

EMILIO CHIOVENDA



Emilio Chiovenda was one of the most renowned and authoritative Italian botanists, whose name is strictly linked to both the flora of Northern Italy and the succulent plants, that he studied extensively.

Born in Rome on 18 May 1871, his family originated in Premosello (now Premosello-Chiovenda), a little village in Ossola Valley, (Verbania province); he obtained a degree in natural history in

1898. He was immediately attracted by the plants and botany, and was soon appointed curator of the botanical collections of the Rome University by professor Pirrotta. In those days he worked with Pirrotta to a never finished *Flora Romana*.

At the same time the first material from Africa were brought to Italy by various expeditions. Prince Eugenio Ruspoli explored twice Ethiopia and Somalia, the second time in 1893 with Domenico Riva, when *Caralluma rivae* was discovered. Professor Achille Terracciano, of the Sassari University, went with Agostino Pappi to Eritrea, there finding *Caralluma dicapuae*. These and other materials, and the contemporary establishment of a *Colonial Herbarium* in 1904 absorbed Chiovenda most of his time. In 1909 he was appointed professor in Botany and in 1915 moved to Florence where in the meantime the herbarium was moved too. In 1926 Chiovenda moved again to Catania, then to Modena three years later and, at last, to Bologna in 1935. He had a deep knowledge of the tropical flora, especially that of East Africa, but worked also to the Mediterranean flora and that of the Piedmont Alps. In 1909 travelled to Africa, particularly to Eritrea with the Ostini expedition, visiting areas such as Tigré, Tzelemti, Semièn, Uogerà and Dembia. Nonetheless he felt much more at ease when working at home on herbarium materials and, as Rowley (1997) states «over-reliance on herbarium fragments... required some drastic alterations later and left unsolved mysteries».

Working on the materials collected by Stefanini-Paoli in Somalia (1913) he was able to describe some five hundred new species and several genera. The subsequent expedition by Stefanini-Puccioni produced more important collections, including some 30 new species in the genus *Commiphora*.

He studied also plants collected in Kenya, Harar and Somalia by Robecchi Bricchetti, in Ruvenzori and Uebi-Scebeli by Duca degli Abruzzi, Ogaden and Somalia again by prince Ruspoli, and more. As far as the botany of Italy is concerned, Chiovenda found many exceedingly rare illustrations from ancient herbals, studied the *Hortus Hiemalis* and wrote well documented monographs on the coconut palm and the papyrus. Emilio Chiovenda was the only Italian contributor to White & Sloane's *The Stapelieae*, published in three volumes in 1937, still one of the most important works on these plants.

He wrote 141 contributions, and authored 250 parts in the Enciclopedia Italiana. His production on the flora of Eritrea and Ethiopia is impressive (230 new species), and on that of Somalia, his *Flora Somala* in three volumes (1929, 1932, 1936) being possibly his most important work. Chiovenda studied the floras of Indonesia, Kenya and New Zealand too. Among the species that he described is *Euphorbia turbiniformis* a sought after rarity. His name is commemorated in the genus *Chiovendaea* C. Spegazzini (1917). Emilio Chiovenda died on 19 February 1941, and was buried in Premosello.