

Prof. Dr Stefan Stanev: on the occasion of his 70th anniversary

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To the man who has contributed thousands of pages to the history of Bulgarian botany – with admiration and respect!

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the most ardent researcher of the history of Bulgarian botany, an outstanding expert on the Bulgarian flora, a passionate environmentalist, a profound scholar of many interests, Prof. Dr Stefan Stanev. It is difficult to write about a man with such a sharp and critical pen, exacting to himself and to his surroundings.

Prof. Stefan Stanev was born on 13 August 1938 in Dragano-vo village, Veliko Turnovo district – a village with cultural traditions of long standing and eventful history. As if to remind us that nothing is accidental in this world, he is its worthy representative, combining the culture of an enlightened Bulgarian with homage and respect for the memory and history of our predecessors.

Stefan Stanev finished high school in Veliko Turnovo with flying colours. He enrolled subsequently at Sofia University, where in 1963 graduated in biology as a graduating student of the Botany Department, again with flying colours. His interest in botany dates back to his early years and throughout his life he remained true to it and made it his destiny. Full of ideas and enthusiasm – this is how I remember Prof. Stanev since his last university year.

He graduated under Academician Daki Jordanov, from whom he learned a lot and whom he remembered with great respect. To be a graduating student under such a scholar is a privilege and reason for pride. And he often mentioned this fact. His MSc thesis was on the subject *Vegetation in the western part of Mt Golo Burdo, Southwest Bulgaria*. It fuelled further his love for plants and for Nature.

After graduation, Stefan Stanev worked for several years as Assistant Professor at the Botany Department of the Paisiy Hilend-



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darski University of Plovdiv. In 1967 he moved to the Plovdiv Natural Sciences Museum, where he has been head of the Botany Department ever since.

The scientific career of Prof. Stanev is chiefly in the field of floristics and geobotany, history of Bulgarian botany, and museum studies. In 1976 he defended a Doctor's thesis on the subject *Vegetation of Pre-Rhodopean elevations: Besaparski Hills*. In 1997 he became a Professor. He read lectures on a part-time basis to the students of the Biological Faculty of the Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.



As a student, on a paleobotanical excursion with Prof. D. Jordanov, Podgoumer village, Sofia district (1962).

His entire scientific legacy – 74 articles and 17 books – is exclusively independent, only nine of them were written in co-authorship with other scholars. His works have been cited by Bulgarian and foreign authors and many reviews and opinions have been published about his books.

Floristic and geobotanical research and contributions

Prof. Stanev has aimed his studies in this field at the comparatively poorly studied territories of the country, such as Eastern Sredna Gora, Eastern Rhodopes, Besaparski Hills, Ovchi Hills, Plovdiv Hills, etc. His results supplement the contemporary pattern of floristic diversity in these territories. He reported new chorological data on over 250 taxa from the Bulgarian flora, including some rare and protected, single-time found species, such as *Lepidotis inundata*, *Turgeniopsis foeniculacea*, *Astragalus sesamaeus*, *Vicia amphicarpa*, *Gypsophila tekirae*, *Aethionema arabicum*, etc. He supplemented the chorological information on most taxa with critical notes, environmental requirements, etc. These results have been used in the compilation of the *Flora of the Republic of Bulgaria*, *Red Data Book of the Republic of Bulgaria*, *Atlas of the Endemic Plants of Bulgaria*, in various conspects, in the evaluation of rare and threatened species under the *Red List of Plants* project, etc.

On a botanical excursion with students in biology from the P. Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (1967).



In Bulgarian botanical literature he was the first to make an attempt at analyzing thoroughly the flora of a specified region: the Besaparski Hills. Subsequently, other authors used this as a model for kindred investigations in the country. Prof. Stanev carried out geobotanical research in the same region, which had not been yet subject to such an investigation. In the result, he described 49 new for the country associations and 16 arboreal-herbaceous and shrub-herbaceous complexes. He developed a classification scheme and a scheme for the vegetation cover dynamics. He also compiled a large-scale map of the vegetation (M 1: 25 000). Prof. Stanev elucidated the processes of grassification and vegetation development on the hill deposits: a problem on which there were few data in Bulgarian geobotanical literature.

