

**NOTICES ON THE AUSTRIAN EXPEDITION IN A VENEZUELAN
DOCUMENT DATED 1787 AND COMMENTS ON BOTANICAL
NAMES LINKED TO THE COLLECTORS**

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RESUMEN

En abril de 1783 fue enviada a América por el emperador Joseph II de Austria una expedición liderada por el botánico austríaco y profesor de Historia Natural Franz Joseph Märter, con el objeto de aumentar las colecciones de los museos, zoológicos y jardines botánicos de la corte. Entre sus integrantes figuraban además un médico, un pintor y los jardineros imperiales Franz Bredemeyer y Franz Boos. En etapas posteriores del viaje, específicamente en las que corresponden a Haití y Venezuela, aparece otro jardinero llamado Josef Schücht quien aparentemente no formaba parte de la nómina original.

Publicaciones referentes a colectores botánicos dan cuenta de la presencia de Bredemeyer y Schücht en Venezuela. No ocurre lo mismo con Boos, a pesar de que también se han reseñado muestras venezolanas colectadas por él. La existencia de un documento de 1787 en el Archivo General de la Nación, Caracas, Venezuela, en donde se menciona a Boos y Schücht podría representar una prueba de su presencia en territorio venezolano. En el presente trabajo se transcribe parcialmente el documento mencionado y se hacen observaciones históricas sobre la actividad coleccionista de los naturalistas de la expedición austríaca y sobre nombres botánicos relacionados con sus apellidos.

Palabras clave: Expedición austríaca, Märter, Bredemeyer, Boos, Schücht, Venezuela.

**DATOS SOBRE LA EXPEDICIÓN AUSTRÍACA EN UN
DOCUMENTO VENEZOLANO DEL AÑO 1787 Y COMENTARIOS
ACERCA DE LOS NOMBRES BOTÁNICOS RELACIONADOS CON
LOS COLECTORES**

ABSTRACT

In April 1783 an expedition led by the Austrian botanist and professor of Natural History, Franz Joseph Märter, was sent to America by Emperor Joseph II of Austria. The purpose of this trip was to enlarge the collections of the museums, zoos and botanical gardens of the Imperial Court. Besides the leader, the expedition also counted with the presence of a doctor, a painter and the Imperial gardeners, Franz Bredemeyer and Franz Boos. At later stages of the journey, specifically during the stays in Haiti and Venezuela, there appeared another gardener, called Josef Schücht, who apparently formed no part of the original list of expedition members.

Papers dealing with botanical collectors make reference to the presence of Bredemeyer and Schücht in Venezuela. However, Boos is not mentioned in regard with this country, even though there are reports of samples collected by him in this land. The existence of a document, dated 1787, held in the "Archivo General de la Nación" (the National Archives), Caracas, Venezuela, in which both Boos and Schücht are mentioned, could signify proof of their presence in Venezuelan territory. In this present work a partial transcription of the above mentioned document is included. Besides this, pertinent historical observations are made about the collecting endeavors of the Austrian naturalists, as well as regarding the botanical names linked to their surnames.

Key words: Austrian Expedition, Märter, Bredemeyer, Boos, Schücht, Venezuela.

FROM AUSTRIA TO AMERICA

In April 1783 an expedition led by the Austrian botanist and professor of Natural History, Franz Joseph Märter, was sent to America by Emperor Joseph II of Austria. The purpose of this trip was to enlarge the collections of the museums, zoos and botanical gardens of the Imperial Court¹.

