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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

CONCERNING LATER STARTING POINTS IN ALGAE

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Following the publication of a paper by F. C. Silva entitled "Later Starting points in Algae" (*Taxon* VII(7):181-184, 1958) there will be published another article by three Czechoslovakian bötanists, J. Komarek, E. Pouzar and J. Husicka, entitled "To the problem of later starting points in Algae", a typescript copy of which we have read through the courtesy of Dr. J. Husicka. Their article deals principally with the Cyanophyta. Our experience, of more than 40 years for the senior and 20 years for the junior author, is solely with the Desmidiaceae, and it is with regard to this group that we wish to discuss Silva's numbered paragraphs.

(1). "Later starting points violate two of the most basic principles of the Code, namely, priority of publication and the type method". Surely this objection must have been raised, considered, and settled long ago when Balb's 1848 was selected as the starting point for desmid nomenclature and inserted in the Code. Why bring it up again?

(2). "Later starting points create nomenclatural confusion through divergent interpretations of their application". With all due respect to Dr. Silva, it should be mentioned that he is not a specialist on desmids. In this group of plants the 1848 starting point has not created any confusion; on the contrary it has greatly reduced the possibility of confusion. Among our circle of friends who are skilled desmidiologists we do not know of anyone who would want this date changed, and we should be greatly surprised if any other specialists ^{on this group of plants} ~~vote~~ vote in favor of changing. For desmids Silva refers to Nordstedt, and we also refer to two papers (Medwigia 32, 1893 and Botaniska Notiser 1906) by this illustrious phycologist, who had a long lifetime of experience with desmids. We do not think that Silva has succeeded in any way in controverting Nordstedt's reasoning. So we need to fight once more against attempts, such as G. Kuntze's Revisio Generum Plantarum and others, to reinstate long abandoned and forgotten names. Or should we go back to the time before Balb's 1848, when some of his contemporaries believed that desmids were animals, because some of them

possess a slight power of movement. That would indeed result in confusion, and would be almost catastrophic for the systematics of desmids.

(3) and (4). Silva cites some nomenclatural problems in the algae resulting from the application of Art. 13, in which desmids are not involved. They have been discussed by the Czechoslovakian botanists.

(5). "Later starting points have seldom been used by specialists of the groups concerned, let alone by general taxonomists of algae". In the case of desmids we think this is not correct. So far as we know, all the best desmidiologists during the last 40 or 50 years have used Nalfe 1848 as the starting point. There are, of course, a few individuals who express their disagreement with the Code in such ways as by using the generic name Synozysa instead of Rebusina, though the latter has been a nomen conservandum for 25 years or more. Quite recently P. Brouet and W. Bailly, (Butler Univ. Bot. Stud. III, 1956) have revived the long-forgotten specific name of Cylindrocystis "cylindrospora" (from Falsella cylindrospora Fréb. 1835) instead of the generally known C. brebissonii Menegh. 1838 that has been used for more than 120 years, and was also used by Nalfe though he thought the plant was a Fenium. We regard these and similar examples as bad practices that should be condemned.

(6). In this paragraph Silva discusses typification and recommends 1753 as the starting point for all algae. Desmids and most other microscopic algae are typified by descriptions and illustrations, the latter being by far the more important. According to W. & G. S. West, the earliest recorded descriptions and figures of British desmids are found in Willughby's British Conserveae 1809; Smith's English Botany 1790-1814; and some others of later date. Nordstedt's Index, p.288, lists the desmid genera in chronological order, the first few items being: 1774, "Corpicetti a bacello" Corti; 1781, "Der halbe Mond" Eichhorn; 1784, Vibrio sp. Muller; 1802, "Conferve inédite" Girard-Chantr.; and then the first generic name - Achinella Achar. 1810. This proved untenable, however, and so the first genus recognized today is Blosterium Nitzsch 1817. So it would be quite useless, even senseless, to make 1753 the starting date for desmid nomenclature, since none of them received botanical names until half a century later. Nalfe 1848 was the first work to publish any considerable

number of good illustrations of desmids, and that is why his work was selected as the starting point for desmid nomenclature. Writing 56 years later, H. & M. S. West in the preface to their monograph on British Desmidiaceae referred to Ralfs' work as "this classical volume", and stated "Ralfs' book stands today as the only monograph extant containing accurate figures of these simple plants".

It seems to us that the study of the Code itself has become an independent discipline and a hobby of some scientists, quite distinct from the taxonomic study of the plants themselves, but apparently considered of equal importance. However, the nomenclatural rules are intended only as a helpful means by which the classificatory system can be built up more easily, correctly and consistently.

In conclusion we recommend most strongly that Silva's proposal should be rejected insofar as desmids are concerned. It should not be allowed that persons who are not thoroughly familiar with the systematy of desmids should have the right of deciding how taxonomical questions in this group of algae are to be treated by the Botanical Congresses.