He described an interesting new community in the Eastern Rhodopes, with participation of the Mediterranean species *Quercus coccifera*, so far unknown for that part of the country.

These results have found application in various phytocoenological works (such as *Vegetation of Bulgaria*), in the different in scale mapping of the vegetation of Bulgaria, in the elucidation of the processes of grassification, development and regeneration of vegetation, in the solution of a number of practical issues related to afforestation, pasture improvement, etc.



On the calcareous rocks of peak Chervenata Stena, Central Rhodopes (1969).

Studies into the history of Bulgarian botany

With his studies in this field Prof. Stanev marked the beginning of a new scientific line in the country: *History of Bulgarian Botany*.

He studied, provided detailed characteristics and analyzed the researches in Bulgaria in the domain of plant morphology, anatomy, embryology, cytology, physiology, biochemistry, floristics, and taxonomy. The results found place in his book *History of Botanical Science in Bulgaria*, in two parts (1993, 1994).

His studies covered the period from the emergence of botanical science in Bulgaria until 1944. This is a distinct historical period, during which botanical science had formed its centres, lines and traditions, experienced downslides and years of upsurge, scored definite successes, and established some prestigious names in the scientific world.

On the basis of archive material and other authentic data Prof. Stanev elucidated a number of little known but essential moments in the history of various scientific fields. With due persistence and consistence he searched for creative scientific works by Bulgarian and foreign authors on the analyzed issues, many of them in inaccessible foreign publications.

He identified the first scientific developments, made bibliographic lists of the publications for each of the analyzed fields.

Prof. Stanev listed the major scientific achievements and contributions of the most prominent researchers, who marked the beginning of the respective studies in Bulgaria and created schools and lines.

With admiration and respect for the personalities and lifework of the scholars in the field of Bulgarian botany, with a firm confidence that they should receive due recognition and their names and creative work should not fall into oblivion, Prof. Stanev dedicated a considerable part of his creative work to them.

He studied and described the life and creative achievements of 40 Bulgarian botanists of varying prominence since the emergence of Bulgarian botany and almost to our days, all with their own trace left in the botanical science. He wrote many pages working persistently, selflessly and after profound research, after reading hundreds of pages from the archives in the Bulgarian and foreign libraries. This could be done only by a person who understands well the value of his efforts and his duty to leave to posterity the history of predecessors.

Prof. Stanev is the only contemporary Bulgarian botanist who has communicated directly with such pillars of Bulgarian botany as Academicians Boris Stefanov and Nikolai Stoyanov and zoologist Acad. Ivan Bouresh, to whom also goes some of the credit for the development of Bulgarian botany. Typically intelligent and active, he managed to get ahead of time and to have unforgettable meetings and conversations with them, in order to write subsequently about their life, to provide us with some so far unknown facts related to their development as scholars of international renown. He did all that in order to make us familiar with the writing of *Flora of Bulgaria* (which underwent four editions), with scores of new for science species described by them, with hundreds of species discovered for the first time on Bulgarian territory; to acquaint us



With Prof. W. Greuter and Dr S. Prister, Symposium on Problems of the Balkan Flora and Vegetation, Varna (1973).



At the reception in the Town Hall of Vienna during the meeting of the International Committee of the Natural Sciences Museums with ICOM (1979).

with their works which laid down the foundations of Bulgarian botany and have not lost their significance ever since, and without which no newly initiated botanical scholar could begin work.

With enviable animation he described some important moments about the discovery, distribution and study of many plants, including some relicts, endemics, rare and protected species.

Prof. Stanev left to posterity the bio-bibliographies of Acad. Daki Jordanov, Acad. Boris Stefanov, of the first Bulgarian professor in botany Stefan Georgiev.