The expedition was originally made up of Märter, the German painter Bernhard Albrecht von Moll, the Croat doctor Mathias Leopoldus Stupicz and the Imperial Viennese gardeners, Franz Boos and Franz Bredemeyer. The voyagers' first port of call was Philadelphia, where they arrived in October 1783. Owing to problems that arose with respect to their wages, and excited by their new destination, Moll and Stupicz abandoned the expedition in 1784 and settled down in the east of what is today the United States of North America (Riley 1997). Notwithstanding, the remaining explorers continued on with their mission as planned, journeying into tropical lands. Subsequently, Bernhard von Moll achieved a certain fame painting pictures and cutting out silhouettes of important personalities in Philadelphia, while Mathias Stupicz decided to dedicate himself to his doctor's practice (Riley 1997). The separation of these two members from the expedition in North America greatly worried the Austrian Emperor. Fearing that this would stimulate specialists and professionals to leave the Empire, Joseph II decreed in 1784 that emigration would only be allowed in exceptional cases (Wagnleitner 1991). Furthermore, he declared that Märter would not be reinstated in his academic post on returning from the journey for having failed in his role as expedition leader, by allowing these desertions to take place (Riley n.d). Prior to the expedition, Franz Joseph Märter (1753-1827) had already published various works on Austrian plants. During his visit to the New World he collected samples in the south of the United States of North America and on several of the islands in the Antilles (Barnhart

1965; Stafleu & Cowan 1976). He is also known as author (Maerter) of several botanical names (Brummitt & Powell 1992).

At later stages of the journey, specifically during the stays in Haiti and Venezuela, there appeared another gardener, called Josef Schücht. This man apparently formed no part of the original personnel because there is no mention of him in the expedition's journal nor in the account for expenses (H. Riley, pers. com.).

Many of the living plants and seeds collected during the explorers' long journey, led by Märter, were subsequently planted in Vienna, in the Palace gardens of Schönbrunn, and dried samples of some of the plants brought by these travellers can still be found today in the herbarium (W) of the Natural History Museum of that city (Holmgren et al. 1990; E. Vitek, pers. com.).

THE DOCUMENT

In a document dated the 13th March 1787 held in the "Archivo General de la Nación" (the National Archives), Caracas, Venezuela (Tome XXXV, Section "Gobernación y Capitanía General") instructions can be read from the King of Spain to the Lieutenant High Justice of La Victoria (a city to the west of Caracas), which states: "The King desires that to the Imperial naturalists Mr. Boos and Mr. Schicht, who will travel to that town, to carry out investigations with regard to the characteristics and virtues of the plants should be afforded whatever help deemed necessary." It seems certain that the person, named as Monsieur Boos was Franz Boos, while the also-mentioned Monsieur Schicht, quite probably referred to Josef Schücht, taking into account the phonetic similarity of the surname, given that in German the "u" with dieresis has a sound very similar to an "i".

In the courteous language proper of the age, it is intimated that a house would have been made over to the travellers for their comfort and also as a place for studies to be carried out on their discoveries. However, at the same time it is also mentioned in the document that "they are to be watched for any attempts to make charts, or report details of, our commercial products, population or any other thing related to our government, whether general or particular, in those valleys". On March 10th Boos and Schücht presented respectfully to the High Justice of La Victoria from whom they received the information about the King's orders.²

This prudence on the part of the Spanish Crown was nothing out of the ordinary in an age during which the colonial powers were extremely wary of each other and feared that the intrusion of foreigners might lead to acts of espionage. In consequence, several foreign naturalists underwent embarrassing situations in Venezuela owing to the fact that they seemed suspicious (Lindorf 2001, 2003).

THE COLLECTORS

In the biographical literature consulted (Barnhart 1965; Stafleu & Cowan 1976) there is no record of Boos collecting flora in Venezuela during the expedition sent out by Joseph II. These publications only note that Franz Boos (1753-1832) had been on collecting trips in the south of the United States, in the Bahamas and also in South Africa. Nevertheless, in the *Catálogo de la Flora Venezolana* (Pittier et al. 1948) there

appear various species, collected in our country, by the said botanist (*Bunchosia glandulifera* (Jacq.) Kunth: Boos n.n; *Talisia intermedia* Radlk.: Boos 20; *Coccoloba fagifolia* Jacq.: Boos n.n.). In this sense, the document held in the "Archivo General de la Nación" (the National Archives), Caracas, Venezuela, mentioned previously, could constitute proof that Franz Boos had indeed set foot on Venezuelan territory.

