



## Historical Notes

### GÖRAN ROTHMAN (1739-1778): The Swedish Physician, Botanist, Author and North African Explorer

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#### BACKGROUND:

Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) is probably the best-known Swede worldwide (Figure 1). His contributions to systematic botany presented in his "Systema Naturae" and "Species Plantarum" (Figure 2) gained him a great reputation.

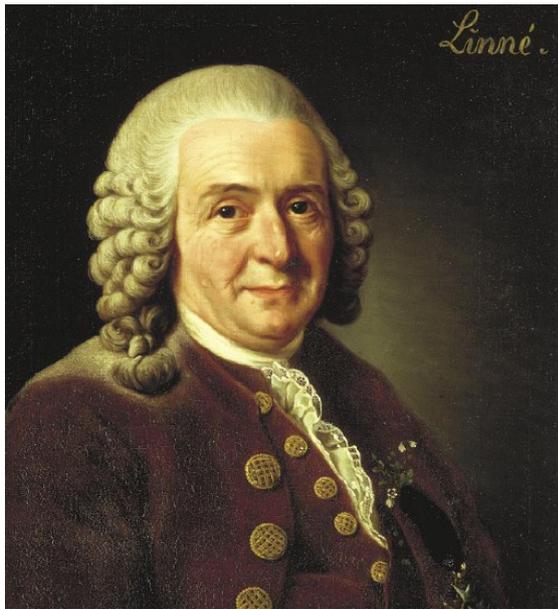


Figure 1. The colour portrait of Linnaeus owned by and is on display at the Swedish Academy of Science, Stockholm, Sweden

He enthused his students so much that 23 of them became professors in various centres of excellence of their time. Linnaeus was indeed responsible for sending some of his adventurous students to distant lands recording and collecting. He often described these scholars as his "Apostles". Göran Rothman, the subject of this work, was one of the four Apostles who came to North Africa and the Middle East. The aim of this paper is

to put together all fragmented pieces of work that are available on Rothman's Life and Work, and present a first-hand English translation of some of the original Swedish documents with a view of stimulating further work.



Figure 2. The cover pages of Linnaeus famous two books representing the basis of modern Botany and Taxonomy.

#### HIS LIFE AND EDUCATION:

Göran Rothman was born in Skatelöv (province of Småland) on November 30, 1739. His father was Dr Johan Rothman (1684-1763). Goran was the older half-brother from his father's late marriage to Anna Elisabeth Rudebeck. His father, a physician and botanist, studied at Harderwijk and Leiden. Göran Rothman went to Uppsala for his studies in 1757. He graduated with a Master in Philosophy in 1761, and two years later graduated as a medical doctor after defending his dissertation on De Raphania under the supervision of Carl Linnaeus on 27 May 1763. Thereafter, he settled in Stockholm as a practicing physician between 1763 and 1765. In 1765, he was sent to the island of Åland (Now in Finland) to help control the plague which has been there for several years. After

spending a period of time as a member of the faculty in the College of Medicine, he was appointed as the supervisor of quarantines in Stockholm archipelago in 1770. Between 1773 and 1776, He made a trip to Tripoli. After his return from Libya, he practiced medicine

and teaching for two years and died in Stockholm on December 3, 1778 at the very young age of 39. Linnaeus and Voltaire died in the same year (Figure 3A & B).

1507

Rother—Rothman.

1508

bevarar till stor del sitt medeltidsutseende. Det har 7 kyrkor, ett gymnasium och en realskola. Befolkningen driver jordbruk och vinodling; derjämte finnas fabriker för tillverkning af barvagnar och leksaker, landbruksmaskiner och svanmärk. R. hade under den senaste medeltiden egna grevar och var 1172—1803 fri riksstad. Genom sitt behörande läge på ett berg och sina befästningar har den af värde rit utsatt för belägringar.

**Rother** (König Rother I. Rother), tysk medeltidsk. som är författad i Didskrifts- och är författad omkr. 1150 af en vandrande spelman från norra Tyskland. Heltet, som är affattad i korta, parvis rimmade verser med talrik förekommande assonanor samt roster af alliteration, skildrar den apytiska konungen Es-vaxlingsrika frieri till en kejsaradotter i Konstantinopel. Den är utgifven af bl. a. H. Rückert, 1872.

