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BIELEFELD, R. (1897). Georg Boyung Scato Lantzius-Beninga. *Abhandlungen herausgegeben vom Naturwissenschaftlichen Verein zu Bremen* 15: 148-155, 1 Fig.

### Georg Boyung Scato Lantzius-Beninga

By Rudolf Bielefeld, Norderney.

(With portrait)

G. B. Scato Lantzius Beninga descended from the old East-Frisian family of Lantzius-Beninga's, from which came different, excellent personalities. In the East-Frisian Geest landscape, three hours south of the pretty, small country town of Aurich is situated, surrounded by splendid forests of leafy trees, the idyllic estate Stiekelkamp, in the first decades of our century, run by Lantzius-Beninga's father, the chief forester G.B.S. Lantzius-Beninga, and the estate is still now in possession of the family Lantzius-Beninga. Here Georg Boyung Scato Lantzius-Beninga was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1815.

In his earliest youth this youngest son was extraordinarily delicate and, of all his brothers and sisters, the problem child of his loving parents. And, with a visible success, they looked after the delicate little boy. Nonetheless this slowly evolving boy learned to walk only in his seventh year. Hence the first and worrying phase of his physical development had come to an end. And now, in spite of his weakly built body, the intellectually evolved boy could not be fenced within the parental home. He would get out, this little young man: get out into the garden overgrown with marvellous beeches and firs, get out into the splendid, small wood surrounding the paternal estate, as it still is in our days. The parents' greatest wish was to take care of their small and delicately built son in their home for as long as possible; therefore they assigned him a competent, cheerful, private tutor to give him the first basic rudiments of human knowledge. In their free time they wandered through the woods and bushes to listen the singing of the birds in the forest, which interested Scato – it was his affectionate name. They roamed through the Heseler Gaste, situated south of Stiekelkamp, equipped with a net to catch butterflies or a specimen box (Botanisierbüchse), or as well, through the extended heathland, situated in the west, to capture the cheerfully fluttering butterflies, or to surprise a viper or to take home Flora's children.

At home, conducted by the well-informed teacher, the caught butterflies were spread out and, step by step, joined to form a small, pretty collection; in the same manner, through the installation of an herbarium, a promising and encouraging beginning was fashioned. All this was a great joy to the pupil, gifted with a good eye, and already in the very first stages of his intellectual development the sense for the later study of natural sciences was evoked.

Systematic physical exercises strengthened the will, and the many tiring excursions in the forests, the meadows and the heathlands helped the feeble boy such that, finally in his twelfth year, he safely could be sent to the grammar school after an adequate intellectual preparation. In the year 1827 he went, accompanied by the best wishes of his tenderly loving parents, to

the little town Norden to become a pupil of the local Gymnasium. Later on, from there he went to Aurich to the local grammar school, the Ulrichs-Gymnasium. What nature, so to speak, initially had missed in the evolution of the assiduous boy, now, relatively rapidly, caught up. At both schools the lessons evoked much pleasure for the boy eager to learn, the reason why Lantzius developed a great enthusiasm with which he won the love and affection of his teachers. Also unfamiliar to the young East-Frisian was the all glaring pushiness that had nothing in mind other than its own egoistical purposes. His open and frank straightness was not only not held against him but brought him the friendship of his school friends, as well as the respect of the teaching staff.

Starting in Aurich, often alone or in company with friends, he made botanical excursions to the nearby Eikebusch or the marvellous Egelser Forest. By this many-fold way he acquired a sound intellectual basis for his future studies, and also by physical exercises, and the often undertaken botanical strolls, he usefully supported his physical development; nevertheless he remained of a faintly noticeable small stature.

