A BOTANICAL GORDIAN KNOT: THE CASE OF *ATERAMNUS* AND *GYMNANTHES* (EUPHORBIACEAE)

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The taxa of the Euphorbiaceous tribe Hippomaneae (sensu Webster, 1975) still present notoriously difficult problems in generic delimitation, despite the revisionary efforts of Mueller (1866), Baillon (1874), Bentham (1880), Pax and Hoffmann (1912), and others. This is especially true of the complex of taxa with highly reduced flowers which Baillon (1874) reduced to the single genus *Excoecaria.* Although Rogers (1951) achieved an acceptable differentiation between *Sapium* and *Stillingia,* the demarcation lines between *Actinostemon, Gymnanthes, Sebastiania,* and some smaller genera remain uncertain. This problem in classification is exacerbated by some nomenclatural difficulties, among which the status of *Gymnanthes* is most critical.

Rothmaler (1944) initiated a still unresolved nomenclatural crisis by resurrecting the generic name *Ateramnus* P. Browne (1756), based on a Jamaican plant that Rothmaler identified with *Gymnanthes lucida* Sw. Since *Ateramnus* is a validly published earlier name, Rothmaler argued that it should be adapted for the genus currently known as *Gymnanthes* Sw. (1788). Recently, this suggestion of Rothmaler's has been taken up by Adams (1970, 1972) and by Gillis (1974), who apply names under *Ateramnus* to species heretofore treated under *Gymnanthes.* Gillis avowedly follows the lead of Dandy (1967), who in his index of generic names published between 1753 and 1774 listed *Ateramnus* in such a manner as to imply that it has priority over *Gymnanthes.* This has created a confusing situation in the current literature, because some botanists have followed Adams and Gillis in adopting *Ateramnus* (Correll, 1979; Tomlinson, 1980), whereas others continue to use *Gymnanthes* (Fournet, 1978; Elias, 1980). Little (1979), in his most recent index to the names of North American trees, judiciously declines to accept *Ateramnus* in place of *Gymnanthes* until this nomenclatural conflict is resolved.

One solution to this problem might be to propose *Gymnanthes* for conservation. However, as noted by Gillis (1974), conservation of Swartz's generic name has already been rejected once by the Special Committee for Pteridophyta and Phanerogamae (Taxon 3: 241. 1954). The deciding factor in that vote may have been doubt that *Ateramnus* and *Gymnanthes* are synonyms. Long before Rothmaler's article, Hallier (1918) concluded that it is highly doubtful that *Ateramnus* was based on the plant Swartz called *Gymnanthes lucida.* This may be seen clearly by comparing the characteristics of Swartz's species with the brief description of Browne (1756: 339):

ATERAMNUS 1. *Foliis oblongis, levissime crenatis, alternis*; *spicis singularibus, ad alas.*
The *Ateramnus,* with oblong crenated leaves. *Flores alii masculini, alii feminini, in iisdem spicis.* Mares *plurimi, conferti, quadristaminei*: feminae *pauciores, tribus stylis praeditae, & ad basim spicae sitae. An, ad* Sapiam *referri debet*?

As Hallier indicates, and comparisons with specimens and the detailed descriptions of Fawcett and Rendle (1920) confirm, none of the Jamaican species of *Gymnanthes* match this description. In particular, it is clear that *Ateramnus* cannot be based on *Gymnanthes lucida,* in which the solitary basal pistillate flower is long-pedicellate and scarcely appears to belong to the same inflorescence as the staminate flowers. *Gymnanthes glandulosa* (Sw.) Muell. Arg. can be ruled out because of its terminal spikes, and *G. elliptica* Sw. must be eliminated as a candidate because of its unisexual spikes with 1-flowered staminate bracts. Other Jamaican Hippomaneae can be eliminated from consideration because they have terminal or unisexual spikes.

The discrepancies between Browne's description and the characters of Jamaican Hippomaneae create a difficult situation to resolve. One can readily sympathize with Hallier's conclusion that *Ateramnus* must be consigned to the limbo of dubious names. However, in the interest of nomenclatorial stability it seems desirable to select as a neotype for *Ateramnus* the Jamaican species of Hippomaneae that can most easily be reconciled with Browne's description. In this connection, it is notable that Browne himself questioned whether *Ateramnus* might not be the same as *Sapium,* which was described from the facing page. The type species, *Sapium jamaicense* Sw., scarcely differs from the description of *Ateramnus* except in its distally clustered pseudo-terminal spikes. Occasionally, however, the spikes

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in *S. jamaicense* may be separated by well-developed internodes, and then may appear axillary; such specimens would correspond well to *Ateramnus* except for the stamen number.

In conclusion, a review of the evidence furnished by inspection of the Jamaican Hippomaneae described by Browne and by Swartz shows that *Gymnanthes lucida* Sw. should be regarded as the lectotype of *Gymnanthes* Sw. but not of *Ateramnus* Browne. The preponderance of the evidence leads me to cut the gordian knot of this nomenclatural tangle by designating *Sapium jamaicense* Sw. (i.e., *Sapium arboreum foliis* etc. Browne) as neotype for *Ateramnus* [according to Fawcett and Rendle (Fl. Jam. 4: 325. 1920) the type specimen of *Sapium jamaicense* Sw. is the specimen from Jamaica, *Swartz s.n.* (BM)]. *Ateramnus* thus becomes an exact nomenclatural, as well as taxonomic, synonym of the simultaneously published *Sapium.*

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