The results obtained in this field are an important contribution to the history of Bulgarian botany and are used in scientific developments, monographs, manuals, encyclopedias, etc.

Work and contribution to museum studies

It is Prof. Stanev who developed the theoretical basis for the structural and personnel network in the Natural Sciences Museums and Nature departments in Bulgaria, as well as for some of their major activities and problems (namely, collection and fund work, ecological education, Nature protection, living collections, extracurricular work at schools, and the role of museums).

He is the author of three successive botanical expositions, the latter and the biggest one in Bulgaria being constantly supplemented and updated. He created a scientific herbarium of about 10 000 herbarium sheets, also the biggest one within the system of Natural Sciences Museums in Bulgaria. With few exceptions, the plants have been personally collected in Nature and determined by him.

He traced out, organized and subsequently handed down to the Institute of Botany, BAS the herbarium collection of Václav Stříbrný. This collection comprises about 9000 herbarium sheets and provides a good basis for taxonomic work, as well as many interesting groups of plants. As a man who values books, Prof. Stanev has been most active in enriching the museum library (about 8000 volumes). He organized great environmentalist exhibitions (at the Museum and outside it). In-

dustrious and active at work and a never-failing source of ideas, Prof. Stanev has contributed very much to enhancing the prestige of the Natural Sciences Museum in Plovdiv, both among the general public and in the scientific circles. With his participation in a number of international and national forums, as well as with his lifework, he has greatly promoted the work of Bulgarian Natural Sciences Museums abroad and its development in the country.

He has also promoted the work, collections and exhibitions of the Natural Sciences Museum in Plovdiv, which is one of the leading museums in the country.

Popular science and Nature protection work

Irreconcilable with the destruction of Nature, Prof. Stanev was among the first who reacted sharply with writings in the press and at conferences and symposia. He gave scores of interviews on topical subjects relating to the protection of flora, vegetation and Nature in Bulgaria. He was widely sought by colleagues and Nature protectors for opinion and advice, when they had to wage battle against the next incoming injustice and encroachment against Nature. He gave opinion on interesting facts in Nature, answered the questions of Nature-lovers, school students and citizens. He was always ready from the position of a scholar and citizen to commit himself to studying and protection of Nature and its riches. He sounded the alarm, when some of these riches were threatened with extinction, owing to another human irresponsibility. Prof. Stanev dedicated over 75 popular science articles to Bulgarian Nature, to plant species threatened with extinction, and made the readers familiar with some interesting ter-



Among the books at his work place (2001).



Reading a paper on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Bulgarian Botanical Society (2003).

ritories in the country related to plant diversity and its protection. With interesting and originally presented information he attracted the attention not only of specialists but also of people who were unfamiliar with these matters. His books have been read and much sought after by many people: specialists, teachers, university and school students, tourists, etc. who loved Nature and its beauty.

It is a general opinion that Prof. Stanev is the best promoter of botanic knowledge in Bulgaria. His book and articles are not simply reproductions and compilations of well-known literary facts and events, but reflect in an original way his own studies and observations in Nature, his long years of quest in State-owned and private archives, his many conversations with relatives, friends and contemporaries of the first Bulgarian botanists and his personal impressions of the acquaintance with some of them. Along these lines he wrote some particularly outstanding books: *Stars Fade in the Mountain*, which underwent five editions in 30 years, *Eminent Bulgarian Botanists* with two editions, *The Green World of Plovdiv*, *Stefan Georgiev* and *Daki Jordanov* (from the *Eminent Bulgarian Scholars* series of the St Kliment Ohridski University Press).

This part of the creative work of Prof. Stanev makes the reader admire his enthusiasm, patience and responsibility in looking out for each fact, and for the time spared from his numerous engagements so as to express his civic position combined with the position of the well-established and respected scholar, and his skill for presenting the scientific knowledge in an exciting and attractive manner, in a language understandable to a wide range of readers, and with a rare belletristic skill for a scientific worker.

