



---

What Is the Value of an Interrogation Mark in Plant Descriptions?

Author(s): A. J. G. H. Kostermans

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Taxon*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Feb., 1988), pp. 132-133

Published by: [International Association for Plant Taxonomy \(IAPT\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1220940>

Accessed: 27/07/2012 04:54

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT)* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Taxon*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

POINTS OF VIEW

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF AN INTERROGATION MARK IN PLANT DESCRIPTIONS?

A. J. G. H. Kostermans<sup>1</sup>

In context with a special case (the validity of the name *Systemonodaphne* Mez, Lauraceae), denied by Werff (1986), I should like to ponder the following questions:

1. What is the value of an interrogation mark in plant descriptions?
2. Should one follow the intention of the Rules or the wording?
3. Should the Rules be permitted to interfere with plant taxonomy, or should they keep their subordinate character of a tool?

*The Case*

Hamilton (1825) published a short, generalized description of *Laurus geminiflora* and stated that he had seen the plant alive on St. Kitts and Jamaica and herbarium material in the collection of Desvaux. No specimens have been located so far.

Meissner (1864, p. 102) assigned Hamilton's name with a question mark to the synonymy of *Goepertia geminiflora* Meissner and quoted material from British Guiana and Brazil, but not of Desvaux or Hamilton.

I agree with Howard (1981, p. 47) and Howard et al. (1981, p. 228), that Meissner not quoting any material of Hamilton or Desvaux, created the name of a *new* taxon and not a transfer of a basionym (cf. Article 48.1).

An interrogation mark in plant descriptions had and has the same value as the words: perhaps, possibly, might be, etc. The symbol is still used by me and has been in common use to indicate a doubtful synonym, not accepted as a synonym by me and others, simply meaning a suggestion.

If the validity of the question mark in the above should be denied, I shall in the future not be allowed to express in a discussion, that my new species might be conspecific with a plant, described earlier and valid, but be punished because I suggested that it might be conspecific with a plant whose name has priority making my new name invalid.

What is the basic philosophy of the Rules? Shall we follow the spirit or shall we behave like lawyers, looking for loopholes to punish taxonomists for things they never intended?

A simple recommendation should be sufficient, that in the future one should abstain from mentioning a non-accepted doubtful synonym in the neighborhood of the new species name, but discuss it elsewhere.

Kostermans (1936, p. 756) concluded that *Laurus geminiflora* did not correspond with either of the specimens quoted by Meissner under *Goepertia geminiflora* Meissner (by an oversight as noted by Howard, in my *Bibliographiae Lauracearum*, 1964, p. 527, it was erroneously stated that *L. geminiflora* Ham. was the basionym of *Goepertia geminiflora* Meissn., it is not).

Van der Werff thought that Hamilton's plant was not lauraceous, in which I disagree; there are many Lauraceae with a thickened leaf margin and in many the young fruit bears the style or part of the style apically.

Van der Werff quoted Article 55. 2 of the Code, to strengthen his arguments; according to Brummitt (Kew, in litteris) he should have quoted Article 34.2, but this says explicitly "yet published and accepted by the author." However, *L. geminiflora* Ham. was not accepted by Meissner, but suggested as a doubtful synonym.

<sup>1</sup> Herbarium Bogoriense, Bogor, Indonesia.

Article 48.1 says that an author who adopts a name refers to an apparent basionym but explicitly excludes the type, is considered to have published a new name that must be ascribed solely to him.

It all boils down to the question: Shall we accept the intention of the author or shall we accept the wording of the (mostly imperfect) Rules? I think that most scientists will accept the former attitude.

In conclusion I still stand by my own conclusion of 1936, also accepted by Howard, that *Systemonodaphne* Mez should be maintained and that *Kubitzkia* v.d. Werff is a superfluous name.

#### Literature Cited

- Hamilton, W. 1825. *Prodromus plantarum Indiae occidentalis*. London.
- Howard, R. A. 1981. Nomenclatural notes on Lauraceae of the Lesser Antilles. *J. Arnold Arb.* 62: 45–61.
- , K. S. Clausen and W. T. Gillis, Jr. 1981. William Hamilton (1783–1856) and the *Prodromus plantarum Indiae occidentalis*. *J. Arnold Arb.* 62: 211–242.
- Kostermans, A. J. G. H. 1936. Revision of Lauraceae I. *Recueil Trav. Bot. Néerl.* 33: 719–757.
- . 1964. *Bibliographiae Lauracearum*. Bogor, Indonesia.
- Meissner, C. 1864. Lauraceae. In: A. de Candolle, *Prodr.* 15(1): 1–260.
- Werff, H. van der. 1986. *Kubitzkia* van der Werff, a new name for a genus of neotropical Lauraceae. *Taxon* 15: 164–166.

## INCLUSION WITH DOUBT VS. EXCLUSION WITH DOUBT

Dan H. Nicolson<sup>1</sup>

Did the citation, in synonymy of *Goepertia geminiflora* by Meissner (1864), of an apparent basionym with an expression of doubt (query) of *Laurus geminiflora* W. Ham. (1825) constitute inclusion with doubt or exclusion with doubt? Circumstantial evidence for inclusion is that Meissner accepted the same epithet. Circumstantial evidence for exclusion is that Meissner's description and cited Brazilian specimens evidently do not pertain to West Indian *Laurus geminiflora* W. Ham., the latter still without a known type and possibly not lauraceous.

Art. 48.1 pertains and says, "... when an author [Meissner] who adopts a name [*Goepertia geminiflora*] refers to an apparent basionym [*Laurus geminiflora* W. Ham.] but explicitly excludes its type, he [Meissner] is considered to have published a new name that must be ascribed solely to him."

Art. 48.1 goes on to define explicit exclusion: "Explicit exclusion can be effected by simultaneous explicit inclusion of the type in a different taxon by the same author." It appears that what Meissner did constituted implicit, not explicit, exclusion of the type. As such, it appears that Meissner, with doubt, included rather than excluded this synonym.

The current language of Art. 48.1 dates from proposals made by Nicolson (*Taxon* 26: 569–574, 1977) in connection with a parallel case, whether *Mitracarpus hirtus* DC. (1830), excluded or included *Spermacoce hirta* L. when de Candolle cited, in his synonymy, "*S. hirta* [auct.] . . . et forte Linn."

The cases of *Goepertia geminiflora* and *Mitracarpus hirtus* involve what might be termed "inclusion with doubt." There is no difficulty publishing the name of a new taxon with discussion of earlier legitimate names that might pertain if the name of the new taxon has a stated type, as required by Art. 37.1 after 1 Jan 1958. It is a good idea not to use the same epithet as an earlier name that is discussed as a possible synonym. Even if this is done, one's name retains its type if one is clear that the apparent basionym is being "excluded with doubt" rather than being "included with doubt."

<sup>1</sup> Department of Botany, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560, U.S.A.