A NEW ORIGANUM FROM THE ISTHMIC DESERT (SINAI): ORIGANUM ISTHMICUM SP.N.

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ABSTRACT
A new species of Origanum (of Sect. Euoriganum Benth.) from the northern Isthmic Desert (Sinai) confined to hard limestone cliffs, 500–600 m above sea level is described. It differs from other related species of the above section by its solitary axillary flowers and by its leaf-like bracts.

Origanum isthmicum* Danin sp. nov. Ab O. vulgari L. differt habitu sphaerico, per anthesin ramificationibus intricatis non ascendentibus; bracteis foliis caulinis conformibus, ab eis colore formaque non differentibus; floribus in bracteis axillaribus, non in spiculis multifloris dispositis.

Dumulosa, 10–50 cm alta, hieme fere glabra, aesteae parce puberula. Folia et ramuli juveniles glandulosos-punctati. Caules numerosi, intricate ramosi, eorum partes hiemales glabrae. Folia subsessilia, late ovato-cordata; hiemalia glabra, 4–7 mm longa et lata; aestivalia (praesertim facie superiore) puberula, 2–3 mm longa et lata. Rami et ramuli aestivales parce puberuli, eorum apices (usque ad 1–3 cm) floriferi, cymos gerentes. Bracteae calycem aequantes, foliis aestivalibus magnitudine et indumento similes. Flores singuli, axillares, brevi-pedicellati. Calyx tubulosus, regularis, 1.5–2 mm longus extus hirsutus, glandulosos punctatus, faux intus villosa; dentes 5, aequales, anguste triangulari-subulati, tubo breviores.

Corolla exserta, ochracea, post anthesin cinnamomea, extus puberula, 3 mm longa; corollae limbus sub-bilabiatus, lobi inferiores 0.8 mm longi, superiores subaequales. Stamina distantia subincisa, aequilonga, 0.8 mm longa, filamentorum bases aequidistantes; antherae biloculares loculis distinctis divergentibus. Stylus apice inaequaliter bifidus. Nuculae fuscae, laeves, obovatae, apice obtusae, basi acutiusculae, 1 mm longae.

Vernacular name: Za'atar.


* After Isthmic Desert (Tih Desert)
Received July 7, 1969
Fig. 1. *Origanum isthmicum* Danin. a — summer branch; b — winter branch; c — flower

*O. isthmicum* should be included in Sect. *Euoriganum* Bth., because of its nearly equal calyx teeth and the medium sized bracts.

*O. isthmicum* differs from the other oriental species of the section which have a subincluded corolla tube (e.g., *O. vulgare* L.)* by being a chamaephyte and not a hemicyryptophyte. Its flowers are solitary in axils and not in spikes.

Ecologically, it is found in a more arid climate (about 100 mm of rainfall) than the other species of the section. However, it grows in crevices of flat smooth-faced rocks receiving additional runoff water (cf. Danin, 1967a).

Such habitats within desert areas seem well-adapted to preserve relics of former mesic floras from more humid periods (cf. Danin, 1967b). In fact, the association of *O. isthmicum* with Mediterranean plants such as *Juniperus phoenica*, *Astoma*

* Of the related species mentioned in this section by Boissier (1879) only *O. vulgare* L. is accepted by other authors as a valid species.
seselisfolium and Fumana thymifolia, as well as its taxonomic position and geographical isolation, suggest its being a relic species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the useful critical comments of Dr. J.H. Ietswaart of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Prof. M. Zohary, Dr. C.C. Heyn and Dr. I. Grünberg. I also wish to thank Mrs. E. Huber for the drawings.

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