

REVIEW

RUTH SCHNEEBELI-GRAF: Blütenland China. Botanische Berichte und Bilder. I. Zierpflanzen: Vorkommen Symbolik Wirkstoffe. II. Nutz- und Heilpflanzen: Vorkommen Symbolik Wirkstoffe. 2nd Ed. Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel, Berlin, Boston, 1995. **I:** 157 pp., 146 col. illus., 30 b/w illus. ISBN 3-7643-5182-9. **II:** 160 pp., 72 col. illus., 96 b/w illus. ISBN 3-7643-5183-7. Both hardcover. Price: DM 44.00 each.

Series (two parts): ISBN 3-7643-5188-8. Price: DM 75.00.

Two attractive looking, well-produced booklets in the German language.

The first volume on ornamentals contains (1) an original introduction to the plant geography of China, 12 pages and, indeed, not more than a very simplified introduction to the physical, climatological and vegetational diversity of China; (2) a translation of five chapters from E.H. Wilson, *A naturalist in Western China* (1913), viz. on the flora of western China, on travels in NW Hupei, and on the flora of Ichang, Emei Shan, and Wa Shan (more than 50 pages); (3) a number of 'plant portraits', more than 40 paragraphs each covering one species or sometimes a genus, altogether more than 60 pages; (4) a list of the older plant hunters in China (almost all 'expatriate', covering on a total of 42 collectors only 3 with Chinese names!), a list of literature references and an index to (scientific and German) plant names.

The second volume on (otherwise) useful plants contains (1) as an original contribution a kind of history (time table) of China in short sentences, arranged according to the dates from -3000 till 1992, and stressing the happenings related to the book's subjects; (2) a German translation of a chapter in Bretschneider's 'Botanicon sinicum' giving an index to the plants in the most famous Chinese herbal *Shen nung pen ts'ao king*, the names updated by the authors; (3) a translation of four chapters from the work by E.H. Wilson, mentioned above, viz. those on wild and cultivated fruits, useful trees, Chinese medicinal plants, and tea; (4) a number of 'plant portraits' (from *Bambusse* to *Zitrone*), altogether some 80 pages, mostly on food plants but also on plants with technical uses, always stressing medicinal uses whether or not substantiated; (5) a number of notes, a list of literature references and an index to names.

Much in these books is not original, but that is not to say that it is without interest. As an introduction to Chinese botany the books will be quite useful for botanical tourists, etc. It is not at all critical when listing medicinal uses and only repeats the usual unsubstantiated list of illnesses and effects. Lists of 'Wirkstoffe' (active components), sometimes added, and in alphabetical order, do in my opinion not contribute much to the understanding. The plant portraits also contain all kinds of more or less obsolete stories, legends, literary sidelines and poems, adding to the variation and to the charm, but not to the botanical value.

The books are illustrated by a large number of coloured, reduced but very high-quality reprints of plates in *Botanical Magazine*, and some black-and-white drawings from *Iconographia Cormophytorum Sinicorum*, of a much lesser quality. In Wilson's chapters some of his photographs are reproduced from his original glass negatives, and their quality validates a statement I often make, that photographs have never been better than when it took at least 5 minutes (and a workman's daily wages) to take one.

C. KALKMAN