed.), Bonner Islamstudien 44). – ISBN 978-3-86893-348-2. – 15.5 × 22.5 cm, 570 pp., eight illustrations, hardback. – Price: EUR 34.80. – Available at <https://www.ebv-berlin.de/>

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It may come as a surprise to see this book reviewed in *Willdenowia*, but there is a special reason: it sheds additional light on one of the more important botanical expeditions to the Ottoman and Russian empires undertaken in the mid-19th century, which was focused on north-eastern Anatolia and the southern Caucasus area. Among historians of science and, in particular, specialists for expeditions, it is a well-known fact that insights into these undertakings are greatly improved through reports of a second or third participant. Cook's second circumnavigation is the classical example: here Captain James Cook, the naturalist George Forster and the astronomer William Wales kept daily records, with the consequence that this voyage is particularly well understood.

This book is focused on the linguist Georg Rosen (1820–1891), a pioneer for South Caucasian languages, in particular Laz, who travelled with the botanist Karl Heinrich Koch (1809–1879) in what is now Serbia, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia in 1843–1844. So far only Koch's extensive travel reports published on some 1500 pages are known. The primary aim of this book is the publication of the travel recollections of Rosen kept in the Lippische Landesbibliothek in Detmold, his letters sent home and a miscellany of other papers pertinent to this trip. Appended is a republication of various texts by Rosen about this expedition, which appeared in the *Wochenblatt der Johanniter-Ordens-Balley Bran-*

denburg, the weekly of the German Protestant branch of the Knights Hospitaller, in 1878. The editorial principles for Rosen's texts follow conventional standards and, as usual, a wealth of information is found in the numerous footnotes which accompany the texts.

For the botanist, the most interesting part is the introduction (pp. 13–104) offering the necessary background information of the expedition and adding substantially to what had previously been reported about this trip (Edmondson & Lack 1977; Lack 1978; Wimmer 2004). Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia, the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin and Friedrich Eichhorn, minister for religious and cultural affairs, were involved in organizing funds for Koch and Rosen. Although they were not Prussian citizens, they travelled with Prussian passports. Koch, aged 34, who had visited the Caucasus area in 1836–1838, and Rosen, aged 23, who had just received his PhD from Leipzig University and was without any field experience, formed an unequal pair. Rosen, supported among others by Alexander von Humboldt, seems to have regarded Koch as a vehicle for his future fame, while the latter regarded his companion as of no help for his work as a botanist. As a consequence, it remained uncertain who led whom during the trip, which started in Vienna, where they were received by Metternich, chancellor of the Austrian Empire, and continued via Belgrade, Istanbul and Trabzon further east. Unsur-

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prisingly, Koch and Rosen separated in Tiflis and, after a trip to Erivan, Rosen travelled back to Istanbul, where he entered the Prussian diplomatic service as a translator. Koch returned via Chernivtsi to Jena and moved in 1847 to Berlin. There he had to wait for no less than 15 years to get a badly paid position at the Royal Botanic Garden, destructive critique from Humboldt and Carl Sigismund Kunth being among the major reasons for this delay.

The realities of travelling in the more distant parts of the Ottoman and Russian empires are dealt with in some detail. Very rightly the travels from Muş across the high mountains of northeastern Anatolia to the Russian border in November 1843 are characterized by Rosen as resembling more an escape from robbers and the approaching winter than a scientific expedition. In these remote provinces, the recommendations from Istanbul or Trabzon were of no great use. The reader is informed for the first time about Koch's travel equipment, which included not only a microscope and two barometers but also a camera to produce daguerreotypes. This makes him one of the first scientific travellers who made use of this new apparatus in the field. Incidentally, it helped him to finance his stay in Tiflis, where he had run out of money: with his camera Koch produced portraits and sold them. We also learn how Koch's herbarium specimens were sent back – wrapped in waxed cloth, put into boxes and transported e.g. from Erzurum via Istanbul and Trieste to Jena. A modern aspect of the expedition was the press coverage it received. Reports sent to Humboldt, the geographer Carl Ritter and others in Berlin were quickly passed on by them to the media, mainly to the *Allgemeine Preussische Zeitung* with the result that extracts appeared while Koch and Rosen were still in the field. The publication of Koch's four maps, largely based on Russian military maps and published in a microscopic print-run for the Prussian General Staff, is only briefly dealt with, but this topic has already been covered elsewhere (Lack 2012). The present volume contains a few illustrations, among

them Koch's so-far unrecorded printed concept for the expedition submitted to the Royal Academy of Sciences and the Royal Government in 1842 (p. 109). As one of the aims, this plan explicitly mentioned the comparison of the floras of the region to be explored with those of Central Europe and of Central Asia.

The edition of Rosen's recollections is divided into four parts: from Belgrade to Istanbul, from Trabzon to Erzurum, from Erzurum to Gymri (previously Alexandropol, subsequently Leninakan) and from Tiflis to Erivan. Each of these parts is prefaced by a valuable introduction offering the reader what the authors rightly call the "political context" of that part of the trip. The book ends with a glossary of Ottoman administrative terms (pp. 529–531), the bibliography (pp. 533–542), and registers for persons (p. 543–548), for toponyms (pp. 549–558) and for general terms (pp. 559–570).

For all interested in expeditions undertaken in the 19th century, in particular to regions that were then called the Orient, this is definitely a work to read and enjoy.

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