

A REFLECTION ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF BOTANICAL SCIENCES

This year *Botanical Sciences* celebrates its 75th anniversary. When it first appeared in 1944, this journal bore the sober title of *Boletín*, but shortly after it was renamed as *Boletín de la Sociedad Botánica de México*, taking recently its current name. For seven and a half decades, this journal has been the outlet for an enormous amount of botanical research, mostly conducted in Mexico, covering topics spanning from floristic surveys and taxonomic descriptions of new taxa, to ecological, genetic and phylogenetic studies. Easy said, not easy done.

Over a decade ago, when I had the honor to serve as the journal's Chief Editor, I spent one rainy evening in my home studio writing an editorial on the occasion of its 60th anniversary. I recall thinking then how desirable it would be for the *Boletín* to achieve a centennial trajectory and beyond. At that time still 40 years away from that goal, and with the journal facing logistic and financial difficulties, the odds were not good. Today, at the age of 75, and with the national and worldwide circumstances changed in almost every conceivable way, it seems to me that *Botanical Sciences* is making firmer steps into the future. Nonetheless, this significant anniversary is a good time to reflect about where the journal stands now and the direction it is taking. Ultimately, the question is: With the large number of international botanical journals available today, should we continue the publication of this journal in Mexico? To me, the answer is a simple and decisive yes, and in the following lines I provide some arguments for those who may be more skeptical.

First, I would like to remind the readers and authors of *Botanical Sciences* that one of the foundational goals of the Botanical Society of Mexico (Sociedad Botánica de México, SBM) is to disseminate botanical knowledge. Of course, this goal was intended to encourage the study of Mexico's flora and vegetation, which in the first half of the 20th century was incipient. The SBM has been committed to this task since its creation and I see no reason to abandon it today.

In addition, it should be stressed that *Botanical Sciences* is exceptionally supportive of the many types of botanical research carried out in Mexico, some of which is not readily published in other journals; for example, articles that provide checklists of the still many poorly-explored but highly-diverse regions of this country, or studies that describe the numerous and complex ways in which traditional Mexicans relate themselves with their environment, and particularly with its plants. The Mexican ethnobotanical narrative has filled many pages of the journal through its existence. All of this defines a profile for *Botanical Sciences* that distinguishes it from other sister publications and that is attractive to authors at home and abroad.

I am convinced that when it comes to science and scientific knowledge, the distinction between national and international, between "us" and "them", becomes blurry. Through scientific journals we engage ourselves in innumerable, intense albeit silent dialogs with colleagues all over the world. Mexico is not isolated on the planet, and Mexican botanists form part of an international community with which we walk hand-in-hand to create new knowledge. Many of the country's academic organizations (particularly scientific societies, but also universities and research institutions) have taken the responsibility of publishing scientific journals that we classify as 'national'. However, we can no longer deny that our journal is nothing less than an international periodical to foreign researchers, and it is possible that after judging its scope, the quality of the papers published in it, and the similarities with their own research goals and questions, an increasing number of scholars abroad will continue to trust their work to the pages of *Botanical Sciences*; this includes researchers relatively close to us from Central or South America, but also from much farther away, including regions as distant as northern Africa and the Far East.

The final argument I want to share is related to the role that science should play in the development and well-being of every nation. In my view, Mexico, like many other countries, is largely wanting on scientific bases to grow stronger as a nation, to give better opportunities of life to its citizens and to integrate itself more smoothly with the rest of the World. Much of what Mexicans do at present, how they do it and how much they enjoy it is a direct product of scientific research. Paradoxically, however, I perceive a growing trend in many sectors of the Mexican society to give scientific thinking not only a far-from-prominent place, but often to see it with suspicion and distrust. Similarly to the expansion of the Flat-Earthers' movement in the United States and other countries, in Mexico there are more people now than ever before, particularly young ones, convinced that mankind never set foot on the Moon, that vaccines are bad for the children, or that we can feed 130 million people with technologies used in the past to feed one tenth of this number. Under this scenario, it is not surprising the happening of worrisome, unprecedented events, such as a Secretary of the Environment alluding to little mythological beings who will take care of the tropical forest, or a national leader referring to the country's academic guild as the 'mafia of science'. Similar anti-scientific governmental attitudes have arisen recently in many countries probably due, at least in part, to increasingly scientifically-illiterate societies around the Globe. How many governments have really longed for a whole society to truly cherish critical thinking? I do not have

the answer to this dilemma, but I hold the conviction that by neglecting and obstructing critical thinking we will be able to make very little progress in bettering the relationships of people with people, and of people with nature.

We can choose to live forever in the shadow of the large scientific powers of the planet, to continue being mere by-standers watching how they grow scientifically, technologically and socially, or we can decide to continue working every day, moving forward step-by-step, to bridge the still immense, but always shrinking gap that separates us. The

call is ours, not theirs. *Botanical Sciences* and other Mexican periodicals that operate under the principles of rigor and truth have undoubtedly played a key role in contributing to the scientific development of the country. The future role that *Botanical Sciences* will play in the growth of botanical theory will be highly dependent on the quality of science conducted in Mexico and elsewhere and published in its pages.

This is enough food for thought for the remaining quarter of the century, in waiting for *Botanical Sciences* to become a fully centennial scientific publication.

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