Interests in the arts and culture

In his typically witty manner Prof. Stanev often says: *"My drama (or maybe happiness?) is that professionally I am occupied with science, while spiritually I belong to the men of art."*

There is no other contemporary scholar in botany, not even in the entire history of Bulgarian botany, with such purposeful and profound interests in the arts and culture reflected strongly in his publications.

True to his marked interest in the pictorial arts and music, Prof. Stanev has published eight books, in which he tells of the creative work and his meetings with some prominent Plovdiv artists (painters, graphic



At the exhibition of artist Stanimir Videv, Plovdiv (2006).

artists, and sculptors), actors, writers, and musicians. Books to be envied by any specialists in the field. He also wrote over 40 articles about many emblematical figures of Plovdiv, without whom it is difficult to imagine the cultural life of the city in which Prof. Stanev lives and works. A connoisseur of their art, he attractively and fascinatingly leads the reader along their lifepaths, giving them deserved credit for their works. With a profound insight into their human and creative nature, and with responsibility so typical of him, Prof. Stanev has left to posterity information about them, as a sign of gratitude and a document against oblivion.

Teaching activities

Prof. Stanev has taught the students from the Biological Faculty of the Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. In his earlier years he taught practical classes and summer practices in the field of *Plant Systematics, Anatomy and Morphology of Plants, Ecology of Plants*. Subsequently, he read lectures on *Current Problems in Botany, History of the Natural in Bulgaria, Protected Natural Sites in Bulgaria, Organisation and Structure of Botanical and Zoological Gardens, History and Theory of Museum Studies*.

He also read lectures on Nature protection and environmentalist education and on methodological museum problems to students, teachers, etc.

Other activities

For his exclusive competence not only in the field of botany, his active work and clear-cut opinions on the emerging problems, Prof. Stanev is a much-sought partner and participant in various organizations, com-

missions, councils, etc. For many years he has been member of the National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM – UNESCO), of the International Committee of the Natural Sciences Museums with ICOM, Chairman of the Museum Workers Club in Plovdiv, Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Plovdiv Museums, member of the Bulgarian Botanical Society, Deputy Chairman of this branch organization in Plovdiv for a set period of time, member of the management of the Bulgarian Naturalist Society, etc. He is also member of the Specialised Botany and Mycology Council with the Higher Attestation Commission. Prof. Stanev is on the editorial boards of various magazines and scientific journals (*Proceedings of the Natural History Museum in Plovdiv, Proceedings of the Museums in South Bulgaria, Museums and Monuments of Culture*).

He participated in many international congresses and symposia: the 14th World Congress on Botany, Berlin (1987); the symposia on the problems of the Balkan flora and vegetation, Varna (1973) and Istanbul (1978); the Symposium on Mapping the Flora on the Balkan Peninsula, Sofia (1976); the 9th World Congress of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) with UNESCO, Moscow (1977); the conferences of the International Committee of the Natural Sciences Museums with ICOM, Sanct Petersburg (1977), Vienna (1979), Paris (1982), etc. Prof. Stanev read papers at many of these events.

Instead of an afterword

An intelligent man, with solid knowledge not only in the field of botany and biology, extremely industrious, with interest in everything which surrounds him, Prof. Stanev is the live history of Bulgarian botany. In his scientific works he bequeathed to Bulgarian botany and to posterity some very valuable things: the memory of, the scientific thoughts and the creative work of eminent scholars who laid the foundations of Bulgarian botany. Many of them he has thoroughly studied in person. The Bulgarian botanical science owes him its history, which should be well remembered, in order to develop it in the future and supplement it with

new discoveries and contributions. He is the person who knows best everything related to Bulgarian botanical science and his creative work raises an insurmountable barrier to oblivion of everything created by its founders, as well as of those who came after them and left their trace in our beloved science.

Thus, honouring everything he has written and will write in the future, honouring his profound research efforts, we wish to congratulate the scholar, colleague and friend and wish him health and undying enthusiasm in his creative quest.

Many happy returns, colleague Stanev!

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