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British contribution to the exploration of the Cyprus flora

Seminar contribution to the module "Terrestrial Ecosystems" (2101-230)
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Meikle's Flora of Cyprus

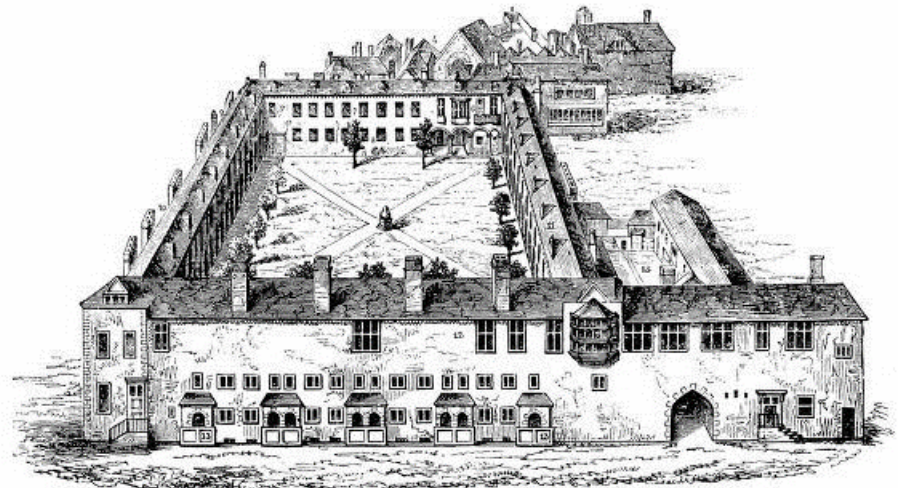
Viney and the North Cyprus Herbarium



British science

Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge

The Royal Society was founded in 1660 at the Gresham College in London. Its mission has been to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.



OLD GRESHAM COLLEGE

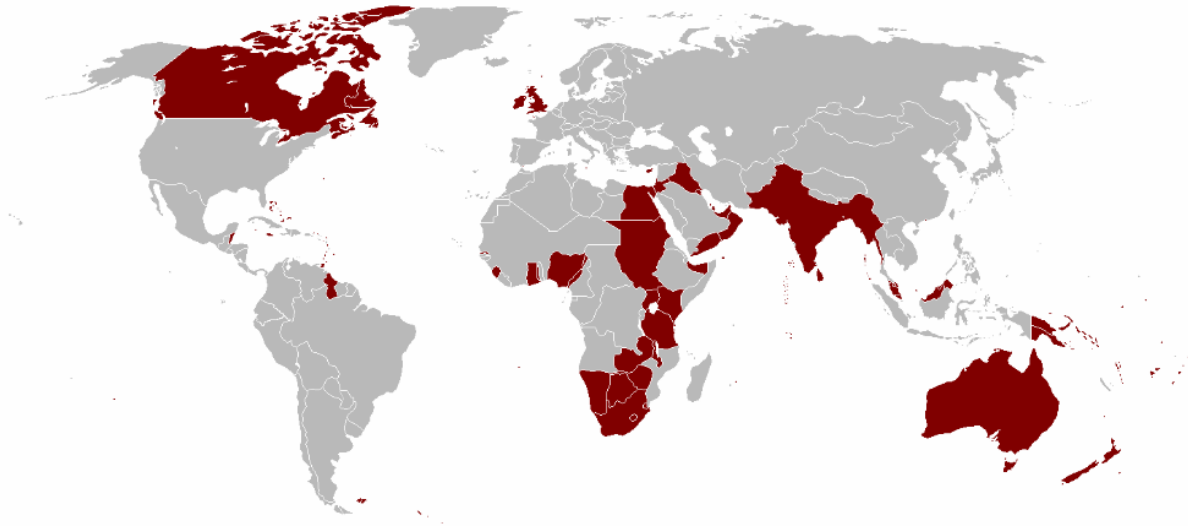
Illustration of the Gresham College in London [1].



British science

The British Empire:

The Empire covered a massive territory encompassing a wide diversity of landscapes and ecosystems. Many British scientists spent their lives exploring all of these different regions. Cyprus was included from 1878 to 1960.



The British Empire at maximum extent in 1921 [2].



British science

Cyprus botanically relevant for the following reasons:

As an island Cyprus is geographically isolated.

Cyprus is located within the Mediterranean climate zone.

Cyprus contains multiple Altitudinal zones.



These factors make the flora of Cyprus especially unique within the British Empire.

Satellite image of Cyprus [3].



Early accounts of the Cypriot flora



John Sibthorp *1758 †1796 [4].

