

WALRAVENS, HARTMUT (2024): Joseph Francis Rock: Travels in Eastern Tibet. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden (Asien- und Afrika-Studien der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Band 61). 193 pp, 4 photographs, 1 map. ISBN 978-3-447-12186-6 (paperback, 48 €), 978-3-447-39524-3 (e-book).

This volume represents Walraven's latest contribution on the explorer, plant hunter and Nazi specialist, Joseph Rock (1884-1962). Rock was born in Vienna, which was then the capital of a multinational empire. So, at an early age, he was exposed to a range of languages. At the age of six his dotting mother died, and he was brought up by his authoritarian father and older sister, who wanted him to become a priest. To escape this fate, he ran away from home in his late teens, travelling Europe for some time before emigrating almost by accident to the USA in 1905. He finally settled in Honolulu in 1907, where he worked tirelessly on the Hawaiian flora. Although he had no formal training in botany, he was appointed Professor of Systematic Botany in 1919. In 1920 Rock was sent by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to look for *Hydnocarpus kurzii*, which was considered useful in combating leprosy. He sailed to Singapore, and caught a train to Bangkok. From there he travelled to Khorat (NE Thailand), where he found a related species (*H. anthelmintica*). Not content with this discovery, he continued on to Chiangmai (N Thailand), where he chartered a houseboat to sail down the Mae Nam Ping River to Tak. A long overland journey to Burma followed. Finally in tiger-infested country in the Sagaing Region he discovered mature fruits lying on the ground. From there Rock found his way back to Chiangmai. He sent the fruits to Hawaii, where they were planted in the Waiahole Forest Reserve in 1921-22.

The first part of the present volume takes up the story in Chiangmai. It consists of letters written to David Fairchild (1869-1954) at the USDA in 1922-1924, in which Rock described his subsequent travels in Yunnan and as far north as southern Tibet. Rock and his Thai assistant left Chiangmai on December 30, 1921, sailed up the Mekong (Lancang Jiang) to Jinghong, and from there headed for Pu'er, which is renowned for its brick tea. They continued northnorthwestwards along the Babin He (Black River), via Guchengxiang and Enlecun, and finally arrived in Dali in April 1922. While in Dali he collected material of fruit trees (especially pears) for Fairchild while he waited for the rainy season to pass. At the end of September they set out for Tengchong (Tengyueh), where George Forrest (1873-1932) had a

base, and criss-crossed the Sino-Burmese borderland in search of viable fruits of sweet chestnut trees. It is sometimes difficult to follow his exact route, because Rock used his own phonetic transliteration of the local place names, many of which have changed in the past century. In April 1923 he was back in Tengchong, and from there travelled to Yuhu Village (Ngulukö), north of Lijiang, which was to become Rock's base in China.

On October 2 1923 Rock set out to explore NW Yunnan. Rock and his team headed for the famous bend in the Yangtze at Shigu, and then followed the Yangtze as far as Judian. They then set off westwards across the Yangtze/Mekong divide (Yun Ling Mountains), arriving in Weixi on October 10. They continued on as far as the Salween/Irrawaddy watershed (Gaoligong Mountains) on the Sino-Burmese border, then recrossed the Salween, and headed north for the Catholic enclave of Cizhong on the Mekong (Lancang Jiang), which they reached on November 5. One can imagine the weather in the mountains at this time of the year. As they continued on their journey, they had to cross a number of passes including the Selalaka Yakou at 4165 m, which even in the summer is a hard climb. They finally arrived at Bingzhongluo on the Salween (Nu Jiang), some 25 km from the Tibetan border. Having once more crossed the Salween and the Mekong, Rock's party reached Deqin (Atuntze) in the northwestern tip of Yunnan. They then paid a short visit to Tibet before returning southwards to the relative warmth of Rock's base at Yuhu Village on February 15, 1924. However, in less than 3 weeks, Rock was again on the move, this time heading southeast for Hanoi, on his way to catch the SS "President Pierce" from Shanghai to San Francisco. However, he quickly tired of "civilization", and was soon back in China on behalf of the Arnold Arboretum and the Museum of Comparative Zoology (Harvard University).

