

## **Alwin Berger: gardener, botanist & succulent researcher. His life and scientific work from today's view**

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The name Alwin Berger today is inseparable from the history of succulent plant science, although his botanical interests were not confined to succulent plants only. Stimulated by and in cooperation with the Berger family, who mounted an exhibition about Alwin Berger in 2009 in Möschlitz, I started to collect all available data and material about the botanical and scientific work and life of Alwin Berger.

Alwin Berger was born in 1871 in the small village Möschlitz (Thuringia, Germany). After school he became a gardener and worked in several nurseries and botanical gardens between 1887 and 1897. In 1897 he became curator of the Hanbury garden 'La Mortola' in Italy, where he also met and married his wife Elise Berger (who perished in the German concentration camp Theresienstadt in 1944). His son Fritz Berger (1905) and his daughter Iris Verna Berger (1906) were born at that time. During the time at La Mortola, Berger came into contact with cacti and succulents, and it was the famous gardener Karl Sprenger, who suggested he study succulent plants more in detail. Because of World War I the Bergers had to leave Italy in 1915. From 1915 to 1922 he was employed at the "Wilhelma" in Stuttgart, Germany. For a study of 'small fruits' (*Rubus*, *Ribes*, *Fragaria*, etc.) he moved to the United States from 1923 to 1926. After completion of this project he became 'Hofgartendirektor' at the Museum of Natural History in Stuttgart till his death in 1931 (caused by appendicitis).

Alwin Berger started his career as gardener and became an esteemed authority and botanist later. During his life he had correspondence and personal contacts as well as friendships with many gardeners, botanists and biologists, well known not only in the 'succulent scene', for instance Nicholas E. Brown, Kurt Dinter, Ernst Haeckel, Joseph N. Rose, Camillo Schneider, Frederic A.C. Weber, Richard Wettstein. For his studies of succulents he visited many botanical gardens, herbaria, succulent plant collections and nurseries, such as Kew Gardens and the collections of De Laet, Haage, Weingart, etc., but he never visited the main distribution areas of his favourite study objects.

More than 200 publications attest to his extensive work. Besides well known books as *Die Agaven* (1915), *Entwicklungslinien der Kakteen* (1926), *Kakteen* (1929), etc there are contributions for Engler's *Das Pflanzenreich* (Aloineae, 1908), Engler & Prantl's *Die natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien* (Crassulaceae, 1930), Bonstedt's *Pareys Blumengartnerei* (several succulent plant families) as well as about 200 papers in journals devoted to horticulture, botany or succulent plants. Most of these papers have been published in the journals *Monatsschrift für Kakteenkunde* and *Gartenwelt*. In addition to the eleven books under his own authorship, he published some more books for gardeners in the 1920s under the pseudonym A.B. Burgk.

Alwin Berger was in one of the first botanists who began to study seriously the phylogenetic relationships of cacti. Within a few years of the publication of the *Gesamtbeschreibung der Kakteen* by Karl Schumann he recognized that the few big genera still usual at that time do not reflect natural relationships very well. His ideas were worked out and broadened later by Britton & Rose in their monograph *The Cactaceae* (1919–1923). Hundreds of new names and combinations were published by Berger, mainly in succulent plant families, as well as in Asteraceae, Rosaceae, Grossulariaceae, etc.

To deepen our study and insights in life and work of Alwin Berger all material and data related to him and his botanical and horticultural activities is still being sought. Publications and exhibitions about him, his life and work, are in preparation. All additional items of information (as well as published or unpublished illustrations, writings, etc.) would be welcome to complement the Alwin Berger archive!

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