John Sibthorp

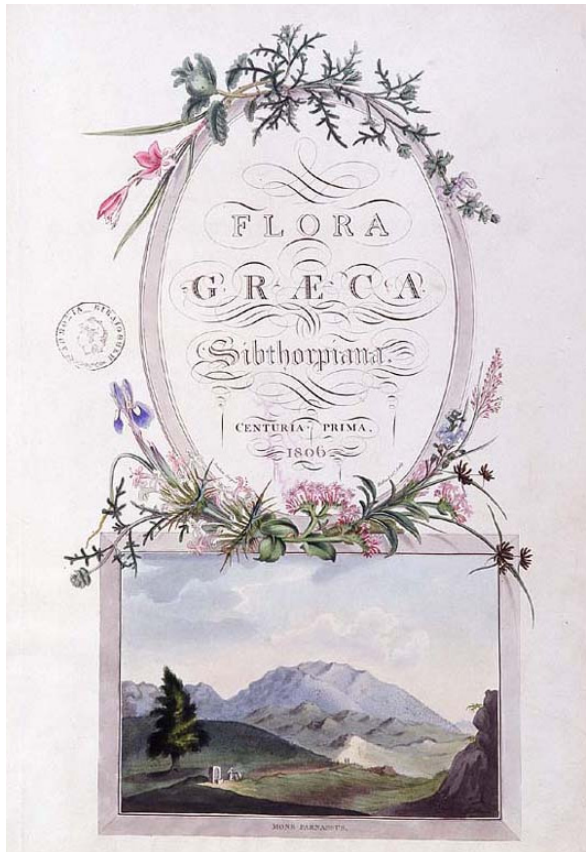
J. Sibthorp was born in Oxford in 1758, where he studied for his bachelor's degree at Lincoln College. Quite early on his career he showed great interest in plants and by the ripe age of 25 he was granted professorship, the Sherardian Chair of Botany.

In 1785 he set out on a journey aiming to travel the Greek isles and to craft a comprehensive record of the species of plant that may be found there. During his tour he also set foot on Cyprus. Sibthorp collected a lot of specimens while on his tour, some of which had not previously been described. The draftsman Ferdinand Bauer was tasked with creating detailed illustrations of the collected specimens.

In 1794 Sibthorp left for a second voyage to the Greek isles, however, he died from tuberculosis on his way back in 1796.



Early accounts of the Cypriot flora



Flora Graeca, vol. 1 [5].

Flora Graeca

Volumes 1 - 10, published 1806 - 1840.

Because of his early death the publication of his work was passed on to his colleagues like Sir James Edward Smith.

In the period of 1806 to 1840 ten volumes of the *Flora Graeca* were published, including scientific description and illustration of all the different species of plant that were found. Because of Sibthorp's failure to bring order to his collection, it is uncertain, whether the upwards of 600 species of plant described to be present on Cyprus in the *Flora Graeca*, really originate from the island.

Nevertheless, the *Flora Graeca* remains a work of significance, for being the first record of Cypriot flora using Linné's newly established system of taxonomic classification.



Early accounts of the Cypriot flora

“It is certainly a pity that Dr. Sibthorp did not mark all his specimens, or the drawings, but he trusted to memory, and dreamed of not dying.”

saying John Hawkins to J. E. Smith (by Meikle).

Further Contributions

In the following decades botanical interest in Cyprus only seemed to grow. More and more work was done, adding to knowledge about the island’s plants. Several British names should be noted for their contributions:

William Bertram Turrill and his colleague A. K. Jackson, who kept expanding the list of known species on the island. Mrs. E. W. Kennedy, who collected and prepared a great number of specimens. Peter Harland Davis, who on his travels leading to his well-known *Flora of Turkey* payed a visit to Cyprus and discovered some new species, as well as readjusted range of distribution for many known ones. Esther Chapman, who published her book *Cyprus trees and shrubs*, which discusses the woody vegetation of Cyprus in great detail. Even more work was done by L. F. H. Merton and Edward and Mercy Casey.



Meikle's Flora of Cyprus

Robert Desmond Meikle

R.D. Meikle was born in Newtownards in Northern Ireland in 1923 and studied law at the Trinity College in Dublin. Since his early childhood he was interested in nature and especially in plants.

After he earned his degree he moved to London for a job interview with the Administrative Civil Service. When he went to visit the Royal Botanic gardens in Kew in his free time, he was able to impress the staff with his expansive botanical knowledge to the point of being offered employment.

He gave up his career in the law sector and followed his passion about nature to work at the Kew Gardens Herbarium, home to the largest botanical collection in the world. At first, he was invested in the flora of West Africa, but later when he was promoted head of the Middle Eastern department of the Gardens. In 1950 he found a new purpose in creating his *Flora of Cyprus*.



