



## Translations

***Willows of the USSR and its rebirth as Willows of Russia and Adjacent Countries***

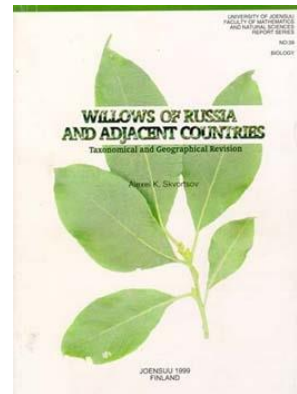
Irina Kadis

Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Boston, MA 02130, USA

Email: [irina\\_kadis@harvard.edu](mailto:irina_kadis@harvard.edu)

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I became possessed with the idea of making A.K. Skvortsov's 1968 monograph *Willows of the USSR* available in English in 1993, when I was nudged by the sight of the book, signed by the author, sitting uselessly on the shelf in the Arnold Arboretum Library, remaining incomprehensible for everyone, except those few privileged to read it in Russian. I thought if any Russian botanical books deserved to be introduced to the rest of the world, here was number one on the list. Equally useful for a novice and a seasoned professional, it contained a description of the author's original approach to the study of willows and a detailed account of morphology, ecology, geography, and hybridization processes in the Old World willows, embellished by many engaging examples, bold discussions, and a multitude of newly discovered facts organized in a logical system. The second part of the book was dedicated to the keys and descriptions of all willows found in the territory of the Soviet Union and adjacent countries. The list of territories encompassed by the book included all of the European countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Mongolia, North Korea, Northeast China, and even a part of North Africa. In addition, the book contained references to North American species, as some Eurasian willows are also distributed in North America or have closely related counterparts there. The broad approach makes the monograph truly encyclopedic. For those on the threshold of the fascinating world of willows, reading it can be a life-changing experience!



One such testimony comes from my life-long friend and husband, Alexey Zinovjev. A student of Leningrad University in the early 70's, Alexey was determined to familiarize himself with willows growing around Leningrad. Armed with a local Flora, he embarked on willow identification, yet soon was totally confused and discouraged. All his attempts were hopeless until he finally discovered the *Willows of the USSR*, Skvortsov's monograph, which quickly became his table, under-the-pillow and carry-around book. In fact it was his gateway to the

world of willows. Applying the approach described in the book, he gained his first victory on his field trip to northern European Russia. It took him just a week to conquer the difficult group and figure out all the species he could find in the Khibiny Mountains on the Kola Peninsula.

Following that breakthrough, Alexey returned to the challenging situation around Leningrad, this time much more confidently. He naturally became a fan and admirer of the monograph and its author and made quite a few trips from St. Petersburg to Moscow with the sole purpose of seeing Alexei Konstantinovich in person, showing willow collections to him, confirming his identifications, and asking questions. The professor never denied anyone who approached him seeking help and always found time for an in-depth consultation.

Alexey greeted the idea of “The Willow Book” translation with enthusiasm from the start and became the very first and most devoted supporter of this project. Indeed we still argue about whose idea this translation originally was! It turned out to be a complicated project. It began in 1993 and came to its conclusion only in 1999. In-between stretched seven years of work—not just mine but also of others from four different countries: Russia, Finland, Canada, and the US.

To begin with, it was not that simple for Alexey and me to combine our efforts, as at the time he was residing in Russia, in St. Petersburg, while I was living in Boston. In addition to the translation itself, the project involved many technical tasks, the most daunting of which was producing electronic versions of distribution maps for every willow described in the book. This was an engaging problem for Alexey, whose other specialty (in addition to biology) is programming and producing applications for biological projects. First of all, he visited A.K. Skvortsov in Moscow once more, asked permission to produce a translation of the willow monograph, received a blessing from the author, and borrowed the original maps from him. The weathered originals had been drawn in pencil on sheets of paper now yellowing and brittle with age. Apparently, scanning was not an option. Alexey had to produce electronic map versions and he enthusiastically accepted the challenge.

Meanwhile, I started working on the translation. Even though I had had some experience in translating botanical texts, I had never dealt with such a monumental assignment. Luckily, my very first clumsy steps were guided by the Arnold Arboretum Librarian and Archivist Sheila Connor and, later on, by the Arboretum Taxonomist Stephen Spongberg, for whom I was translating excerpts from a Russian monograph on mountain ashes. The historical essay on the study of willows, the chapter I started with, was the one that took me the longest time. After translating that chapter, I could proceed with more confidence.

