

TAMÁS PÓCS – A REMINISCENCE

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My contact with Tamás Pócs began with exchange of reprints, a common practice in the days when electronic files did not yet exist. Students and colleagues from our Department who went on a botanical excursion to Hungary brought back intriguing bits of information about the man. They were enthusiastic in their comments about this very accomplished but kindhearted and down-to-earth botanist. Unusually for scientists from Eastern Europe in those days, he had already been to Vietnam for research and was looking forward to a trip to Africa. I was starting my taxonomic studies of the subfamily Jungermanniiineae and did not want to limit my interest to European taxa, so I asked Tamás Pócs if he could lend me specimens collected on his expeditions. A delayed answer came in early January 1970. He apologized and explained that the letter had not reached him at home but had been forwarded to him in Africa. Of course, he would be pleased to send me his specimens of Jungermanniiineae for my studies. Soon thereafter I received perfectly prepared material for revision or even for determination. This cooperation, based on specimens of the taxonomic groups I study, has endured to the present day, and I have had the good fortune of receiving material from all the areas Tamás has visited. Except for taxa for which there was only scant material, these are duplicates sent as thank-you gifts for determining taxa.

I first met Tamás and his wife Saci in October 1973, and then in July 1974 when they both visited us at our flat on a visit to Prague. We visited the Pócs family in 1976 in Eger where Tamás was living and working, and when he transferred to

the Academy of Sciences in Vácrtót we visited him there in 1979. He kindly undertook the role of our guide in Budapest.

His second visit to Prague was marked by a very considerate gesture I'll always remember. He drove to Prague and didn't arrive until midnight. In those days there were no cellphones so contact was difficult. We waited through the evening and finally gave up and went to sleep. Very early the next morning we were surprised to find his car parked out front, with Tamás and Saci sleeping inside it. Tamás apologized for the unexpected delay and said that they had found the door locked and hadn't wanted to ring the bell and wake us up. After the long drive they were glad to leave the car and finish sleeping in a normal bed.

On May 1977 we both accepted an invitation from Dr. Riclef Grolle to visit him in Jena on the occasion of visits by the eminent Japanese bryologists Dr. Sinske Hattori and Dr. Hiroshi Inoue. Of course, for bryologists from Eastern Europe it was a wonderful chance to meet two giants of world bryology on their first visit to Eastern Europe. Besides the opportunity for personal contact and discussion of some special questions, this meeting was of wider importance for the bryologists of all of Eastern Europe. On this occasion the idea of establishing an unofficial group of Eastern European bryologists arose. At that time official societies had to be approved by an organ of the particular country's Communist Party, which made it very difficult to operate as a transnational society. The group was established, however. It organized meetings and



Fig. 1. Tamás Pócs resting during the XII International Botanical Congress in Leningrad, 1975. Photo J. Váňa.



Fig. 2. Tamás Pócs and Jerzy Szwejkowski on an excursion after the 1st Central and East European Bryological Working Group (CEE BWG) meeting in Eger, 1978. Photo J. Váňa.

conferences to coordinate bryological research in Eastern European countries.

These meetings enabled us to have direct contact with the bryologists from Western countries who participated in these meetings, sometimes as invited visitors and speakers. The coordinating committee for the group, called the Central and East European Bryological Working Group (CEE BWG), established in Jena, consisted of Dr. Riclef Grolle (Germany), Prof. Jerzy Szwejkowski (Poland), Prof. Tamás Pócs (Hungary) and me (Czechoslovakia). Tamás worked hard to organize the first conference in 1978 in Eger, which began a series of biennial conferences.

The next conferences were in Poznań (Poland, 1980), Prague (Czechoslovakia, 1982), again in Eger (Hungary, 1984), Leipzig (Germany, 1986), Liblice (Czechoslovakia, 1988) and finally in Apatity (Soviet Union, 1990). The highest number of participants from western countries was in Prague in 1982. Here it was possible to invite, for example, Dr. William C. Steere (USA), Dr. Sinske Hattori and Dr. Hiroshi Inoue (Japan). After 1990, because of the political changes in Eastern Europe, such meetings lost their original purpose and were



Fig. 3. Tamás Pócs (right), Riclef Grolle (in wheelchair), Aune Koponen (left), and colleagues doing field work during excursion after the 1st Central and East European Bryological Working Group (CEE BWG) meeting in Eger, 1978. Photo J. Vána.



Fig. 4. Excursion to Grimsel Pass before the IAB Taxonomic Workshop Meeting in Geneva, 1979 (from left: Tamás Pócs, Dale H. Vitt, Diana G. Horton, Patricia Geissler, Timo Koponen). Photo J. Vána.



