

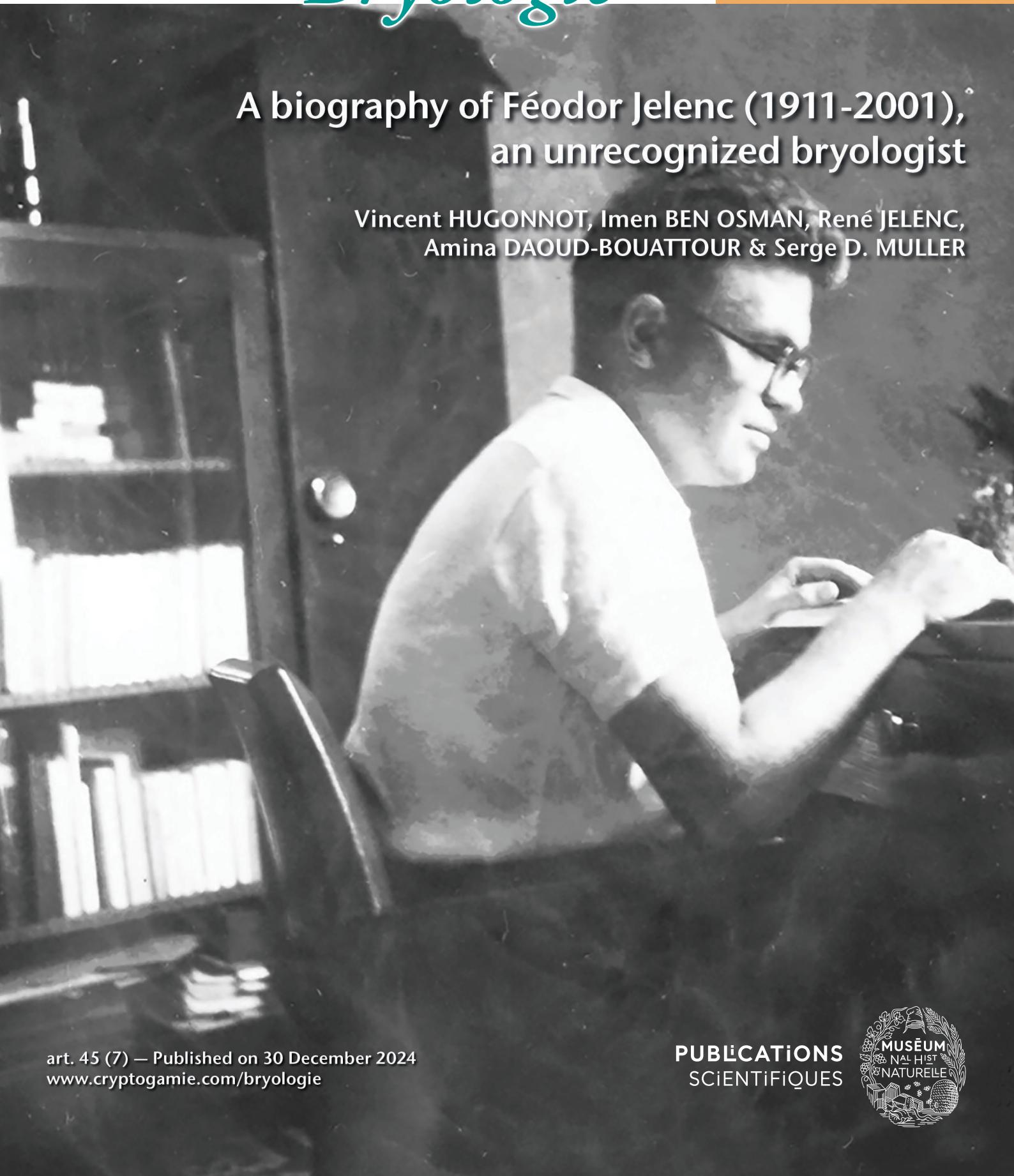
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A biography of Féodor Jelenc (1911-2001),
an unrecognized bryologist

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ABSTRACT

Féodor Jelenc (1911-2001), an overlooked botanist and bryologist, made a major contribution to the study of bryophytes in North Africa. His work laid the modern foundations for subsequent research on the bryophyte flora of the Maghreb and continues to influence current studies. A professor in Algeria until the country's independence, Féodor Jelenc later ended his career as a professor in Châtellerault. He is the author of several important publications on the flora of the western Massif Central. He was also actively involved in the Esperanto movement. Despite the loss of many original specimens, his herbarium collections and publications remain valuable resources for research in the Maghreb.