The second part of the present volume is devoted to Rock's description of his journey in the Muli (Mili) Kingdom in SW Sichuan undertaken in 1928 for the National Geographic Society. It formed the basis for his account in the National Geographic Magazine of 1931. The map, which is included in the preface, helps the reader to follow Rock's route. Having arrived in old Muli (now Wachang or Warzhong) from Lijiang (Yunnan), Rock set off via the rugged massif of Mt. Mitzuga (Muzye in Chinese) towards the Shou Chu (now Shui-luo River). He continued on the right bank of the river before turning west along the Konka Ghu (now Baishui or White River) towards the sacred peaks of Konkaling (now Yading Nature Park) on the border with Yunnan (not to be confused with Konka Shan or Gongga Shan



south of Kangding). He spent a lot of time and energy traversing the area and attempting to obtain colour plates of the various peaks in often adverse weather conditions, and at a considerable risk to his life and those of his companions (the area was seething with bandits and illegal gold-diggers). Having obtained a comprehensive overview of the inhospitable Konkaling, he returned to the Shuiluo River and moved north as far as the Tibetan hamlet of Wuashi (now Exi). He then turned east along a tributary of the Shuiluo, passing the Gago gomba Lamasery before crossing a flimsy cantilever bridge over the Litang River at Yingo (now Yunge). As the Litang River was in spate, the group recrossed the river a few km further downstream, headed west, but turned south to Wachang before reaching the Shuiluo River. His party stayed at the Wa er dje Lamasery outside Wachang where Rock photographed lama dancers and had dinner with the Muli king (1888-1934). From Muli the group headed for Lugu Lake in Yunnan. From there they travelled south, were ferried across the Yangtze, and finally arrived back in Yuhu Village at the foot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain on September 8.

Although much of the text is a dry account of his travels, every now and then Rock gives a clear insight into his personal feelings. He clearly had a quixotic character, depression rapidly followed by elation. He was quick to take offence, as some of the monks he encountered rapidly discovered. On the other hand, he appreciated the simplicity of the common people, and was willing to help them when in need. He had no use for missionaries unless they had a medical training.

Even though Rock's team experienced many hardships (bad weather, filthy conditions, wild tribes, robbers, hardly anybody to talk to), he was enthralled by the peace and beauty of nature ("I thanked the gods for being alive, well and able to enjoy the glories of nature"). Although he sometimes longed for a "civilized" life, when in a particularly beautiful area had to admit that he could "dwell here in this lovely place never tiring of the grand spectacle, such a peace, and such grandeur it is impossible to forget".

Considering his background, Rock's English was not perfect, e.g. he spelt "would" as "wood", wrote "dead tired" as "death tired", "My body ist getting to weary" instead of "My body is getting too weary", "I past here" instead of "I passed here", "bogy" instead of "boggy", referred to avalanches as "lavines", and called "herbarium material" by its German name "herbar-material". Other spelling mistakes presumably arose because the transcript of Rock's letters, often written in his tent, was partly illegible, e.g. "the coat will be less" instead of "the cost will be less", "tribes which are net-tled here" instead of "tribes which are settled here", and "be had" instead of "he had". However, these slips of the pen are minor blemishes. I was more confused by the bracketed numbers which occur in the second part of the book. At first I took them to refer to references which I could not find, but then realized that they must allude to the pagination in the original manuscript. Unfortunately, the insertion of these numbers often causes the subsequent text to skip a line, thus creating a new paragraph. Considering that Rock spent most of his time in Yunnan and Sichuan, I found the title of the book a bit misleading – Rock was only in Tibet for a matter of days. However, all in all the present volume represents an important contribution to the literature on Joseph Rock. With his immense knowledge of Joseph Rock, I am still hoping that the author will find time to write the definitive biography of this polymath.

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