Meikle's Flora of Cyprus

Flora of Cyprus

Volume 1: 1977

Volume 2: 1985

Meikle spent the next 30 years of his life on his *Flora of Cyprus*. He paid visit to the island multiple times and developed a love for the country next to discovering some new species of plant.

The first volume of the *Flora of Cyprus* was released in 1977, the second volume followed in 1985. On almost 1000 pages each, the two books contain the complete bandwidth of the more than 1700 plant taxa found on the island.

He introduced a system of subdividing the island into eight different phytogeographical regions with different vegetation, which is still in use today. The plants in the book are sorted by Family and Genus and a functional identification key is included for each rank down to the individual species. Additionally, the *Flora* features detailed descriptions for each species and scientific illustrations for some of them.

Meikle created a comprehensive guide that is still the foundation of any botanical work on Cypriot flora to this day and will surely remain as such for many years to come.



Viney and the North Cyprus Herbarium

Deryck E. Viney

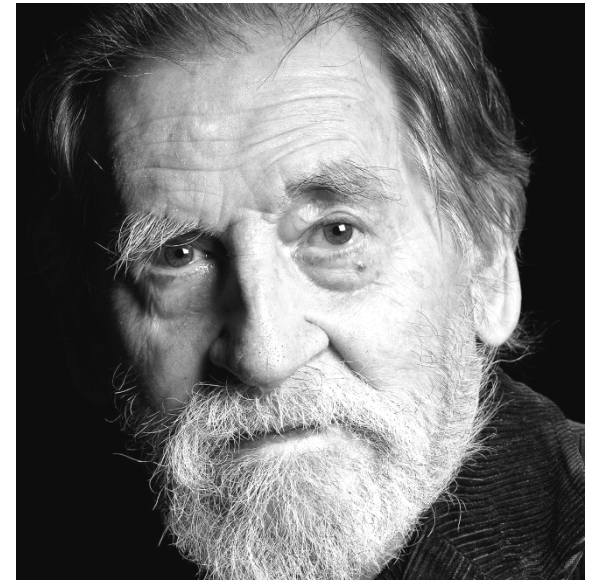
D.E. Viney was born in 1921 in Beckenham and studied Biology and Languages in Cambridge. He was fluent in French, German, Czech and later Turkish.

He went to Prague get a degree in Slavonic Studies in 1947. He translated numerous works of literature from Czech to English and vice versa, e.g. the declaration of human rights of the Charta 77 movement.

He also contributed to the creation of the international Chemical and Biological Weapons Treaty.

He loved music and even composed a few pieces for the piano.

Viney finally retired in 1981 and dedicated himself to his old love for botany. He moved to Cyprus the same year.



Deryck E. Viney *1921 - † 2016 [6].



Viney and the North Cyprus Herbarium

An illustrated flora of North Cyprus

Volume 1: 1994 (Herbaceous plants)

Volume 2: 1996 (Grasses and ferns)

Volume 3: 2005 (Fungi)

Viney moved to Cyprus to create a field guide on the plants of North Cyprus that was using Meikle's Flora as a model, but was still meant to be suitable for amateurs.

He spent years travelling throughout the northern part of the island collecting plants and personally crafting remarkably detailed illustrations of every single specimen.

In 1994 Viney published the first volume of his work *An illustrated flora of North Cyprus*, followed by two additional volumes in the upcoming years and a new edition of volume 1. Besides the illustrations the book includes keys for identification, which are meant to be precise and easy to use.

All of this makes this Flora an indispensable companion in the field for beginners as well as professionals.



Viney and the North Cyprus Herbarium

The North Cyprus Herbarium

During his travels throughout Cyprus Viney learned how incredibly valuable, despite his amazing illustrations, a physical collection with real specimens can be. Unfortunately, the National Herbarium in Nicosia is inaccessible for most people in North Cyprus. With that in mind in 1989 Viney founded the North Cyprus Herbarium with the help of the Forestry and Environment department.

Nearly all specimens were contributed by himself from his extensive collection he had accumulated over the years. However, in principle anyone was allowed to add their own plant specimens to the collection, just like anyone interested in the topic was supposed to have free access to the herbarium.

Today the collection holds examples of almost every single plant that can be found in the northern part of the island that have been well persevered through various methods and can readily be used for comparative analysis of plants that have been found in the wild.

Unfortunately the herbarium is closed since three years, maybe it is in restauration.



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All accessed 13.01.2019.



Illustrations

[1] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gresham_College_from_Record_of_RS.jpg.

[2] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_1921.png.

[3] [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CyprusFromTheISS\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CyprusFromTheISS(cropped).jpg).

[4] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Sibthorp02.jpg.

[5] [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flora_Graeca_\(title_page\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flora_Graeca_(title_page).jpg).

[6] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/deryck-viney-obituary#img-1>. Cropped.

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