KEY WORDS

North Africa,
Algeria,
France,
bryologist,
biography.

RÉSUMÉ

Une biographie de Féodor Jelenc (1911-2001), un bryologue méconnu.

Féodor Jelenc (1911-2001), botaniste et bryologue méconnu, a apporté une contribution majeure à l'étude des bryophytes en Afrique du Nord. Son travail a posé les bases modernes des recherches ultérieures sur la flore bryophytique du Maghreb et continue d'influencer les études actuelles. Professeur en Algérie jusqu'à l'indépendance, Féodor Jelenc a terminé sa carrière en tant que professeur à Châtellerault. Il est l'auteur de plusieurs publications importantes sur la flore de l'ouest du Massif central. Il s'est également impliqué activement dans le mouvement espérantiste. Malgré la perte de nombreux spécimens originaux, ses collections d'herbier et ses publications demeurent des ressources précieuses pour la recherche au Maghreb.

MOTS CLÉS
Afrique du Nord,
Algérie,
France,
bryologie,
biographie.

INTRODUCTION

In the scientific world, there are brilliant figures who remain in the shadows despite their contributions. Féodor Jelenc, a botanist and prolific author on the bryological flora of North Africa, is one such example. The authors of the current publication often refer to Jelenc's work in the context of Imen Ben Osman's doctoral research, and were led to take an interest in the life and professional trajectory of this bryologist in his own right.

Jelenc's research has been crucial for many other researchers working in the Mediterranean basin. His findings were compiled by Ros *et al.* (1999) to draft the first checklist of bryophytes of North Africa, as well as those of Mediterranean hepaticas and anthocerotes (Ros *et al.* 2007) and an annotated checklist of Mediterranean mosses (Ros *et al.* 2013). They have also been used for research on the identity of endemic bryophytes of North Africa (Cano *et al.* 2000; Ros & Cano 2008; Ros *et al.* 2023, 2024).

In Maghreban countries, researchers are focusing increasingly on bryophytic flora, which has led to a growing interest in Jelenc's studies (Algeria: Mazari & Boulaacheb 2023; Mazari *et al.* 2024; Morocco: Ahayoun *et al.* 2013; Elharech *et al.* 2017). To date, three brief notes have been published (Poisay 2001; Charpin & Aymonin 2015; Philippe *et al.* 2015), but there is no complete biography of Féodor Jelenc, whereas his life can serve as an inspiration to future bryologists.

YOUTH: FROM THE JURA TO ALGERIA AND THE WAR

Féodor Louis Jelenc was born on March 31, 1911, in the city of Rougemont in the Doubs, a department of France. His father, Vitomir Jelenc, was a Slovenian journalist and writer, and his mother, Éléonore Ducray, originated from Franche-Comté, was born in Algeria. His life therefore began at the intersection of two cultures and two worlds.

Jelenc spent his childhood with his grandfather Louis Ducray in Rougemont, but left France after World War I

with his family for Bône (now Annaba), in French Algeria. He graduated from secondary school in Algiers in 1929 with a baccalauréat in Latin, science, and mathematics. From 1933-1934 he served in the French military in southern Tunisia where he was assigned to Sfax and Gabès. He subsequently returned to the university of Algiers and pursued studies in earth sciences and natural sciences. He earned a certificate in advanced studies in geology in 1935, another in zoology in 1936, and another in general chemistry in 1937, the year he received his bachelor's degree.

