

NOTES ON THE ALOES OF SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA.

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The Coryndon Museum Expedition to Southern Ethiopia and Somalia was organised to facilitate the investigation of *Euphorbia*, *Monadenium*, succulents, and general botanical collecting by Mr. P. R. O. Bally, and for the investigation and study of the genus *Aloe* by myself. Mr. A. Money-Kyrle accompanied us on Quelea and other research.

The species of *Aloe* recorded from Southern Ethiopia and Somalia had been imperfectly described, type material was scanty and incomplete, and there were no figures. Until I could visit type localities and study plants on the spot, I had little hope of ever being able to recognise or identify those species. My special interest therefore, was to visit those type localities, try and establish identities, write up full descriptions, secure photographs, and prepare herbarium material. In a short article such as this, notes must of necessity be very brief and sketchy, but descriptions of new species and full notes on identities, etc., with photographs, will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of South African Botany*.

The first part of our travels took us northwards to Isiolo, thence to Wajir and Moyale on the Ethiopian border. The termitaria north of Wajir were impressive, some of them being 6-9 feet broad at the base, and reaching 15 feet in height. (Fig. 1).

In Ethiopia we visited Mega and Yavello, while I went alone up to Agere Mariam. It was a surprise to find that *Aloe secundiflora* Engler (plentiful near the Athi River road bridge, 23 miles S.E. of Nairobi—where plants flower in April-May) occurred in numbers near Moyale and repeatedly along the road to Mega and up to Yavello, west of Yavello, but not seen east of Yavello on the road to the Daua Parma River (Fig. 2).

A distinctive new species with deeply channelled much recurved leaves, a paniculate inflorescence with dense racemes of clavate orange flowers was found in considerable quantities on arid plains 48 miles N.W. of Moyale (Fig. 3) and also north of Mega and Yavello. It was also noticed 14 miles south of Buna in Kenya. Many Aloes, found in full flower at Mega turned out to be *A. Rivae* Bak. (Fig. 4). This species also extends northwards to Yavello and beyond. *A. boranensis* Cufod. had been described from “near Dubuluch, coming from Yavello”, but certain plants found in that region, (about 26 miles north of Mega), which fitted the description, turned out to be crosses between *A. secundiflora* and what I believe is *A. otallensis* var. *elongata*.

Yavello proved a most interesting place. Another new species of *Aloe* was found there, a shrub, related to the East African shrubby Aloes, but



Fig. 1.

Termite mound, north of Wajir, Northern Province, Kenya.

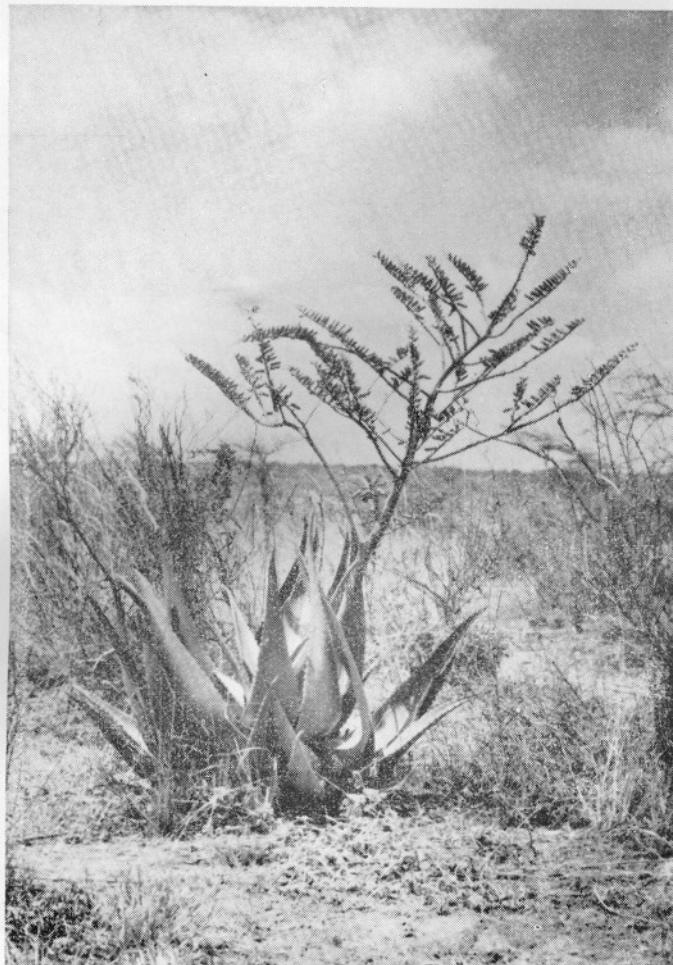


Fig. 2. *Aloe secundiflora* Engler 16 miles N.W. of Moyale, Borana, S. Ethiopia.



