

THE IDENTITY OF MICRANTHUS
SERPYLLIFOLIUS ROTH¹

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Recently I got the opportunity of examining a specimen from the "Rijksherbarium", Leiden, which was provided with a label on which ROTH had written in the middle the name of the plant, viz. "*Micranthus serpyllifol*-Roth" and in the lower right corner the name of the collector, viz. "Heyne"; in the lower left corner another hand had added "Ind. or. Hb. Roth". As the specimen proved to answer the description of *Micranthus serpyllifolius* given on p. 282 of ROTH's "Novae Plantarum Species, Halberstadt 1821," there can be little doubt that it is either the type of this species or else a duplicate of the latter. This is the more important as none of the authors who in the past ventured an opinion with regard to the taxonomic position of ROTH's species, apparently had seen the type.

ROTH's specimen was inserted in the Leiden Herbarium under the name *Andrographis serpyllifolia* R.W. (*Acanthaceae*), but this is obviously a misidentification, for *Andrographis serpyllifolia* does not fit ROTH's description. The plant described by the latter has smaller and less numerous leaves and its flowers are arranged in terminal spikes instead of solitary or a few together in the axils of ordinary leaves.

It is noteworthy that similar errors have been committed by other botanists. STEUDEL (Nomenclator, ed. 2, 32, 1841) referred ROTH's species to the genus *Aetheilema* R. Br., which is a synonym of *Phaulopsis* Willd., and the Index Kewensi (III, 228, 1894) reduced it to *Phaulopsis parviflora* Willd., which is *Ph. imbricata* (Forsk.) Sweet. According to the description ROTH's plant differed from this species inter alia in the much smaller leaves and spikes, the presence of a single flower in the axil of each bract and of two large bracteoles at the base of each flower; the latter are the "calyx diphyllus" of ROTH's description; his "corolla superne angustata, labio superiore trifido, inferiore integro" is the calyx; the petals, which are very small and inserted on the calyx tube, were overlooked by the author.

The plant described by ROTH is no *Acanthaceae*, but represents, as

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was already recognized by NEES, who mentions it in his monograph of the *Acanthaceae* (in DC, Prodr. XI, 262, 1847) with the words "omnino non extricanda, sed certe non huius ordinis", an entirely different family. In fact, it proved to belong to the *Lythraceae* (*Lythraea Lythrinae*), and to be identical with the species described by WIGHT (Icon. I, tab. 257, 1840) under the name *Ameletia tenuis*. The specific epithet of the latter therefore will have to be replaced by that of ROTH's species. The position of this species in the genus *Ameletia* DC is somewhat uncertain, but it belongs without doubt to the species that CLARKE in HOOKER's "Flora of British India" (II, 567, 1879) referred to *Ammannia* L. but which KOEHNE (in Bot. Jahrb I, 177, 1880) placed, in *Rotala* L. As this seems preferable, I will follow KOEHNE's example. The correct name for ROTH's species therefore becomes ***Rotala serpyllifolia*** (Roth) Brem. and *Ameletia tenuis* R.W., *Ammannia tenuis* (R.W.) Clarke and *Rotala tenuis* (R.W.) Koehne are reduced to synonyms of the latter.

It is comparatively easy to see how the misconception of ROTH's species arose. The trouble started with STEUDEL, who overlooked the fact that ROTH's *Micranthus* was an entirely new genus, and by no means identical with the genus *Micranthus* previously described by WENDLAND, a description that apparently had escaped ROTH's attention. ROTH's generic description does not at all agree with that of WENDLAND's genus, and the fact that ROTH gave a generic description and that he added an etymological explanation of the name, should in itself have been enough to show that an entirely new genus was meant, for when he made use of generic names introduced by other botanists, descriptions and etymological remarks were always omitted. STEUDEL's mistake was recognized a few years later by NEES (l.c.), but the latter's criticism has apparently always been overlooked; at least neither in the Index Kewensis nor in De Dalla Torre and Harms the genus *Micranthus* Roth is mentioned.

The genus *Micranthus* Wendl. is identical with *Phaulopsis* Willd. and with *Aetheilema* R.Br.; in fact it is the oldest name for this taxon, which is now known as *Phaulopsis*, because botanists of a later period were of opinion that this name ought to be conserved. STEUDEL's erroneous assumption that *Micranthus* Roth was identical with *Micranthus* Wendl., induced him to transfer ROTH's species to the genus *Aetheilema*. He mentions it in his list of species under the name *Aetheilema? Rothii* Steud. As stated above, it was recognized already by NEES that ROTH's species could not belong to this genus and that it was not even an *Acanthacea*, but as he was unable to assign it its proper place, his remark fell into oblivion, and this explains how the Index Kewensis fifty years later accepted STEUDEL's reduction as essentially correct; as the genus *Phaulopsis* is apparently represented in India by one species only, viz. the plant known at that time as *Ph. parviflora*, it quite erroneously reduced ROTH's species to the latter.