

## Prof. Stefan Georgiev: on the occasion of his 165<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary and 125<sup>th</sup> death anniversary

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**Abstract.** Prof. Dr. Stefan Georgiev (1859-1900) was an eminent presence in the history of Bulgarian botany and natural history. Teacher and university professor, in the first two decades after the liberation from Ottoman bondage, he created the Institute of Botany with the Higher School of Bulgaria (Sofia University), and penned the first botanical articles by a Bulgarian scholar. During his brief life and work span, he had contributed plenty to the formation and development of Bulgarian botany and nascent Bulgarian science and education.

**Key words:** Bulgaria, famous botanists, floristic, history of botany

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Stefan Georgiev Bozhilov was born on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1859 in Bolgrad, Ukraine, in a poor family of Bessarabian Bulgars. In 1878, he graduated from the well-known high school in Bolgrad, named after the SS Cyril and Methodius, and like many other better educated Bulgarian young men in Bessarabia headed for free Bulgaria with its newly-outlined broad vistas for work and fulfilment. After a three-year work span as teacher, Georgiev received a government grant and went abroad to study natural sciences. Initially, he studied for two years in Prague, then continued his education in Leipzig, which was one of the biggest education and cultural centers in Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1886, he graduated from the Leipzig University and sat for a Doctor's Degree under Prof. A. Schenk on the subject of *Beitrag zur vergleichenden Anatomie der Chenopodiaceen*. His dissertation was published

next year (1887) in the prestigious German journal *Botanisches Centralblatt*. That paper was the first scientific botanical work written by a Bulgarian author.

In the academic year 1891-1892, the specialty of Natural Science was set with the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of Sofia University (opened three years earlier as a Higher School) and the 32-year-old first-class teacher from the Sofia High School for Boys, S. Gerogriev, was appointed as best suited for the position of a professor of botany there. Besides of being a Doctor in Botany and an excellent teacher, he had already published two hefty volumes of the flora of Bulgaria: *Materials on the Flora of South Bulgaria (Thrace)* (1889), and *The Rhodopes and Rila Mountain and their Vegetation* (1890), as well as some shorter botanical notes.

Late in the summer of 1893 and during his studies of the flora of Eastern Stara Planina and the environs of



Prof. Stefan Georgiev (1859-1900).

Burgas town, Georgiev suffered a nasty cold but overlooked its treatment and that initial ailment (probably a bronchopneumonia) paved the way for tuberculosis attacks of his already frail organism. Realizing the graveness of his health situation, he left for treatment in the Görbersdorf Resort (Prussian Silesia), then famous for its sanatoria for pulmonary conditions.

After a year of recuperation, Georgiev returned to Bulgaria, stronger and almost completely healed, and with his typical enthusiasm and steadfastness, without further thoughts of practicing caution and sparing himself, proceeded with his work of studying the Bulgarian flora and establishing the Institute of Botany at the University. Unfortunately, in the spring of 1899, he once again felt unwell, but left for Görbersdorf only in April of the following year, where, irrespective of the thorough medical care, he died on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1900.

According to the memories of his school and uni-

Gheorghieff, Beitrag zur vergl. Anatomie der Chenopodiaceen. 117

## Wissenschaftliche Original-Mittheilungen.

### Beitrag zur vergleichenden Anatomie der Chenopodiaceen.

Von

Prof. Dr. **St. Gheorghieff**  
in Sofia.

Hierzu 4 lithographirte Tafeln.

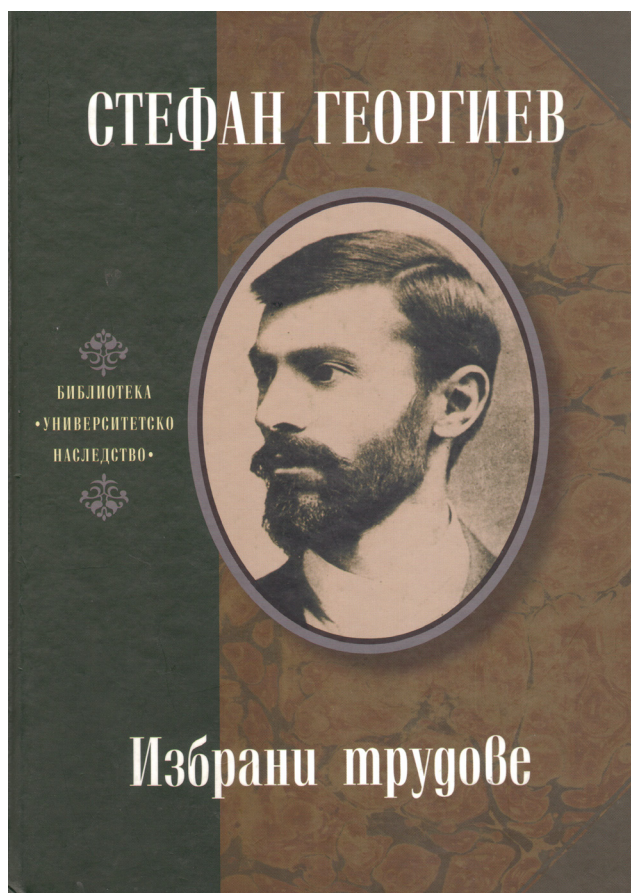
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 Ferner ist mir nur aus Wieler's Referat (Botan. Centralbl. 1886. No. 30—31. p. 92—94) bekannt die Arbeit A. Batalin's: Wirkung des Chloratriums auf die Entwicklung von Salicornia herbacea L. (Bull. du congrès internat. de botan. et d'horticult. St.-Petersb. 1886. p. 219—232.)

