

Historical Notes

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

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Received for publication on 13 June 2008. Accepted in revised form 06 July 2008

Key words: Göran Rothman, Carl Linnaeus, Tripoli, Libya, Tunisia, Sweden, History of Science, Expeditions.

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.

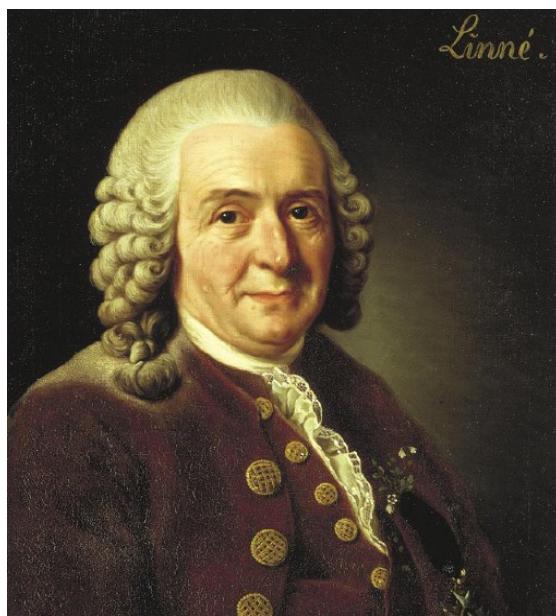


Figure 1. The colour portrait of Linnaeus owned by and is on display at the Swedish Academy of Science, Stockholm, Sweden

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). Göran 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

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

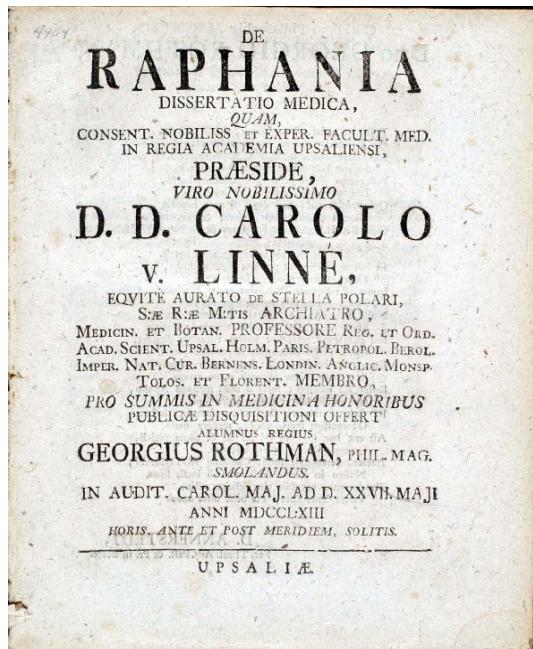


Figure 4. The cover page of Goran Rothman's dissertation and the illustration of the plant subject of the dissertation. From the website of The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

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 Rothmans work has been attributed wrongly to others. Some of the correspondence from Rothman about his trip to Africa was published by Gjörwell in his magazine between 1774 and 1776 (probably this was referring to Carl Christoffer Gjörwell (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 Rothmannia (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 Rothmannia 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.

AKNOWLEDGEMENT:

I would like to express gratitude to Dr Nameer Al Saadwai, Consultant Haematologist at Sheikh Khalifa Medical City for his help in translating some of the original text from Swedish to English and verification of the text which was translated electronically. I would

like to acknowledge the various web resources used and credits are given as indicated in the references list and/or in the legends of different figures.

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To cite this article: Beshyah SA. GÖRAN ROTHMAN (1739-1778): The Swedish Physician, Botanist, Author and North African Explorer. *Libyan J Med*. 2009; 4:56-59. AOP:080829.