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Studies on the History of Botany in Turkey

By Asuman Baytop, Editor: Feza Günergun, Çetin Matbaacılık, İstanbul, 2003

xii + 510 pages. ISBN 975-288-447-4 (Turkish)

History writing requires courage. History writing requires knowledge. Being courageous and learned is not enough; one needs to have the ability to write history. Prof. Asuman Baytop is the most respected authority possessing those faculties and qualified to write the history of botany. By doing so, she has created a record in the history of botany in Turkey important in its own right.

The book consists of 8 main chapters each comprising 3 to 8 parts enlightening different eras concerning the history of Turkish botany.

The first chapter, entitled "Travels", deals with the visits of famous travellers to Turkey since the 16th century. Prof. Baytop, in a way, seems to point to Pierre Belon's Eastern Mediterranean Trip as the beginning of the history of Turkish botany. The chapter goes on to comment on the botanical value of the works of famous travellers such as Rauwolff, Evliya Çelebi, Tournefort and Olivier, and investigates the life stories and works of 3 very important botanists, Boissier, Davis and Huber-Morath, who contributed immensely to the writing of the Flora of Turkey.

The author, who has devoted her entire life to the science and education of botany in Turkey, describes the historical development of botany education in Turkey in 4 chapters. The information concerning the Ottoman era has been collected by Prof. Dr. Feza Günergun, Science Historian, who is the only daughter of Prof. Dr. Asuman Baytop and the late Prof. Dr. Turhan Baytop. The pioneering academics of botany in the Turkish Republic are introduced and the contributions of Heilbronn, Brauner and Yakar to the development of the history of Turkish botany and education are mentioned.

The proceeding chapters can be regarded as a short history of pharmaceutical botany, which is where the true expertise of Prof. Baytop lies. Chapter 7 is devoted solely to the Herbarium of the Faculty of Pharmacy of İstanbul University (ISTE), which is the life work of the author and is considered the most complete and well organised herbarium in Turkey.

Aznavour and Sheppard and papers on essential oils published during the Ottoman era are discussed in the last chapter.

Each chapter ends with an English summary.

However difficult it is to write such a comprehensive book, it is equally easy to criticise it. We should not resort to cheap criticisms like "she has not touched on this issue or she has not mentioned that person" but should read the message Prof. Baytop tries to convey correctly and regard the book as a beginning. Turkey is experiencing a "golden age" in botany. Young botanists look forward to a bright future. Remembering the tremendous contributions of the late Prof. Turhan Baytop to the history of Turkish pharmacy, I believe that this book shall promote and encourage research into the history of Turkish botany. If such efforts are crowned by the organisation of a symposium series on the history of Turkish botany, I am sure that the true intentions of Prof. Asuman Baytop in writing such a book will have been better understood.

I recommend the book to botanists and students of biology. The book can be purchased from Eren Kitabevi (+90-212-252 0560).

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