

Eleonora Gabrielian

Armen Takhtajan (1910-2009)

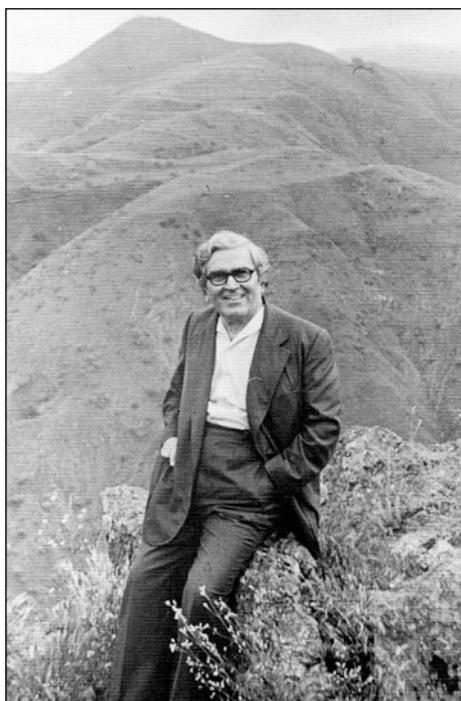


Fig. 1. Armen Takhtajan during a field trip in Armenia in 1988.

The world science has suffered an irreplaceable loss. Armen Takhtajan, the greatest botanist and phylogeneticist of the XX century, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences and of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, passed away on November 2009 in St. Petersburg (former Leningrad), in the hundredth year of his life.

Armen Takhtajan made a huge contribution to the development of botanical science. He began his scientific career in Armenia, holding the Plant Morphology and Taxonomy Chair at Yerevan State University from 1936 on. His lectures and botanical excursions were outstandingly interesting, enlightening and stimulating. His classes became a determining factor in the professional choice for many among his students, who grew to represent the Takhtajan School of Botany. Academician Sosnovsky wittily described this period of Takhtajan's scientific activities in Armenia as the Periclean Century of Armenian science.

In 1943 Armen Takhtajan founded the Institute of Botany of the Armenian Academy of Sciences. He directed the Institute until a year after the infamous August session of Lysenko (1948), where he was labelled a "Mendelist-Morganist". It was fortunate that Academician Alexandrov dared, at that time, to invite him to head the Biology Department of Leningrad University.

Armen Takhtajan was interested in an amazingly large number of botanical topics. He created research teams to work not only on subjects of classical plant taxonomy, but also palynology, palaeobotany, plant anatomy, cytology, geobotany, etc. Almost all departments of the Institute of Botany in Armenia have been created by him.

Among Armen Takhtajan's many interests, the plant world of the Mediterranean domain occupied a prominent place, starting with his first field experience gathered during a one-month botanical trip to Albania, in November and December of 1955. In the introduction to an account of his results, published much later, he wrote: "For me personally, this first trip abroad had a special meaning, since it led me to a country with a typically Mediterranean vegetation – something I had dreamt of for a long time. My doctoral thesis on the xerophytic vegetation of the skeleton mountains of Armenia, written in my young years (in 1937), was devoted to plant formations very similar in physiognomy to Mediterranean phrygana. But neither I myself nor other Caucasian botanists had ever seen real phrygana. It is therefore not surprising that, arriving in Albania and seeing phrygana for the first time, I entered a singular state of botanical trance. Even now, 43 years later, I have before my eyes pictures of coastal Albania, especially of the phrygana on the white marble shores of the sky-blue Ionian sea." [Translated from: Fl. Rastitel'nost' Rastitel'nye Resursy Armenii 12: 6. 1999.]

The multivolume Flora of Armenia became the favourite child of Armen Takhtajan. He was the author of the whole first volume, and permanent editor of all subsequent ones. The last, 11th volume, is currently in press. It is saddening that he did not live to see it published.

While in Leningrad, Armen Takhtajan maintained tight relations with his motherland and upheld his lively commitment to Armenia and Armenian botanists. Thanks to his support, the botanical school in the Institute of Botany of National Academy of Sciences of Armenia is one of the strongest in the territory of the former USSR.

As long-time Director of the Institute of Botany of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Armen Takhtajan was keenly aware of virtually everything going on in botanical research in the country. Throughout the USSR, botanical science developed along strategic lines devised and promoted by him. The Takhtajan School of Botany remains alive, continuing to fulfil the great botanists' thoughts and ideals.

Taxa named in honour of A. Takhtajan

Genera of fossil flora

Takhtajanodoxa Snigirevskaya

Species of fossil plants

Cinnamomum takhtajanii Guryev

Epimedium takhtajanii Kutuzkina

Lepidostrobos takhtajanii Snigirevskaya —[syn. *Achlamydocarpon takhtajanii* (Snigirevskaya)

Schumacker-Lambry

Magnolia takhtajanii Pnevа

Marsdenia takhtajanii Stephyrtza

Populus takhtajanii Gabrielyan & Zhilin

Protodrynaria takhtajanii Vikulin & A. Bobrov

Pseudoctenis takhtajanii Gomolitzky

Genera of plants

Takhtajania Baranova & J.-F. Leroy (1978).

Takhtajaniantha Nazarova (1990)

Takhtajanianthus A. B. De (1988)¹

Takhtajaniella V. E. Avet. (1980) (*Alyssum*).

Species of plants

- Allochrusa takhtajanii* Gabrieljan & M.Dittrich
Altingia takhtajanii T.V.Thai
Astragalus takhtadzhianii Grossheim
Bufonia takhtajanii Nersesian
Campanula takhtadzhianii Fedorov
Centaurea takhtajanii Gabrieljan & Ts.R.Tonyan
Chamaecrista takhtajanii Barreto & Yakovlev
Cousinia takhtajanii K.G.Tamanyan
Erucastrum takhtajanii V.I.Dorofeev
Gagea takhtajanii Levichev
Goniothalamus takhtajanii Bân
Gypsophila takhtadzhianii Schischkin ex Ikonnikov
Isatis takhtadjanii V.Avetissjan
Lactuca takhtadzhianii Sosnowsky = *Cephalorrhynchus takhtadzhianii* (Sosnowsky) Kirpicznikov
Microsorium takhtajanii V.N.Tu
Onobrychys takhtajanii Sytin
Pyrus takhtadzhianii Fedorov
Rubus takhtadjanii Mulkidjanian
Salsola takhtadshjanii Iljin
Saussurea takhtadjanii Lipschitz
Scrophularia takhtajanii Gabrieljan
Sorbus takhtajanii Gabrieljan

Species of animals

- Haptoncus takhtajani* G.Medvedev & Tet-Minassian (*Nitidulidae*)
Throscogenius takhtajani Iablokoff-Khnzorian, 1962 (*Scarabaeina*)

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