1783. Blef student i Lund 1798, i Upsala 1800, inskrefs 1803 i inrikes civillexpeditionen, der han 1807 blef kanslist, förordnades 1809 till protokollsekreterare i ockupationsexpeditionen, utnämndes 1812 till kammarjunkare och 1814 till tredje expeditionsekreterare samt erhöll s. k. afsked. Han afled i Stockholm 1835. Af trycket utgaf han matriklar öfver ridderskapet och adeln 1704—1823 (3 del. 1807—23), *Beskrifning öfver Skokloster* (1819), *Beskrifning öfver kongl. Riddersholmsskyrkan* (1822), *Samlad af konigl. föreläsningar öfver läroämnet rems* (1825) uppl. 1850) samt *Lantmännens öfverflykt* (2 del. 1828, 29). Dessutom utgaf han den tämligen obetydliga »Stockholms tidning» (1824—34).

**Rothlegendes** [rällig-]. Se Permska systemet.

1. **Rothman**, Jakob Gabriel, politisk skriftställare, föddes i Växjö 1721, studerade medicin i Upsala, men tog ej någon examen, samt begaf sig sedermera på utrikes reor. Omkr. 1760 lär han hafva återvänt, men först 1765 uppträdde han såsom författare, med *Theo Frimans underliga lefnad och allsemanna tänkesätt*, ett slags romantiserad självbiografi med inströdda poem, samt *Såväl och orsakor till svenska folkets utlöfning*. Afven den följande tiden fortfor han att utgifva skrifter i dagens frågor, som alltid skärskådades från de då herskande missorsas sidspunkt: *Frihetens intåg, ode* (1760), *Rikets förfärd* och *anmärking* (mot Chyvenius, s. a.), *Samtal angående odvaldhetens* (1768) m. fl. En befallning för sina tjänster åt partiet erhöi R. så han utnämndes till föreståndare för »handelsbalanskontoret» (1767—68). Sin förnämsta bedrift såsom häsk partiskriftställare utförde han med *Skidslutas porrkonstans eller den pratjaks frilärdaren* (1768), en skrift, som i de Foga beklagade personliga anfällans höflighet och uttrycksrikhet är af samtiden ansett så i främsta ledet. Den vickte också allmän förbittring; och då vid riksdagen 1769 hatarna åter hade öfvertrifven, måste R. rymma ur landet, med anledning af hotade efterrättningar för det sätt, hvarpå han skott sin befallning vid nämnda kontor. Det dröjde troligen ej länge, innan R. återkom. Hans pennna var sedermera verksam utlostande i det af Pfeiffer utgifna »Dagligt allehandas». Utom ofvan anförda skrifter offentliggjorde R. afven öfversättningar af »Drinallotmet eller hvad som mest behagar fruentimren» af Voltaire (1765), »Betraktelse öfver forna fris samhällets upkomst och fall» af Montagu (1769) m. m. R. afled i Stockholm i slutet af Juni 1772.

2. **Rothman**, Göran, läkare, öfversättare, den föregående broder, född i Husaby bruk, Småland, d. 30 Nov. 1739 (ej 1730), blef student i Upsala 1757, filosof, magister 1761 och doktor 1763, efter en disputation under Linné *De raphania*. Han praktiserade därefter i Stockholm och sändes 1765 till Åland för att hämma en der under flera år gängse farsot, hvart han lyckades. R. biträde sedermera vid protokoll i Collegium medicum och blef 1770 karantänsläkare i Stock-

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Figure 3A & 3B

Figure3: 3A above &3B below are scanned pages from the Swedish biography list and Swedish family names book. Some of these were translated into English for the first time in this article (electronically using Google translate online and verified by Dr Sameer Al-Sadawi, of SKMC, Abu Dhabi, UAE)

**HIS WORK:**

Göran Rothman became a physician, botanist, translator and author. Unfortunately, he is amongst the least known apostles of Linnaeus. Rothman defended his dissertation on "De Raphania" on 27th May 1763 (Figure 4). A botanico-medical treatise on the disease Raphania (ergotism), recognized by Linnaeus to result from eating bread from a freshly harvested grain and erroneously ascribed to the presence of seed of the weed *Raphanus raphanistrum* L.; common radish (Figure 5).

In 1770, whilst working as the supervisor for quarantines in Stockholm archipelago and residing in Stockholm, Abderhman- the envoy of Tripoli in Sweden- promised Rothman all possible support if he would accompany him on a travel to Africa. This idea was taken up by the Swedish Academy of Science who drew the proposals for this journey and promised to make a contribution towards the costs of this journey provided that he travels to visit North

Africa and inner Africa to carry out studies and bring collections of local plants. Rothman started his journey in 1773 accompanied by Abderhman. This would have been during the first Al-Qaramanli dynasty who ruled from 1711 to 1835 in Tripolitania. The dates of his visit would coincide with the reign of Ali Pasha I who reined from 1754-1793. However, the promised financial support from both Abderhman and the Swedish Academy of Science did not materialize to the extent that Rothman had to start thinking about returning back to Sweden shortly after his arrival in Tripoli.