After the leaving of the Ulrichs-Gymnasium at Aurich he went to the royal seat of his Hannoverian fatherland to matriculate at the Polytechnikum. There he eagerly strived to follow his scientific studies, and the *deutsche Jugendfröhlichkeit* came into its own, too. Shortly afterwards, in his native country, he completed an apprenticeship as a pharmacist, and for a year, himself became assistant of the pharmacist in the village of Timmel nearby his parental home. After living the quiet rural life far from society, he wished to go back to the freshly pulsating life of the academic world. So he went (1840) to Berlin to the University to devote himself entirely to his beloved studies, the Natural Sciences. After the second semester, however, in the year 1841 he exchanged the Berliner Hochschule for the Georgia Augusta in Göttingen where he applied himself to botanical studies only. Particularly, he turned his attention to the investigation of cryptogams, and within them especially to the leafy mosses. The fruit of this serious work was his Inaugural-Dissertation, on the basis of it he was promoted to the degree of Doctor in Easter 1844; the title is: "*De evolutione sporidiorum in capsulis muscorum*". (Gött. 1844. 4). Two years later (1846) he habilitated there as a Privatdozent of the Faculty of Philosophy.

The first work published by Lantzius, which drew the attention of the scientific community to him, was the "Beiträge zur Kenntniss der Flora Ostfrieslands"; (Göttingen, by Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1849). By commission of the Committee of the University in the spring and summer of 1847 Lantzius travelled the East-Frisian peninsula, and partly, the offshore group of islands, for the purpose of floristic research. The results of these systematically planned investigations had been put down in those contributions, originally drawn up only as a research report for the Royal Hannoverian Ministry of the Interior, but now, upon its request, printed in the format of Meyer's "Chloris Hannoverana" (Göttingen, by Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1836) and made available to the general public. Observations, made later on by other botanists, revealed the extraordinary expert knowledge, reliability and care of this East-Frisian expert.\*).

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\*) Compare C. Nöldeke: Flora der ostfriesischen Inseln, in the III. Vol. of these publications, and Fr. Buchenau: Kritische Studien zur Flora von Ostfriesland, in this part p. 82 ff.

On his strolls he often visited dear friends, and when he found interest in botany, he liked to speak about the results of the excursions in the nearby region. Especially he liked the dear home of his friend and teacher H.J. Sundermann in Hesel, a well-known Pestalozzian, who at that time had an extraordinary, extensive knowledge, and for decades was the leader of the East-Frisian teachers. So far as the very occupied Sundermann could find some time, he accompanied Lantzius on his strolls in the vicinity of Hesel. After their return, either to the teacher's home in Hesel, or to the paternal home in Stiekelpkamp, just an hour away, the finds were carefully examined, listed and laid in a sleeve. Also compiled was a list of rare plants found in the area of Hesel, written by Lantzius himself. I could see the original. With his friend Sundermann he discussed repeatedly the edition of a Flora of East-Frisia, but the plan unhappily was not realised because in later years Lantzius was very occupied and these other occupations prevented a further botanical exploration of his native East-Frisian country. The herbarium, installed during his expedition through East-Frisia in the year 1847, and containing all specimens according to his statements, is in the collections of the Georgia Augusta in Göttingen.

Later on, in addition, he wrote the statements for the Flora of Norderney for the small work "Die Insel Norderney" edited by Dr. Riefkohl in the year 1861; however, the list has been "revised" by an unknown and totally incompetent hand who introduced incorrect statements which considerably diminished its value.

By his scientific research, showing a wide expert knowledge, the young scientist soon became known. Thus the *Naturforschende Gesellschaft in Emden* (East-Frisia) appointed him on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1850 to its corresponding honorary member; he belonged to this organization until his death. But a much greater recognition was given to Lantzius the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1855 with the presentation of the diploma of the *Kaiserliche Leopoldinisch-Karolinische Akademie der Naturforscher*, which, at that time, flourished under the chairmanship of Nees von Esenbeck; with the presentation of the diploma to Lantzius, the society was never to regret his admission as member and collaborator. In the year 1850 he became Assistant of the Herbarium of the University in Göttingen; and on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1852 the Philosophical Faculty of the Georgia Augusta appointed him as Assessor.