First page of the PhD Thesis of S. Georgiev (1887).

versity students, Georgiev was a very good teacher and university professor and everybody remembered him with love and respect. After he was appointed professor at the Higher School (renamed into Sofia University in 1894), Georgiev took on the uneasy and responsible task of establishing the first in Bulgaria University of Botany and inspiring and setting on track the Bulgarian academic botany. Thus, the young, only 32-year-old teacher and scholar dedicated all his energy and efforts to that work, pushing to the background his studies of the Bulgarian flora, started by him so lovingly and successfully during his school-teaching years. His major purpose by that time was to create an exemplary Institute of Botany modelled on the botany institutes in Prague and Leipzig – with a botanic garden, herbarium, library, sample collections, research and study lab. Only three years later, in his report on the academic year 1893-1894, the Rector of the University stated that some of the chairs had



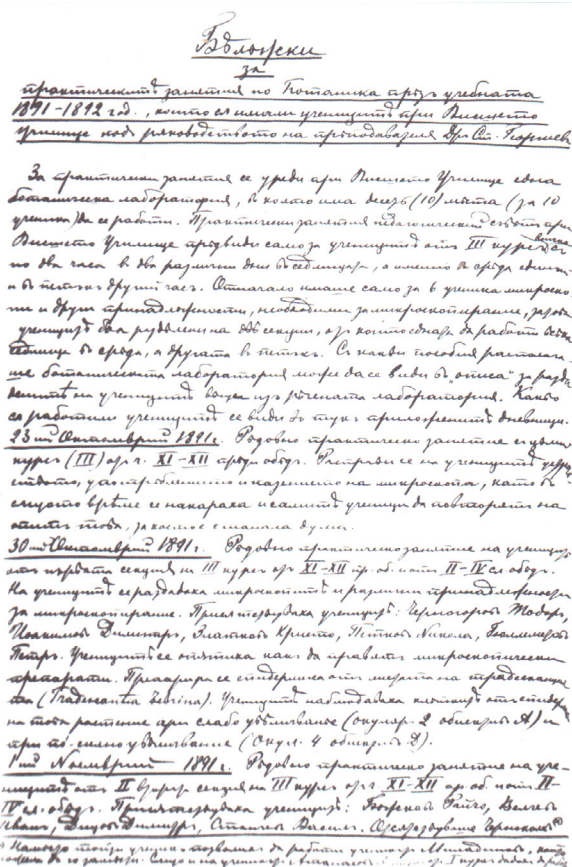


The title page of the book: Stefan Georgiev. Selected Works. Univ. Publishing House St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia (2013).

actually accomplished the university level. He mentioned as an example the Physics Lab and added further: "As great a tribute to the University is the Botanic Garden and the Botany Lab managed deftly by the professor of botany, Dr. Stefan Georgiev".

However, a much greater credit should go to Dr. Georgiev not only for the Institute of Botany set with the University, but for training the first Bulgarian teachers in natural sciences and young botany experts. Among his students were the botanists Bozhimir Davidov, Dimcho Mihailov, Ivan Neichev, Sava Kazandzhiev, Boris Ivanov, etc. He succeeded in passing on to them his great love and passion for science, something repeatedly confirmed by them in their publications and memoirs of their professor.

The above-mentioned works of S. Georgiev have been of special importance for the knowledge of the Bulgarian flora. A total of about 1500 plants were mentioned in them, including 24 genera, 82 species



Facsimile of the first page of S. Georgiev's diary of practical knowledge in botany.

and 21 varieties new for the flora of Bulgaria (e.g., *Bartsia alpina*, *Critmum maritimum*, *Cypripedium calceolus*, *Menianthes trifoliata*, *Tozia alpina*, etc.), while the species *Gentiana frigida*, *Rhododendron myrtifolium*, *Salix herbacea*, *Saxifraga androsacea*, *S. retusa*, *Selaginella selaginoides*, *Sibbaldia procumbens*, *Soldanella pusilla*, and *Subularia aquatica* were new for the flora of the entire Balkan Peninsula. After such an active and successful start of his studies into the Bulgarian flora, Georgiev did not publish new floristic articles in the remaining ten years of his short life, with the exception a concise publication *Has Rhamonda serbica* Panč. been found so far in Bulgaria? (1900). That could be explained by his preoccupation with the establishment of the Institute of Botany, his teaching activities (in the early years, he used to read lectures and conduct the exercises on his own) and his frail health. In spite of that, Georgiev never stopped his botanical hikes, in order

to collect plants, nor did he cease ordering materials from abroad. His purpose was to accumulate plenty of herbarium material and, after improvement of his health, to engage in their critical processing so as to write the dreamt of *Flora of Bulgaria*. His article *Ranunculaceae in Bulgaria* (1900) illustrated his intentions.

Besides his preoccupation with higher plants, Georgiev also evinced interest in the diatom algae, fungi, phytofolklore, and instilment of Bulgarian botanic terminology at the schools and the University. He dedicated the last year of his life to the oozing of species of the genus *Acer*, attempting to elucidate to what an extent that process depended on temperature, moisture and other external factors.

Georgiev's popular science articles constitute part of his heredity. They are five altogether, but in their content, clarity of narration, competence, originality, and practical orientation could still set as an example for popularization of scientific knowledge and accomplishments, while the second part of his extensive article *Melliferous plants and their importance for bee-keeping* (1896) duly merits a research study.

Now is the 165<sup>th</sup> birth and the 125<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Prof. Dr. Stefan Georgiev. Although somewhat forgotten and nearly unknown to the later generations of biologists and botanists, he was and is, as his friend and editor of the *Priroda Journal* G. Hristovich put it, "a patriarch of Bulgarian botany", one of the brightest representatives of those Bulgarian scholars and educators of the first post-Liberation years, who with enlighteners' passion and selflessness were building up the temple of knowledge and science in young Bulgaria.

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