Fig. 5. Meeting in Riclef Grolle's home garden, Jena 1997 (from left: Hiroshi Inoue, Riclef Grolle, Jiří Váňa, Tamás Pócs, Jerzy Szwejkowski. Photo S. Hattori.

no longer organized, as Eastern European bryologists could now freely participate in meetings around the world.

As already mentioned, unlike most of his colleagues from Eastern Europe, Tamás was in a position to participate in expeditions. In the 1970s he visited Vietnam, then made several expeditions to African countries and worked in African universities.

At the time of his visit to Cuba Tamás initiated a project to publish the bryophyte flora of Cuba. The Cuban bryoflora project was coordinated in Cuba by Dr. Pedro Pablo Duarte Bello (later he emigrated to the United States) and Dr. Deisy Reyes Monotoya. Unfortunately, neither the collecting expedition to Cuba nor the publication were ever realized.

I had many contacts with Tamás at international conferences (Eger 1978, 1st Meeting of CEEBWG; Geneva 1979, IAB Taxonomic Workshop Meeting;

Poznań 1980, 2nd Meeting of CEEBWG; Prague 1982, 3rd Meeting of CEEBWG; Tokyo 1983, World Conference of Bryology; Eger 1984, 4th Meeting of CEEBWG; Leipzig 1986, 5th Meeting of CEEBWG; Liblice 1988, 6th Meeting of CEEBWG; Budapest 1988, IAB Conference of Bryoecology, again organized by Tamás as Vice President of IAB; Apatity 1990, 7th Meeting of CEEBWG; Helsinki 1990, Congress of East Asiatic Bryology; Mexico 1995, International Conference of Tropical Bryophytes: Biology, Diversity and Conservation; Chicago 2009, Early Land Plants Today: Toward Uniting Liverwort Taxonomy, Nomenclature & Geography) or during private visits to our colleagues Dr. Riclef Grolle in Germany or Dr. Ryszard Ochrya in Poland. Together we participated with other bryologists as lecturers in courses on tropical bryology in Helsinki (1993, 1998, 2000), organized by Prof. Timo Koponen of the University of Helsinki. I have warm memories

from the World Conference of Bryology (Tokyo 1983). I was on a study visit to Japan at the time, and offered to pick up some conference participants at the airport. Japanese bryologists already knew Tamás but they allowed me to go and welcome him to the Land of the Rising Sun. With Hiroshi Inoue and Rob Gradstein we went a few times to a pub in Tokyo where Dr. Hattori had made prepaid arrangements.

Unfortunately, Tamás and I have not had many occasions to work together in the field, however much we would have liked. Except for a private excursion to Prague in the Prokopské údolí valley, where Tamás was studying mosses growing on loess, we have worked together only on a few excursions after CEEBWG meetings, the 1983 Tokyo conference and the 1995 Mexico conference, and in conjunction with the Helsinki courses in 1990. Especially in Japan and Mexico, very attractive places for European bryologists, I had

a chance to appreciate the exactness and intensity with which Tamás collects specimens. Because time was limited I could only collect extensively there, to get a general overview of the biotopes and vegetation.

We have not written many joint publications because Tamás mainly studies epiphytic liverworts dominant in the tropics (*Lejeuneaceae*) and I study neglected terricolous species in these regions. This is no disadvantage but rather a benefit, because our subjects complement each other. Our joint determination of material collected in tropical Africa by the Belgian bryologist Dr. Jean L. De Sloover resulted in the publication *Hépatiques d'Afrique tropicale* (VÁŇA J., PÓCS T. & DE SLOOVER J. L. 1979. *Lejeunia* 98: 1–23). A description of one new taxon collected by Tamás is in *A new species of Amphicephalozia (Hepaticae) from Madagascar* (PÓCS T. & VÁŇA J. 2001. *Polish Bot. J.* 46: 145–150).



Fig. 6. Meeting at Ryszard Ochyra's house Kraków 1993 (from left: Saci Pócs, Jiří Váňa, Tamás Pócs and Ryszard Ochyra). Photo H. Bednarek-Ochyra.

One of the best works related to the still-neglected Afro-American disjunction is *Disjunct hepaticae in tropical America and Africa* (GRADSTEIN S. R., PÓCS T. & VÁÑA J. 1983. *Acta Bot. Hung.* 29: 127–171) a fundamental phytogeographic study of bryophytes.

All our years of cooperation and friendship have left an indelible impression of Tamás. He is an open-hearted, generous man, a disciplined, energetic researcher, and a scientist of the highest caliber. It is a privilege to know him.

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