Despite the fact that in the said document there is no mention to Franz Bredemeyer, it is quite probable that he had obtained a similar license, of which no evidence is recorded. It is known that Franz Bredemeyer (1758-1839) previously carried out explorations in Martinique, Haiti and Puerto Rico between August 1785 and February 1786, and after that he journeyed on to Venezuela with his companion Schücht, where they worked for two years, eventually returning to their own country in possession of an important herbarium (Schlechter 1919; Pittier 1948; Chardon 1949). Pittier (1931) points out that Bredemeyer and Schücht collected material in abundance on the outskirts of Caracas, besides making small collections on the coast of Falcón State. In the *Catálogo de la Flora Venezolana* (Pittier et al. 1945) there appear numerous plants collected by Bredemeyer on the outskirts of Caracas, some of which appear having been collected jointly with Märter (*Paullinia cauliflora* Jacq.: Märter & Bredemeyer n.n.; *Paullinia hispida* Jacq.: Märter & Bredemeyer n.n.) and with Schücht (*Amomis caryophyllata* (Jacq.) Krug & Urban: Bredemeyer & Schücht, fide Berg).

Not much information exists about the life of Josef Schücht, the other Imperial gardener that formed part of Märter's expedition. However, according to Barnhart (1965), Josef Schücht had collected plants in Haiti, Venezuela and Brazil. In the *Flora Brasiliensis* a Viennese gardener is mentioned with the same name and surname, who made collections for the Royal Museum of Vienna, in Brazil between 1819 and 1822, as companion to Heinrich Wilhelm Schott in the expedition sent by the Emperor Francis I of Austria (Martius 1840-1906). It is possible that Josef Schücht had formed part of Märter's expedition in his youth and 30 years later returned to Tropical America and to Brazil in particular, with Schott.

COMMENTS ON BOTANICAL NAMES LINKED TO THE COLLECTORS

Upon his return to Vienna, Franz Bredemeyer had a successful career. In 1801 the botanist Willdenow introduced the genus *Bredemeyera* of Polygalaceae, saying that he had named it so, in honour of the discoverer, "who, thanks to his findings in the plant world and his prodigious knowledge of botany has contributed so much to the furtherance of science". The genus *Bredemeyera* comprises approximately 30 species around the world, spread mainly throughout America, the Antilles, Australia and Tasmania (Lemeé 1929; Aristeguieta 1973). Seven species are reported in Venezuela (Huber et al. 1998), indigenous to rain- and temperate forests (Aristeguieta 1973), among them the type species *Bredemeyera floribunda* Willd., collected in Caracas (Willdenow 1801; Pittier 1945; Schnee 1960).

Further credit to this horticulturist is also acknowledged through the scientific epithet of several plants, which are found in Venezuela: *Anthurium bredemeyeri* Schott. (Araceae), *Bomarea bredemeyerana* Herb. (Amaryllidaceae), *Croton bredemeyeri* Müll.Arg. (Euphorbiaceae), *Myrcia bredemeyeriana* O.Berg (Myrtaceae), *Piper bredemeyeri* Jacq. (Piperaceae), *Strychnos bredemeyeri* (Schult. & Schult. F.) Sprague & Sandwith (Loganiaceae). Named after him were also *Alstroemeria bredemeyeriana*

Willd. ex Kunth (Amaryllidaceae) and *Jucunda bredemeyriana* Cham. (Melastomataceae), native to other latitudes. As an author, Franz Bredemeyer also played an important role (Brummitt & Powell 1992) and his name (Bredem.) appears associated with various species, among which are several of those he collected in Venezuela.

In Brummitt & Powell's Authors List (1992) the name Boos also appears. This refers to Joseph Boos (1794-1879), assistant gardener in Schönbrunn, the place he was born and died (Barnhart 1965), who in 1816 published the inventory of flora of Schönbrunn (Stafleu & Cowan 1976). It is quite possible that this author was son or close relative to Franz Boos, yet in the bibliography consulted there is no mention of this fact.

In the International Plant Names Index (IPNI) database it was found only one species carrying the name Boos. It corresponds to *Aristolochia boosii* J.A. Panter, named after Julius O. Boos, present day botanist with important collections, mainly of Araceae.

IN HONOUR OF SCHÜCHT OR OF SCHÜCH?