Féodor married Germaine Tabone, a mathematics teacher, on August 16, 1938, in Algiers and was mobilized to Tunisia again in 1939-1940.

In the early 1940s, he met Professor René Maire, who had been teaching botany at the Faculty of Sciences in Algiers since 1911. The meeting had a consequential impact on Féodor, who developed a passion for botany. In 1941, Féodor had obtained a certificate in advanced studies in botany, during a period when he was on leave from the military, and he wrote a dissertation on the anatomy of the *Aristida* L. (Poaceae) stem and leaf in North Africa, which he defended in 1942 before a jury that included René Maire, Charles Killian and Lucienne Gauthier-Lièvre. His dissertation was published in 1951 in the *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences naturelles du Maroc*. Maire's influence also inspired Féodor to write a biographical note on him (1950).

From 1942 to 1945, Féodor continued his military service in Algeria and Tunisia, at the rank of sergeant and then staff sergeant (May 1945). He participated in the landing in Provence and in the French campaign, including the battles of Belfort, Mulhouse, and Thann, crossing the Rhine, and operations in Germany. Between Germany's capitulation and his demobilization in August 1945, he was oversaw the administration of a Bavarian village but as he did not speak German he communicated through the village priest using botanical Latin.

After the war, Féodor's family life flourished. His first child, Pierre, was born in 1947, and a second son, René, was born in 1949. Between 1956 and 1959, during the war against the French, he was again mobilized in Algeria.



FIG. 1. — Féodor Jelenc at the desk in Tlemcen, 1940.

A TEACHER-BRYOLOGIST IN ALGERIA

From 1930 to 1932, Féodor Jelenc worked as the head of a boarding school in Constantine and from 1934 to 1937, he taught in Ben Aknoun, Constantine, and Blida. From 1937 to 1950, he got a teaching job at a middle-school and moved to the Tlemcen Madrasah. From 1950 to 1951, he taught at Guillemin High School in Algiers and from 1951 to 1962 at the Maison Carrée (now El-Harrach).

During a visit to Morocco and Tunisia, Féodor collected many plants. He maintained regular contact with the botany laboratory at the Faculty of Algiers, where he spent part of his summers and undertook an ambitious synthesis of the bryophytic flora of North Africa. He usually worked alone, contacting colleagues to clarify determinations or to seek documents. He compiled all the floristic data known at the time by hand, and prepared publications between 1945 and 1962 on the German typewriter he had used during the war.



FIG. 2. — Féodor Jelenc, 1947.

RETURN TO FRANCE

In 1962, after Algerian independence, Jelenc was forced to leave Algeria. In mid-July 1962, the family house at Maison Carrée (El-Harrach) was looted, and his herbarium and documents completely lost. The few specimens that were saved are preserved today at Clermont-Ferrand (CLF).

He was quickly appointed to a teaching position once in France, at the René Descartes High School in Châtellerault (in the Vienne), where he taught until his retirement in 1971. He was an active member of several learned societies, notably the Société des Sciences de Châtellerault, where he was president of the Botany section, the Société Botanique du Centre-Ouest (SBCO) (Botanical Society of the Centre-Ouest), and the Société d'échanges de Muscinées (SEM) (Society for the Exchange of Bryophytes) that had been created in France by Maurice Bizot and Paul Cuyinet, to establish links among bryologists by exchanging the material of species that were problematic, rare, or remarkable from a certain point of view. SEM remained active for many years (Lamy 2006) and Jelenc exchanged many of the specimens he had collected. He maintained relations with numerous bryologists, including M.A. Rogeon (Plat 2005), R.B. Pierrot (Peytoureau 2006), and J.-R. Wattez, as well as with the professors from the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle in Paris, P. Jovet (Bournérias &



FIG. 3. — Féodor Jelenc in Algeria, 1950.

Aymonin 1999), S. Jovet-Ast (Lamy 2007), and V. Allorge (Amigo 2017). He was also member of the Société Botanique de France (SBF) and the Association des Naturalistes de la Vallée du Loing. He participated in many SBCO and SBF fieldtrips and explored numerous regions of France. He preferred working in the western Massif Central, particularly in the Vienne basin, alone or accompanied by his wife.

SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

Jelenc's work on the bryophytes of North Africa was particularly significant. His most important publications include the *Muscinées de l'Afrique du Nord*, an annotated checklist of the bryophytes of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and the Sahara containing more than 600 bryophytes species with all published localities known to date. A supplement was issued in 1967. He benefited from the pioneering work of Louis Trabut (see biography: Maire 1929) in the third volume of *The Flora of*

Algeria (Battandier & Trabut 1888–1897) that Trabut never published but which included valuable information related to the bryoflora of Algeria.

Approximately 60 nomenclatural combinations are associated with Jelenc's name (Ros *et al.* 1999, 2007, 2013, 2024). These are mostly *nomen nudum* or *invalidum*. Some of the valid combinations have retained their names, but we must consider the types to be destroyed today (Cano *et al.* 2000) as they were lost with his herbarium. Some combinations are still widely used, notably *Acaulon triquetrum* var. *desertorum* (Besch.) Jelenc and *Entosthodon mouretii* (Corb.) Jelenc.

His contributions to the study of the bryological flora in the Tibesti region of Chad, and to the analysis of bryophytes in the Vienne basin are significant. *The Bryophytes of the Vienne Basin* (1971, 1975, 1979) are now essential for documenting the presence and distribution of bryophytes in the region whose natural habitats are now highly degraded. Jelenc also explored the genus *Sphagnum* L., contributing to our understanding of the species' diversity and habitats (1970, 1971).

As of the 1930s, Jelenc began to study Esperanto and collaborated on the botanical part of the complete illustrated dictionary of Esperanto (PIV: Plena ilustrita vortaro de Esperanto; Duc Goninaz & Roux 2005). He was a member of the Internacia Scienca Asocio Esperanta (ISAE) and the Universala Esperanto Asocio (UEA), serving as a delegate in Algeria and then in Châtellerault. In 1965, he published in Esperanto on bryophytes with the Esperanto cultural house in Baugé (Maine-et-Loire). He also corresponded in Esperanto about botany or geography widely, including with Claude Roux, a lichenologist from Marseille.

Féodor Jelenc died on August 9, 2001 at the age of 90, in Châtellerault, France.

HONORS

Féodor Jelenc was made an Officer of the Order of Academic Palms in 1961. He received the Gandoer Prize in bryology from the SBF in 1963. In 2012, in recognition of his involvement in the creation of the arboretum and botanical garden, the city of Châtellerault named a new street after him.

HERBARIA

A small part of Féodor Jelenc's original moss collection consisting of 12 320 specimens divided into 127 boxes is preserved at the Muséum Henri Lecoq in Clermont-Ferrand, which includes the herbarium that Féodor Jelenc acquired in the 1960s from Claude Sarrassat, a botanist from the Creuse in France. Each part of the Sarrassat herbarium is indicated by *ex herbier Claude Sarrassat*. The herbarium at the Muséum Henri Lecoq also contains numerous *exsiccata* from France or other exchange societies, and includes a significant number of specimens collected by Féodor Jelenc in many parts of France and abroad. There are only about 300 specimens from the Maghreb in the collection.

At least 312 specimens (some of which may not be computerized and therefore difficult to detect) bearing the mention Féodor Jelenc are in the herbarium of the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle in Paris. Some specimens, but not all, were collected by Féodor Jelenc, others were attributed to him but collected by others. The 312 specimens are classified in the herbarium of France, the general herbarium, and in the Potier de la Varde and Bizot collections, and include such mentions as Muscinées de l'Afrique du Nord and the Société d'Échange des Muscinées. Féodor Jelenc's original herbarium of North Africa (whose size is unknown numerical) is considered lost since the events of 1962.

LIBRARY

Féodor Jelenc's library is preserved at the Conservatoire botanique national de Bailleul in the Nord department (CBNBL 2022). Nothing remains of books and documents predating 1962.

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FIG. 4. — Féodor Jelenc, 1982.

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