Fig. 3. *Aloe new sp.* 48 miles N.W. of Moyale, Borana, S. Ethiopia.

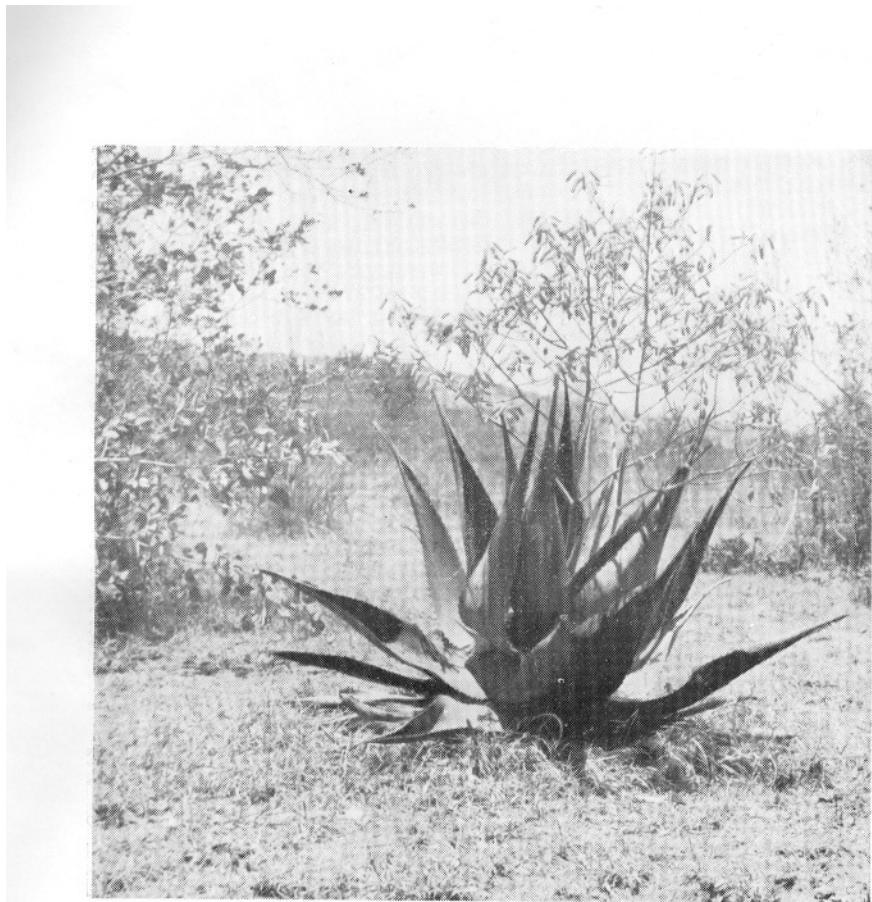


Fig. 4. *Aloe Rivaean* Bak. flowering at Mega, Borana, S. Ethiopia.



Fig. 5.

Termite chimney at Yavello, Borana, S. Ethiopia.



Fig. 6. *Aloe microdonta* Chiov. 20 miles S. of Bulo Burti, Somalia.

differing from them all in having copper-brown leaves, cylindric spotted flowers only 27mm. long, with 10mm. pedicels.

At Yavello Mr. Money-Kyrle secured about ten specimens of the rare bird *Zavattariornis stresemanni*, a species of crow, black, grey and white in plumage with leaden-blue bare skin around the eyes. Mr. John Williams tells me this rare bird is known only from the Yavello district and provides the link between the crows and the starlings.

Yavello is also famous for its great turritiform termitaria, reported to occur only in that region. I photographed one slender lofty specimen which was over 25 feet high (Fig. 5).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Yavello is a small circular building surrounded by a stockade of poles. The sloping roof is crowned with a horse-shoe shaped arrangement of wire threaded through eight or ten ostrich-egg shells, each shell being about one foot apart. One Ethiopian told me that the egg shells were merely ornaments; another said they were placed there to keep the devil away.