When I reported to George Argus, the leading specialist on the North American willows, about this work, his first reaction was negative. From his perspective it was not needed, as another translation already existed. In support of his words, he sent me from Ottawa a bulky copy of the manuscript produced, at his request, by a Canadian translation bureau. Upon reading through a page or two, one could not help but think the translator had been very remote from any botany. George, however, argued that he could always guess what the translator meant and so the text was good enough for him. I was not so sure about guessing correctly after I noticed some things acquired opposite meanings in that translation, as compared to the original. After discussing a few examples, not only did George approve of a new translation, but kindly agreed to become a scientific editor. That's when another round of work on the text started.

I look at translation work as constructing a bridge between the two banks of an abyss, two cultures, two traditions of long standing, the translator being an ambassador of one to the other and vice versa. I was once summoned to a medical room at an elementary school in Boston, where a first grader from a Russian family was having an unexplained fit. I was told an innocent attempt to measure the boy's temperature by sticking a thermometer in his mouth had triggered such a sudden reaction. Both sides were scared and confused.

Surprises often surface when the two languages describing the same discipline are compared. It turns out, in an English speaker's mind, the word "florist" produces an association with an owner of a flower shop rather than a botanist studying a flora. An English-speaking botanist would be at a loss with the term *brachyblast*, a word commonly used in Russian botany for 'abbreviated shoot' and sounding deceptively international. While in Russian there is a difference between *ephemers* (annuals, mostly desert plants) and *ephemeroids* (perennials spending most of the year underground as bulbs or rootstocks), in English there is no such distinction: all are simply covered by *ephemers*. Even such seemingly straightforward cases as the choice between *pond* and *lake* can turn out to be unexpectedly tricky. In English a pond is a shallow body of water, either natural or artificial, where plants can root on the bottom. In Russian, a pond is always man made, while all natural bodies of water, either deep or shallow, are called lakes. In the Russian tradition, very many colloquial words have been deeply rooted in botanical terminology: *hairs* for *trichomes*, *sacks* for *perigynia*, *heads* for *capitula*, etc.

Dr. Argus analyzed the translation painstakingly and made me care about a whole realm of concepts I had previously overlooked, for example, about the fact that English terms describing two-dimensional objects, such as leaves, have their counterparts for three-

dimensional objects, such as fruits, e.g., *ovate* vs. *ovoid*, while the only word used in both cases in Russian translates as “egg-like.” On the other hand, each time when George was attempting to rewrite *Willows of the USSR*, I had to stand on guard and remind him that this was only a translation of what had been said. Frequent asymmetry (or else symmetry that was only implied, but not explicitly stated) of leads in Skvortsov's keys appeared to be especially problematic with English speakers. ”Just wondering why those older authors who did not strictly oblige to the symmetry requirement still produced so many useful keys that are so convenient to use, while contemporary, strictly dichotomous keys are often very difficult to apply to the real world!” commented Alexey Zinovjev when we were discussing this with him.

A.K. Skvortsov's memorable visit to the Harvard University Herbaria for the *Flora of China* Project marked a new stage of my work on the translation. Differently from Alexey, I had never met Alexei Konstantinovich in person and was anxious to get to know him, be able to show him the draft, and, of course, ask multiple questions regarding my interpretation of the text. I found him very approachable, easy-going, attentive, and extremely patient with all my questions—even though he was on a tough schedule. He spent a few evenings reading and criticizing the manuscript.

Among other things, we discussed a lack of symmetry in some couplets of his willow keys, and I promised that the keys would remain the way he had arranged them. I also remember him teaching me a tactful way of presenting Russian names in English: never attempt to “correct” a transliteration, keep it the way the person called herself/himself, be it Latinized, Germanized, or any other spelling. He used his own surname as an example, noting that another Russian botanist, his namesake, also mentioned in *Willows of the USSR*, used to transliterate his own name as 'Skvorzov,' so that the abbreviation *Skvorz.* in the book was not a typo.