In 1849 C.H. Schultz presented several new species of Compositae herborized in Brazil by the Swedish botanist A. Regnell, among which *Erigeron schüchtii* Sch. Bip (Linnaea 22: 571. 1849) is found. Due mention by Schultz is made to the fact that this plant had first been collected by the "illustrious" Schücht. Notwithstanding, there is no actual description of the species. Consequently, this must mean we are dealing with a nomen nudum and, therefore, invalid. In the Flora Brasiliensis (Martius 1840-1906) the species *Erigeron maximus* Link & Otto (Prodr. 5: 284. 1836) is described, with *Erigeron schüchii* (without the "t" at the end) listed among its synonyms, citing the same reference to its publication in Linnaea 22: 571. 1849, and the affirmation of it being a nomen solum.

There are several plants that have botanical names with a similar derivation: the Solanaceae *Solanum schuchii* Sendtn. (Fl. Bras. 10: 101. 1846); the Rubiaceae *Psychotria schuechiana* Müll.Arg. (Fl. Bras. 6 (5): 348. 1881); the Myrtaceae *Eugenia schüchiana* O. Berg (Fl. Bras. 14 (1): 257. 1857), *Myrcia schuechiana* O. Berg (Fl. Bras. 14 (1): 181. 1857) and *Myrciaria schuchiana* O. Berg (Fl. Bras. 14 (1): 373. 1857); the Bromeliaceae *Tillandsia schüchii* Beer & Fenz (Allg. Gartenzeitung 14: 265. 1846); the Euphorbiaceae *Securinega schuechiana* Müll.Arg (Fl. Bras. 11 (2): 78. 1873); as well as the genus *Schüchia* (Endl. 1178. 1840) – sometimes written *Schuechia* – of the Vochysiaceae. The respective descriptions of these plants were published between 1840 and 1881, and they all had in common the fact that they were based on plants from Brazil and that the majority of the types were collected by someone called Schüch, Schuch or Schuech. The previously mentioned species still maintain their original denomination, but the name *Schüchia* has become a synonym of *Qualea* Aubl. (Bentham & Hooker 1802; Martius 1840-1906; Stafleu 1954).

In the original descriptions of these plants there is absolutely no reference at all to the person, in whose honour they were named. However, a combination of three facts (dates on which the descriptions were published, plants growing in Brazil and the surname of the collector) would allow us to suppose that they were named for Rochus and Guilherme Schüch.

Rochus Schüch (1788-1844) was a German naturalist and scientific advisor to the court of Empress Leopoldina of Brazil. Guilherme Schüch (1824-1908), son of the former, was a Brazilian geologist that made many journeys into the interior of Brazil in his two-fold capacity as director of The Brazilian Telegraphic Service and member of the Scientific Commission for Exploration. His most outstanding efforts as a collector are recorded between 1850 and 1861, and his botanical samples can be found mostly in the Museu Nacional de Río de Janeiro and in the herbarium at Kew (Martius 1840-1906; Stafleu & Cowan 1976). In 1881 he was named Barão de Capanema by the Emperor Pedro II of Brazil, with whom he had been a childhood friend. The names *Schüchia*, *Solanum schuchii* and *Tillandsia schüchii* were proposed several years before the period of actual collecting by Guilherme Schüch, which suggests that they may have been dedicated to his father, Rochus Schüch. The successful professional activity of the Schüch and their good relations with prominent members of the political and scientific world of the times undoubtedly had an influence on the selection of their surname to designate these plants. The naming of *Erigeron schüchtii* (with "t") could be due to a confusion with the lesser known Josef Schücht. In any case, this name was not considered valid and did not last long.

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NOTAS

1 In 1992 an Exhibition commemorating the Discovery of America was showed in the Natural History Museum of Vienna. The resultant publication contains an article which reports this expedition: Hühnel, H. 1992. Botanische Sammelreisen nach Amerika im 18. Jahrhundert. In: Die neue Welt. Österreich und die Erforschung Amerikas (Wawrik, F., Zeilinger, E., Mokre, J. & H. Hühnel, eds.), pp. 61-77. Wien (H. Riley, pers. com.).

2 This document was also reviewed by Texera (1991). However, she did not establish the relationship with the Austrian Expedition.