In the second part of the 22. vol. of "Nova acta", edited by the Leopoldina, Lantzius published the results of his investigations on the moss capsule under the title: *Beiträge zur Kenntniss des innern Baues der ausgewachsenen Mooskapsel etc.* In this paper the researcher really demonstrates his profound insight in his field and the extraordinarily precise investigations of the objects, and moreover, his exact knowledge of the cryptogams often evoked by his students astonishment and great surprise. The 11 lithographic print tables, with 41 figures, added to the work are real works of art, all drawn after nature by the author himself. Introduced in the text are critical comments concerning "Bryologia Europaea" of Bruch and Schimper with indications of frequent superficialities, many errors and inaccuracies, in contrast to the results found by himself, and on the basis of the research results of the perspicacious Robert Brown. Thanks to the author's precision, despite the decades passed since the publication of these contributions, even today they show an unreserved scientific value.



In the last decade of his life the tirelessly employed man was occupied with his work, of which, unhappily, only the first part was finished. Its title is the following: *Die unterscheidenden Merkmale der deutschen Pflanzenfamilien und –Geschlechter*. Erste Abteilung. Göttingen 1866. Verlag von Albert Rente”. As all sound scientific works, this work also has a history. Some years earlier Lantzius fulfilled the wish of his students and published the lithographed tables of the Central German plant families and genera, usefully elaborated for the lessons by himself. These tables had been revised, essentially augmented, and explanatory illustrations of the family - and sexual characteristics added. Thus a work was created, distinguished by the restriction to that which is worth knowing and leaving aside all useless and superfluous elements. The illustrations, splendid and exact, had been engraved by the author on stone, and mostly after nature. The text, in the form of tables, is excellent in its clarity and compactness.

By his research, several times Lantzius came to new views, deviating from traditional opinions; but he did not look for pride in new names as other botanists. He introduced only one new genus (*Echinanthriscus*); the reasons are given in the introduction. Given the expert knowledge of the author, it could be expected that the work is up-to-date regarding the clarity of the tables, the understandable mode of expression, and the exemplary, instructive illustrations.

Therefore, many people encouraged him to publish the second part soon. Unhappily this was not granted to him; the inexorable death put a limit to his work. –

As an author and also as an academic teacher he was a person of great talent and diligence. His lectures were frequented, just as those of the two other botanists working at the University of Göttingen (Profs. Giesebach and Bartling). In the years between 1845-1870 nearly all the pharmacists from the kingdom, later the province of Hannover, sat at his feet. And not only their attention, no, their heart, too, they must give to him as soon as they came into contact with him. And how stimulating and interesting were the excursions he undertook with his students in the splendid area of Göttingen, provided with a rich flora! Several seniors, their eyes sparkling with joy, told me about the delightful hours they spent on these botanical strolls side by side with the highly respected and beloved teacher.\*) But he was not only their teacher, but also their loyal friend and advisor. How sorry was he about a failed examination. With the most friendly care and real paternal fidelity he supervised those examination candidates that had to be examined during the German-French war and were then called up to arms. They all passed. He had not only a profound scientific formation but also a true nobleness of heart that was one of his most outstanding characteristics. As an East-Frisian he was a man of an unshakable honesty and often of a Germanic rough straightness, driving him at times to rash comments and frankness.

As everywhere, also here, existed unfeeling gossips, and consequently the colleagues of the Georgia Augusta by no means brightened up his life. Especially Hofrat Professor Dr. G. F. W. Meyer, very favoured by the Hanoverian court, was the most powerful and influential

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\*) I too, with hearty thankfulness, remember the academic lectures I had with Lantzius in the years 1850 and 51, and of the warm interest that he showed in me since.