"The expedition was apparently not the idea of Linnaeus, but had been requested by an envoy in that region. The expedition was far from successful, and although not himself directly at fault for its failure, Rothman suffered misery for the remainder of his life. He died in Stockholm two years later on 4.12.1778." He

spent the last two years as a teacher in the college of medicine and practicing physician.

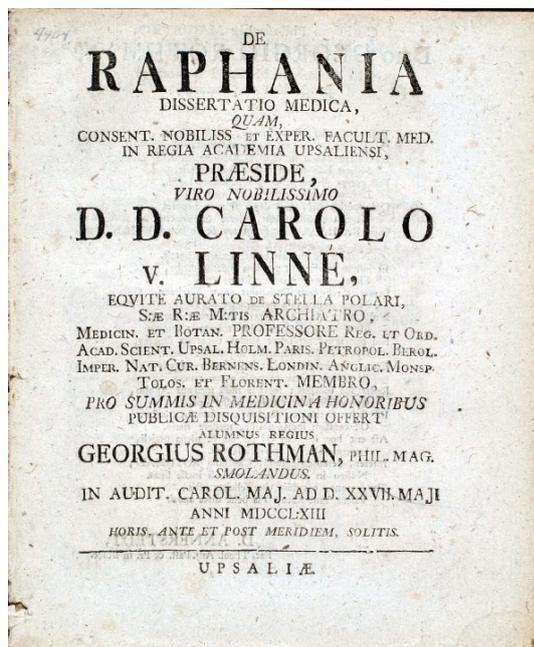


Figure 4. The cover page of Goran Rothman's dissertation and the illustration of the plant subject of the dissertation. From the website of The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

As a fan of literature, he published several successful works and translations. Important translations included Voltaire's classic tale of "Zadig" originally published in 1747. He also translated "Eloisa letters to Belard" poems of the English essayist Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Rothman also translated some work of Ranieri de' Calzabigi (1714-1795) who was an Italian poet and librettist, most famous for his collaboration with the composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787) on the reform operas. Rothman translated his opera "Orpheus and Eurydice" which was well received when played in 1757 with music composed by Gluck. He also translated the newer opera "Alcides". He has written several small pieces of poem and essay for magazines. In addition, he left several unpublished manuscripts and translations. It has been suggested that some of Rothman's work has been attributed wrongly to others. Some of the correspondence from Rothman about his trip to Africa was published by Gjørwell in his magazine between 1774 and 1776 (probably this was referring to Carl Christoffer Gjørwell (1731-1811) in his magazine "The Swedish Mercury" which can be considered the beginning of Swedish criticism. Little is known about his collections since there are no letters or specimens sent to



Figure 5. The figure of *Raphanus raphanistrum* from Goran Rothman's thesis.

Linnaeus who, at that time, was in failing health. It is often stated that "circumstances prevented his work from being as comprehensive as he had hoped" but no information on the obstacle is available yet. His collections and unpublished diary are in Sweden, Bergianska collections, Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien Stockholm "Resa till Tripoli år 1773-1776".

Rothman's name is remembered by the genus Rothmania (Figure 6) which was named after him by his friend the Swedish botanist Carl Peter Thunberg (1743–1828) a Swedish naturalist known as "the father of South African botany" and the "Japanese Linnaeus". There is nothing in the literature to indicate why the genus was named after Rothman.



Figure 6. The photo of the flower from the genus Rothmania named after Goran Rothman by one of his friends perhaps in sympathy with his failed expedition in North Africa

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

"The Linnaeus Apostles - Global Science & Adventure" project has been underway by the IK Foundation & Company. The publication of a major international series of eight volumes is in motion. All the accounts of the apostles' journeys to every continent will be published here for the first time in English. Volume Four will be of particular interest. It is due in 2008 and will cover Europe, North East and West Africa and the Middle East. Work of Apostles who visited these places including Göran Rothman will be covered. Subtitle 1 is devoted to Göran Rothman's journal and letters on Sweden, Denmark, Tunisia and Libya. The main source for this section is his Journey to Tripoli in 1773 Translated from the Swedish manuscript; Resa till Tripoli år 1773 af G. Rothman. Once published, this first translation into English will be of great value to researchers with an interest in the history of that era.

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