

VAVILOV'S FOUR CONTINENTS

Vavilov, N. I., 1997: *Four Continents*. International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, Rome, 198 pages, ISBN 92-9043-302-7.

It is rather rare that a book with a scientific stuff is read as a novel. This was actually my case when I got an envelope from IPGRI Rome and after opening it I recognized an excellent portrait of the Russian botanist, geographer, explorer, etc. N. I. Vavilov, who spent many months in his life in expedition in four continents searching for wild relatives of cultivated plants. As it is well known, these were the bases for his theory of homologous variation and centres of diversity.

The book "Five Continents" contains descriptions by Academician N. I. Vavilov of the expeditions he made between 1916 and 1940 to five continents, in search of new agricultural plants and confirmation of his theories on plant genetic diversity.

In comparison with the original Russian edition (Nauka, Moskva, 1987) the English translation is completed with new chapter "The Russian Scientist Nicolay Vavilov" written by S. Rzeznik and Y. Vavilov (the son of the N.I.V.) describing his life including the last years of his fight against Lysenko's pseudoscience until his arrest in 1940.

As it is obvious from the English edition Vavilov was not only a excellent scientist but also a good photographer. Many

of the photos which "survived" in hidden places are very good examples of Vavilov's search not only for seeds of wild relatives of cultivated plants but his expeditions also had a broader aspect to show, *i.e.* the life of people and farmers in remote countries. It is really a pity and unpayable loss for human heritage that some of the manuscripts are missed after the second world war and thus the book is not complete in the present form. The chapters describing the expeditions to Central and North America are missing and lost for ever.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Nicolay Ivanovich Vavilov (1887-1943) on the anniversary of his birth. Thanks are also due to the IPGRI Rome who made efforts to translate and publish this book in English and to make it accessible to that part of the world where Russian is not a mother tongue or a familiar language. Although, the content of this book is not very relevant to geneticists or breeders of forest trees, I sincerely recommend this book as a nice reading to all of them.

Ladislav Paule, Zvolen (Slovakia)