As busy as he was, Skvortsov found time during a weekend to visit an art gallery and he asked me if I would accompany him. The day I went with Alexei Konstantinovich to Boston Fine Arts Museum is especially memorable. I had heard that the fine arts constituted Skvortsov's life-long passion, yet I could not anticipate the consequences. We entered the Museum as soon as it was open in the morning. Very soon I realized that Alexei Konstantinovich wanted to appreciate and imprint in his memory literally every single piece of art hanging on the walls of the museum. We were crawling from one painting to another, from one endless floor to another, spending no less than one or two minutes in front of each canvas, at times stopping for a long while. After some four hours, we devoured a very modest lunch on

a bench outside the Museum and sank right back into the depths of art. After another few hours, I was tempted to use every bench within reach, yet Alexei Konstantinovich, then in his 70's, seemed to be completely fresh and as excited with every new painting as he had been in the morning. I was considering sitting down on the floor when he finally asked if I didn't mind visiting the museum store, where he was hoping to purchase some reproductions for souvenirs. We left the museum store only when asked to do so. They were locking up, and we were the only remaining customers.

Following A.K. Skvortsov's departure, I continued my work on the translation with new energy. One foreseen difficulty was keeping a consistent approach to all botanic and geographic terminology and transliterations of hundreds of geographic names and proper names all the way through the long text. I had to compile a large list of geographic names, which served me well and later became an addition to the English text. As we all know, geographic names mentioned on historic herbarium sheets may be quite obscure local toponyms. Those little places they designate may have ceased to exist long ago. Besides, geographic names from Asia, especially Chinese place names, when spelled in Russian, may lose any similarity to either the original names or the manner they are depicted in English. To be able to find adequate English names, I had to first locate these places on Russian-language historic large-scale maps and then try and find them on similar maps produced in English. An old edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* proved to be my only source in many difficult cases, especially when dealing with old toponyms of Central Asia.

I never regretted spending much time on the geographic name research, as it resulted in a reference source, which has proved to be useful even standing on its own. I was happy to receive the following message from George Argus in 2002: "I have been looking up information on a type for a manuscript dealing with the PanArctic Flora. I have found the appendix of geographical and local names, which you wrote for the Skvortsov willow book, to be very useful in understanding Russian place names on old specimens. The work you did on that is enormous and I have made great use of it."

Even though the translation work was steadily progressing, the problem of finding a publishing house for such a special book remained unresolved for a long time. Finally, help came from Finland. Alexey's friends and colleagues from the Joensuu University—ecologists, entomologists and specialists on sawflies—were interested to see the renowned Russian willow book in English. Jorma Tahvanainen and Heikki Roininen made it possible for the translation to be included in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences Report Series. At the end of

1998 our work approached the final stage: we now had to produce the book layout. For this, Alexey and I were to meet in Finland. His trip from St. Petersburg was, however, much shorter than mine, from Boston. The Arnold Arboretum stepped in and helped by paying for my round trip across the Atlantic and providing a week of work time.

I remember Joensuu all sparkling with snow in the light from street lamps under the pitch-black skies. Daytime was short and inconspicuous and did not leave any memories. Nighttime was the most important time for us! Every night, long after the twilight had wiped out silhouettes of cyclists meandering across the snowy university campus and the faculty members had left the building, we unlocked its massive door, entered dark corridors, turned the lights back on, and started working on two computers available for our project at night, which worked well for me with my jet lag. I now have to reiterate that in addition to his entomological skills, Alexey happens to be a good programmer. A fan of WordPerfect, he was able to write macros in that language, so it was not a problem for him to move a map from one page to another at my request or re-generate the Latin Name Index for the tenth time, because *Salix abscondita* had now jumped from page 186 to 187! The two of us only had a week for all that, so I sincerely apologize to anyone who has noticed that Sect. 26 (Cheilophilae), while present in the book, is missing from the Contents. Yet we managed to complete the layout during that unforgettable week.

A few years ago Alexey Zinovjev was visiting a famous Finnish private garden featuring willows from across the world, literally all those that are able to withstand the Finnish climate! To Alexey's amazement, at some point in the conversation, the owner of this outstanding garden produced a copy of *Willows of Russia and Adjacent Countries*—all soiled, weathered, already falling apart, and with markings on every other page! We wished Alexei Konstantinovich could see this copy—as well as others that ended up in many different hands. The translation has been long out of print; however, all those who need the book can find it at *Salicicola*, where we have uploaded it with the permission of Joensuu University: <http://www.salicicola.com/announcements/Skvortsov1999.html>

## References

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