

Greek Wild Flowers and Plant Lore in Ancient Greece. H. Baumann, translated and revised by W.T. & E.R. Stearn. Herbert Press, London. 1993. Pp 252; 442 colour photographs. ISBN 1-871569-57-5. £16.95.

This is an English translation, by William and Ruth Stearn, of the second edition of Hellmut Baumann's *Die griechische Pflanzenwelt in Mythos, Kunst und Literatur*, first published in 1982. Professor Stearn has contributed a Foreword and a short Appendix on Greek myths, as well as other 'additions and emendations' to the original German text (which are not, however, identified). The author belongs to a Swiss family which has long had business associations with Greece. A keen student and lover of Greek plants, he has (in Stearn's words) 'sought and photographed them in their habitats the length and breadth of Greece, over many years, at the same time becoming more and more interested in the varied and extensive literature about them in German, French, English and modern Greek.'

The book is obviously a labour of love. It is intended for the general reader, its aim being to increase and enrich the visitor's enjoyment of the Greek flora today by evoking the plant life of ancient Greece and the role that it played in the literature, religion, mythology and art of Greek antiquity. After introductory chapters on 'Plants and Man in Ancient Greece' and 'The Botany of the Ancients', the meat of the book is contained in five chapters dealing with landscape, cults and myths, medicinal and magic plants, crops, and painting and the plastic arts. The book concludes with short chapters on mountain flowers, orchids and introduced plants. There is a very short glossary and a useful bibliography (although more could have been done to adapt it for the English reader).

Judged by its stated purpose, the book is at best a qualified success. It contains much interesting information not readily available elsewhere to the general reader, but the author's approach is in general too uncritical and too superficial to give any real insight into the ancient world. Indeed, this is almost inevitable considering that a period of some two thousand years is covered in about one hundred (fairly small) pages of text. As the author disarmingly says in his Preface, the book is 'a mosaic put together out of all periods of Greek ancient history'. Furthermore, the range of ancient authors referred to is limited (for example poets apart from Homer barely rate a mention); and the content of the book lapses at times into banality or whimsy. In truth, the text is best seen as a pot-pourri of curious information and plant lore culled from a variety of sources ancient and modern, broadly arranged by subject-matter and providing a framework for the illustrations which are the really outstanding feature of the book. It is exceptionally well illustrated with literally hundreds of small but good quality colour photographs, nearly all taken by the author, which show a wide range of beautiful and interesting plants. There are also numerous black and white illustrations.

To give just one example of the book at its best, five colour plates (346–350) illustrate neatly and convincingly how the sea-daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) was used as the source of decorative floral motifs in painted murals from Thera and on a bronze Mycenaean sword now in the National Museum of Athens. The text adds interesting details about the botanical accuracy of the representation.

The book is attractively produced, and in view of its convenient pocket size and modest price it can be warmly recommended as a vade-mecum or bedside book for the botanically minded tourist with an intelligent interest in the ancient Greek world. There is a scattering of misprints which ought to be corrected in a later edition, and the illustration of *Platanthera chlorantha* (463) is printed upside down.

L.D.J. Henderson

A Taxonomic Revision of *Lamium* (Lamiaceae). [Leiden Botanical Series, 11]. J. Mennema. Leiden University Press. 1989. Pp. vii + 198; 70 figures, 3 tables. ISBN 90-04-09109-2. Dutch Guilders 92.

This is the first revision of the genus *Lamium* since Briquet (1897). Long in gestation, it clearly represents the fruits of many years' painstaking work and is based on examination of c. 10000 collections; of these, quantitative measurements were made on 2700. The resulting slim volume is divided into three parts. The "General chapter" first outlines the taxonomic history of *Lamium* (a cameo of the history of European plant taxonomy). The author accepts the traditional concept of *Lamium* followed by most authors, including Briquet. Various extra-European species, e.g. *L. nepalense* Hedge, *L. staintonii* Hedge, *L. tuberosum* Hedge and *L. foliatum* Dunn, are excluded. Some consideration of genera peripheral to *Lamium* might have allowed the author to assign these to their correct genus, assuming he is right in excluding them from *Lamium*.

Brief notes (too brief, in many instances) are given on the value of various taxonomic characters. Indumentum characters, and the presence or absence of an annulus (internal ring of hairs) in the corolla tube, are given less weight than by most authors. Notes on geography, the criteria for delimiting taxa, and hybridisation follow. Only one hybrid, *L. x holsaticum* (*L. album* x *maculatum*) is accepted.

The final part of the introductory chapter is by far the most controversial. Its heading, "An Intuitive Phylogenetic Reconstruction", will raise more than the eyebrows of those who practise cladistics! Mennema starts from "the axiom that species with a large, disjunct area are older than species with a small continuous area", to construct a branching diagram or 'phylogenetic tree'. Rigid adherence to his maxim (which bears some relationship to Willis's 'Age and Area Hypothesis') results in some extremely odd conclusions. Perennial species are said to be derived from annuals (e.g. *L. album* from *L. galactophyllum*). Species of ancient habitats (e.g. *L. orvala* of mesic forests) are considered to have been derived from those inhabiting rocky places and (historically recent) ruderal habitats. All the conclusions in this section are the reverse of those which would have been deduced using generally accepted theories of evolutionary trends, and I find it exceedingly difficult to believe any of them.

The taxonomic chapter, 114 pages long, forms the core of the revision. The genus is treated in a broad sense, including *Galeobdolon*, even though a combination of characters (discussed by Mennema), have influenced other workers to recognise the latter as a distinct genus.