

THE FIRST BOTANIC GARDEN OF HAVANA AND JOSÉ ANTONIO DE LA OSSA

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Abstract. According to one of Ossa's manuscripts, the first Botanic Garden of Havana (HBG) was founded in 1813 but became fully established in 1817 with J. A. de la Ossa as Director appointed. The floristic list (inventory) of the HBG and some remarks on its design are given as well as a brief information on Ossa's role as Director and botanist.

Résumé. Inventaire floristique du Jardin Botanique de La Habana en 1821, d'après l'étude du manuscrit de José Antonio de la Ossa. Le travail contient quelques anotations sur l'auteur et son rôle comme directeur du Jardin et comme botaniste.

Zusammenfassung. Aus einem Manuskript von José Antonio de la Ossa, erster Direktor des Botanischen Gartens von La Habana, stellt man hier eine Liste der lebendigen Pflanzen im Garten, im Jahre 1921 vor. Angaben über die Rolle von José Antonio de la Ossa als Direktor, sowie als Botaniker, sind eingeschlossen.

Resumen. Del estudio de un manuscrito de José Antonio de la Ossa, protodirector del Jardín Botánico de La Habana, se obtiene el inventario florístico del jardín en 1821. Acompañan algunas notas sobre la figura del autor y su papel como director y profesional de la botánica.

INTRODUCTION

Not much is known about José Antonio de la Ossa, except that he was born in Havana, entertained Baron Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland during their stay in Cuba in 1800-1801 and was appointed Director of the first Botanic Garden of Havana (HBG) in 1817. Replaced by Ramón de la Sagra in 1824, he died in 1829, ÁLVAREZ (1958), IZNAGA (1974). Further investigations on his background, qualifications and public life are needed.

However, his work as a botanist can be inferred from a manuscript, deposited at the Archivo General de Indias, Santo Domingo, legajo 1714, which also allows the reconstruction of the HBG; both are the main objectives of this work. BLANCO & al., (1993: 118) have also mentioned this manuscript.

Ossa's manuscript

The manuscript, which is transcribed in annex I (except the list of cultivated plants), is entitled:

Noticia de las plantas cultivadas y espontáneas que hay en el día en el Jardín Botánico de la Habana, clasificadas según el sistema de Linneo.

dated «30 de Julio de 1821» and signed by José Antonio de la Ossa himself. This manuscript consists of two letters and Ossa's report on the condition of the HBG at the time (1821), plus a list of the plants grown in the Garden, and a map of the Garden itself with explanatory notes. A discussion of each of these items follows. Concerning the map, I drew a sketch, as a photocopy of a photocopy would not have been clear; such a sketch is included in this work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A chronology of the history of the Garden, taken from Ossa himself (in his report and