

In memoriam

Prof. Dr. Radiša Jančić
(1951 – 2018)



Radiša Jančić, a professor of botany at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Belgrade, was born on June 18, 1951 in Bela Crkva, where he attended elementary school. After graduating from a gymnasium in Novi Sad, he studied at the Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Belgrade (Department of Biology), from which he received his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees.

In January of 1975, he joined the staff of the Institute of Botany at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Belgrade. He defended his master's thesis [entitled "*Morphophysiological Research on the Species *Embellisia didymospora* Munt.-Cvetk. (*Hyphomycetes, Dematiacetae*)*"] in 1976 and was engaged as an assistant in 1978.

In 1984 he defended his doctoral dissertation [entitled "*Taxonomic Investigation of the Genus *Mentha* L. (*Lamiaceae*) on Territory of the Republic of Serbia*"]. After earning his PhD, he was elected a scientific associate in 1987, an associate professor in 1990 and a full professor in 1999. During the period between 2000 and 2016, he served as Head of the Department of Botany at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Belgrade.

As an assistant and as a professor until his retirement, Radiša Jančić was loved and appreciated at both

the Faculty of Pharmacy and his home Faculty of Biology, where during the 90's as a visiting professor he delivered some of the lectures for the courses Evolution and Phylogeny of Plants and Fungi; and Principles of Taxonomy and Nomenclature. He was an outstanding lecturer with a wide classical education, one of the "old school" of teachers whose presence and speech alone were enough to fully hold the attention of students.

On arrival at the Institute of Botany in 1975, Radiša Jančić joined investigators engaged in extensive research on medicinal and aromatic plant species, especially representatives of the families Apiaceae and Lamiaceae, as part of work on the topic "*Distribution of Coumarins and Essential Oils among Some Plant Species in Connection with Their Taxonomy*". These investigations were carried out within the framework of fruitful 10-year (1974-1985) cooperation between the Institute of Botany at the Faculty of Pharmacy and the Komarov Botanical Institute in Leningrad, and under auspices of the Council of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

This collaboration resulted in numerous scientific papers treating the morphology, anatomy and second-

ary metabolites (coumarins and essential oils) of plants belonging to the genera *Seseli*, *Peucedanum* and *Libanotis* from the family Apiaceae, as well as the genera *Calamintha*, *Acinos*, *Micromeria* and *Satureja* from the family Lamiaceae, on territory of the entire former Yugoslavia.

For many years he conducted research on taxonomy, morphology of vegetative and reproductive organs, features of pollen grains and the phenomenon of hybridisation in the complex genus *Mentha*. He found and described a species new to science – *Mentha serbica*. With collaborating chemists, he later investigated the variability of essential oil in the genus *Mentha*. In the period from 1986 to 1990, Professor Jančić managed the subproject “*Botanical and Phytochemical Research on Spontaneous Species of the Genus Mentha L. in SR Serbia*” within the project “*Study of Medicinal Herbs and Physiologically Active Substances*”.

After 1976, Professor Radiša Jančić participated in basic projects of the Ministry of Science realised by workers at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Belgrade. In so doing, he collaborated with associates from the faculty, primarily with colleagues from the Department of Pharmacognosy. The main objectives of these projects were to investigate the ecological and physiological properties of plants, with an emphasis on their active substances and definition of their medicinal potential.

As a researcher toward the end of his career, he was interested in interpreting the biological importance of secondary metabolites, primarily essential oils, in the life of plants. What is the significance of secondary metabolites for the plant, what advantages in natural selection and evolution do they ensure, why do some plants contain a large amount of specific metabolites and others none at all, are just some of the questions that he was trying to answer. Attempts to get the answers to many of these questions were embedded in scientific goals of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations that under his mentorship were defended by graduate students at the Department of Botany of the Faculty of Pharmacy.

As an authority on the flora of the Balkan Peninsula, for more than 30 years he was a member of the Committee on Flora and Vegetation of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), in addition to which he belonged to the Organisation for Phyto-Taxonomic Investigation of the Mediterranean Area (OPTIMA).

He authored a number of publications on various aspects of the use of plants, as well as several noteworthy popular science novels. In these books, he successfully connected botany, mythology, history and art, thus giving readers the opportunity to enter into the world of his interests and gain an insight into the extent to which we are related to and dependent on plants. With these very important publications, Professor Jančić became recognised beyond the circle of the scientific botanical

community. Based on his novel about the history of botany, a dramatic-documentary series was broadcast on national television, which also contributed to the popularisation of botany as a science.

Professor Radiša Jančić passed away on November 8, 2018 in Belgrade, his death ending the life of a prominent personality and the career of a significant teacher and scientist. He will be indelibly remembered by the generations of students and colleagues who were privileged to work with him.

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