From Yavello the road leads eastwards, sloping gently down to the Daua Parma River, then it climbs up to Neghelli. Mr. Bally was overjoyed at finding a *Monadenium*, which might be *M. majus* described from Harar. Masses of plants were found, in full bloom, for 20 to 30 miles south of Neghelli, in country where no Aloe was found. From Neghelli south-eastwards to Dolo is not Aloe country, but Mr. Bally found much in the way of *Euphorbia* to interest him.

Near the Ganale Doria River in Ethiopia we ran across some baboons, the like of which I had never seen or heard of before. They had long shaggy hair around the shoulders, while the lower half of the body and hindquarters was flesh-coloured and devoid of hair. I don't know their name, but a good vernacular name for them would be the "Fur-cape baboon." (Probably *Hamadryas*—B.V.)

From Dolo we followed the road southwards to Lugh Ferrandi, thence to Iscia Baidoa where large quantities of the most attractive *Adenium somalense* were in full bloom. Some plants were 8-10 feet high, their clusters of brilliant deep red flowers decorating and enlivening an otherwise drab landscape.

Bardera, on the Juba River, was reached, and we headed southwards for Gelib and Margherita. This was an important area for me since it contained a few Aloe type localities. *A. microdonta* Chiov. was recognised at last. It is distinguished by having deeply channelled much recurved leaves, with a paniculate inflorescence with oblique to almost horizontal branches of laxly flowered racemes with secund red flowers. *A. Ruspoliana* Bak. (type locality Mil Mil in the Ogaden) was also found in numbers and it eventually transpired that this species and *A. Jex-Blakeae* from the Horr Valley, Kenya, are conspecific.

A. Stefaninii Chiov. is merely a form of *A. Ruspoliana*, while *A. defalcata* Chiov. proved to be a mixture of species, the channelled recurved leaves of *A. microdonta* having been mixed with the capitate yellow-flowered racemes of *A. Ruspoliana*.

A. Piottae Berger was found in several localities and so was *A. trichosantha* Berger var. *albo-picta* Schweinf.

A. Ellenbeckii Berger, described from along the Juba River south of Bardera, and as having flowers allied to those of the East African species *A. lateritia*, in the Section *Saponariae*, was not found anywhere. From what I have seen of the vegetation of the Juba River I doubt very much whether any *Aloe* sp. allied to *A. lateritia*, is to be found in those regions.

The tree, *Euphorbia Robecchi*, is common in parts of the coastal area, and is used at the saw mill near Kismayu for making slats for crating bananas for export to Italy.

Queleas are also giving the Italian agronomists much trouble in the irrigated lands along the Juba River near Gelib and Margherita, so much so that cereals can no longer be grown. One Italian told us that in 1946 he had 1,000 acres under rice. Then the Queleas came in flocks of millions, darkening the sun, and wiped out his entire crop in two days. He fired his shot-gun into the air, and with that one shot brought down no less than 634 birds. It is now clear that unless some scheme of Pan-African control is organised, and that soon, on lines similar to those of the Desert Locust Control, nothing less than a major disaster will overtake Africa's cereal cultivation, to say nothing of some of the grasses.

From Kismayu we journeyed up to Mogadishu, finding numbers of *A. microdonta*, and lesser quantities of *A. Ruspoliana* on the way. *Caralluma somalica*, with its dense heads of yellow flowers, was seen near Merca, not far from the sea.

We had hoped to press on to Hargeisa in Somaliland Protectorate, but got no further than Bulo Burti, 135 miles north of Mogadishu. Here, with broken springs, the rains imminent, and threatened with the real danger of being bogged down and cut off, we reluctantly decided to follow the dictates of wisdom, and turn back.

Returning to Kismayu and travelling via Beles Cogani and Liboi, we reached Garissa and Nairobi only one day before the rains came, and the closing of some coastal roads.

Our expedition had covered 3,750 miles, and I returned to Johannesburg, filled with gratitude that my investigations had been blessed with every success.

I am indebted to the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, for a travelling grant which made possible my *Aloe* investigations in Ethiopia and Somalia.