Vaillant rides again?

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Abstract

VAILLANT RIDES AGAIN?.—The unwanted consequences of accepting post-1753 translations of pre-Linnean works are shortly discussed using the case of Vaillant and the genus Rhaponticum as a timely example. A modification of the current code of botanical nomenclature is suggested.

Key words: Nomenclature, pre-Linnean works, Rhaponticum.

La cabalgada de nuevo?.—Las consecuencias no deseadas de aceptar traducciones posteriores a 1753 de obras prelinneanas se analizan brevemente utilizando el caso de Vaillant y el género Rhaponticum como un oportuno ejemplo. Se propone una modificación del actual código de nomenclatura botánica.

Palabras clave: Nomenclatura, obras prelinneanas, Rhaponticum.

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Vaillant’s shadow is long, and the undesirable consequences of the acceptation of the nomenclatural validity of a German translation of a pre-Linnean work by Vaillant (Greuter et al., 2005) have resurfaced once again. The story is well documented and discussed in Brummit (2008), Greuter & McNeill (2008), Susanna (2009) and Hind (2019), and I will offer a short recapitulation.

Greuter et al. (2005) unearthed an old German translation of a pre-Linnean work by Vaillant and claimed that, the translation being published after 1753, the generic names proposed in that work were nomenclaturally valid. Since then, we reluctantly assigned to Vaillant the authorship of several genera in our most important contributions to the systematics of the Compositae-Cardueae (Susanna & Garcia-Jacas, 2007, 2009; Herrando-Moraira et al., 2019). Reluctantly, because we anticipated the potential problems of a proposal that we considered contrary to nomenclatural stability and even to common sense; without any hope (and without any tangible results, like a nomenclatural Cassandra), I warned on the consequences of playing around with names (Susanna, 2009). In fact, trouble had already started when Brummitt (2008) proposed the rejection of Vaillant’s translation as opera utique
oppressa. Brummitt’s proposal was eventually approved (Brummitt, 2011; Turland et al., 2018) and, accordingly, the IPNI webpage (2019) considers Rhaponticum Vaill. nomen invalidum.

As I had predicted, Hind (2019) re-lived the problem by proposing a new nomenclatural combination, Leuzea repens (L.) D. J. N. Hind. The reason is clear: nowadays it is widely accepted that Leuzea Cass. and Rhaponticum Adans. are the same genus (Susanna & García-Jacas, 2007, 2009). If we accept Vaillant’s authorship for Rhaponticum, the prioritary name is Rhaponticum. After “damning Vaillant” (in the words of Greuter & McNeill, 2008), the prioritary name is Leuzea Cass. However, other translations of Vaillant have been published and the issue of the validity of Vaillant’s generic names is far from resolved (Alexander Sennikov, pers. comm.). We are again at the starting point, and the nomenclatural instability resulting from these interchanges of ingenuieties is exasperating.

Taxonomy, and its sibling, botanical nomenclature, should never be a frivolous game of wits. It is a frivolity to dig up from a library an obscure treaty that nobody has cared to read to mess around with the authorship of names in common use as in the case of Centaurea crocata Franco discussed by García-Jacas & Susanna (2020). It is a frivolity to begin a new round of nomenclatural combinations when the ink of the previous ones has barely dried out. The pilgrimage of Linnaeus’ Centaurea repens L. through Acroptilon Cass., Rhaponticum and Leuzea is an appalling example. Incidentally, all of the species of Rhaponticum were combined under Leuzea by Holub (1973). One species, however, is missing from the list, and I will hereby propose the new combination as my personal contribution to botanical nomenclature.

There is an obvious and very easy solution, and I believe that it is quite sensible too: The International Code of Nomenclature (Turland et al., 2018) should state clearly in article 30 that a post-1753 translation of a pre-Linnean work does not automatically infuse nomenclatural validity to that work, which should be automatically rejected as opera utique oppressa. In the meantime, I would ask my colleagues for a more serious approach to botanical nomenclature.

APPENDIX


REFERENCES

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