

*Moravian Botany – The Scientific Legacy of the Moravian Church's Global Network*

The uniformity of Moravian settlements worldwide is reflected not only in liturgy and social practices such as the choir system, but also in the development of a global botany. The significant scientific legacy of the Moravian Church has thus far received little attention.

Botany played a vital role in the various local congregations and the global mission. Between 1750 and 1920, well over 150 people worked as botanical collectors, creating their own herbarium collections, compiling local floras for Gemeinorte and mission stations, and documenting, often for the first time, the flora of specific regions – from the Himalayas, Greenland, and Suriname to places like Gnadau, Herrnhut, and Niesky (Germany), or Christiansfeld (Denmark), and Gnadenfrei (Poland/Silesia, formerly Germany). For some regions, the local floras were updated up to five times. This document the historically occurring changes in the natural environment. The corresponding material evidence of dried plants represents botanical sources of the highest quality and scientific standards.

Some of the involved members of the Moravian Church described (in European science) new species, or newly named plant species and genera were named in their honor. Today, a multitude of botanical manuscripts and objects are housed in archives and natural history collections worldwide, representing significant, untapped sources for research into historical biodiversity. Their sheer volume also underscores that religious communities are an integral part of the “scientific legacies of colonialism” (Subramaniam 2024, Schiebinger/Swan 2005, Groove 1995) and of a supposedly “secular” modern knowledge formation.

This presentation examines aspects of botanical practice and provides an initial summary assessment of Moravian botany. It is based on preliminary findings from the German BMFTR-funded collaborative project, *Natural Science and Protestant Mission — the Plant Collections of the Moravian Church in the Herbarium of the TU Dresden: Identification and Contextualization with Methods of the Digital Humanities*.