opponent, for a short time, working together with him at the Göttingen University. The beginning of the discord can no longer be disentangled; but already in the first years of Lantzius' academic teaching the relationship between both was anything but friendly. This is already visible in unequivocal plainness of the comments made by Hofrat G. F. W. Meyer in the preface (pages XIV-XVII) of his *Flora Hanoverana excursoria* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1849) on the *Beiträge zur Flora Ostfrieslands* of Lantzius, published in the same year, recognizing, however, that the *Beiträge* "demonstrated powerful expert knowledge and, what says more in our time, an honest striving for truth". These last words of Hofrat Meyer sound very strange because it is a well-known fact that in Meyer's *Flora Hanoverana* the localities etc. are often revealed to be unreliable. Therefore Hofrat Meyer is criticized\*) in the botanical literature whilst the florists unanimously and unreservedly recognize the reliability of Lantzius' statements. Because of these highly unedifying relationships, in spite of his competence, recognized even by the opposing side, and his colleagues, Professor Dr. Grisebach and Professor Dr. Bartling, Lantzius had been recommended nowhere and remained for the rest of his life at the Georgia Augusta. During the period of office of King George V nobody considered awarding him a professor's chair. His students interceded on his behalf – without the suggestion of the man of unblemished honour that he was – with the committee of the University of Göttingen to promote him to a professor, but with a quite strange success. In the No. 12 of the IV. year of the 'Pharmaceutische Wochenschrift' (Speyer) of the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1871, we can read, in a short obituary at the death of Lantzius-Beninga: "Obviously his scientific activity, besides his extensive teaching, was restrained by the fact that he missed always the encouragement during the period of office of Ernst August and George V and of the Committee of the University. Nevertheless that most of the students in Botany attended his lectures the authorities could not decide to promote him to an associate professor. Therefore he spent nearly a quarter of a century as Privatdocent and assistant at the herbarium of the University, and later on as Assessor of the Philosophical faculty at the University. As the character of the *Welfentum* and their ministries may predict that the reason of this noticeable disregard of a great work can be found in the political and national conviction of the deceased and of which the through and through honourable man never made a secret. The injustice committed was to such an extent that, even under the rule of Borries, the students of the deceased could not fail to ask the Committee of the University for the appointment to an Extraordinary professor, but the consequence for the candidate was that the non-fixed part of his salary was withdrawn. Thanks to the ministry of Mühler the long lasting injustice against Lantzius found an end by the appointment at first to a member of the pharmaceutical examination commission and then to an extraordinary professor. In this position he was active at the University scarcely still nine month." –

At the end of January 1871 he fell ill with a malicious abscess in the armpit, ending with his death. He died after six weeks of a painful illness the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1871. At his grave stood his deeply distressed widow and six children (four sons and two daughters), for them he always

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\*) Compare also Professor Dr. Buchenau, *Flora der nordwestdeutschen Tiefebene* (Leipzig, Engelmann, 1894) preface, page IX and there: *Kritische Studien zur Flora von Ostfriesland*, in this issue p. 82 ff.

was a careful husband and father. Also his life as an academic teacher has been spoiled by unjustified neglect, all the more so his family life was a happy one. His wife, loyally loving him and his good children, knew how to drive away the cares. The eldest son went to sea and became a Ships Officer; the second one attended to Business science and lives now as businessman in Melbourne; the third one studied in Boston, was promoted there and became a doctor in Massachusetts where unhappily, already in 1894, he followed his father to the grave. The youngest of the sons studied at German Universities, after his promotion became first Executive Doctor of a Psychiatric hospital, and later on family doctor in Eltville on the Rhein where he is working, to great benefit, still today.

With Lantzius-Beninga passed away, a life full of work and full of the undaunted idealism, a markedly distinctive personality with real German qualities, a highly talented man of science whom, under favourable circumstances, would have had much more influence. But the position appropriate to his faculties was withheld from him by obstacles put in his way by unpopular persons. Several of his contemporaries have badly sinned against this man. May, therefore, the posterity bearing in mind the sad injustice, and grant him now the place in the genealogical table of the human mind which is due to him and rightly so! We East-Frisians will always regard him with justified pride as one of ours; he was a man who, even as a fine representative of the sciences, never denied his Frisian qualities, and remained faithful to his dear native country. Therefore honour to his memory! “Wohl dem, der seiner Väter nicht vergisst, der, froh von ihren Thaten, ihrer Grösse den Hörer unterhält und, still sich freuend, ans Ende dieser schönen Reihe sich geschlossen sieht!” §.

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§ The latter quote originates from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* I. 3. (1786) (eds.).