

## Mendel's Manuscript of 'Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden': The (Never) Ending Story?<sup>417</sup>

*Michal Šimuněk, Uwe Hofsfeld*

**Abstract.** The 'rediscovery' of Mendel's work (1900) stirred much curiosity in the life and work of the Moravian scientist. Many scholars were convinced that his manuscripts, especially the result sheets of his plant experiments and/or diaries, would be crucial for a better understanding of his research. In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mendel's experimental papers were assumed to be possibly kept in three locations: i. in the Augustinian monastery (Brno/Brünn) where he used to be the abbot, ii. at the Natural History Society (Brno) whose member he was, and iii. with his relatives, especially both of his nephews. Before 1910, only one manuscript of J. G. Mendel most important and famous work, *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden* [Experiments on Plant Hybridization], was identified. The story of this manuscript, which was repeatedly lost and found, has lately attracted much interest. It seems therefore important that some historical facts surrounding these events be corrected based on new archival evidence.

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## Introduction

Confirmation of validity of Mendel's results from 1850s and 1860s understandably also led to interest in J. G. Mendel's person. Immediately after 1900, interest in Mendel's life and work grew. However, it soon became clear that very little was preserved of the original manuscripts, especially those relating to his botanical research.

Not only did Mendel live in a relative seclusion of a monastery, the very nature of his research was solitary. Even though he kept in touch with some other scientists (e.g. Karl Wilhelm von Nägeli), he did not belong to any academic institution and 'scientific school' in general was not even expected to be the main focus of his activities.<sup>418</sup> Unlike scientists working within academia, he thus was not in position to tutor his own students who might follow in his footsteps and further develop his scientific legacy.<sup>419</sup> Moreover, it seems likely that Mendel's mental health was towards the end of his life rather precarious, and that is why he quite possibly destroyed all his writings before his death on January 6, 1884.<sup>420</sup>

These are just some of the obstacles which authors of articles on his life and all later biographers had to deal with from the very beginning. One should also note that the early writings on Mendel, which were to a large degree motivated by family ties, local connections or particular anniversaries, and the later, larger, more ambitious and more critical biographies were written in often sharply different political and ideological contexts. Until the end of WWII in 1945, it was mainly the still very popular biography by Dr. Hugo Iltis (1882–1952), botanist, teacher, and Brno native, which was completed in 1924 and first published in the language in which it was written, i.e., in German as *Gregor Johann Mendel. Leben, Werk und Wirkung* [Gregor Johann Mendel. Life, Work and Impingement].<sup>421</sup> In 1938–41, Father Libert de Waegenare published in the diocesan journal *The Messenger* a series of 41 articles, which were supposed to culminate in a larger work depicting Mendel's personality and his work.<sup>422</sup> And in 1943/44, Oswald Richter (1878–1955), a Professor of Botany from Brno, published his work called *J. G. Mendel – wie er wirklich*

<sup>418</sup> Geison, G. L. (1981) Scientific Change, Emerging Specialities, and Research Schools, *History of Science* 19, pp. 20–40. See Olby, R. C. (1985) *Origins of Mendelism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago London, pp. 89–109.

<sup>419</sup> The only professional botanist, who was taught by J. G. Mendel (at the Gymnasium), was later professor in Prague, Vienna and Japan (Tohoku University), Dr. Hans Molisch (1856–1937). See Frimmel, F. (1940) Brunn – Wiege bahnbrechender Naturforschung [Brno – The Cradle of Pioneering Natural Research], *Brünner Tagblatt* 1.12.1940, Supplement – "Unser Beitrag zur gemeinsamen Größe" [Our Contribution to the Common Greatness] and Molisch, H. (1934) *Erinnerungen und Welteindrücke eines Naturforschers* [Memories and Impressions from the World of the Naturalist], Emil Haim & Co, Wien – Leipzig, pp. 16–22.

<sup>420</sup> John Innes Center (hereinafter JIC) Norwich, Bateson W., Mendel-Papers 37, F. Schindler to W. Bateson, 6.9.1902.

<sup>421</sup> Iltis, H. (1924) *Gregor Johann Mendel. Leben, Werk und Wirkung*. J. Springer, Berlin.

<sup>422</sup> Wad, T. (2009) Gregor Mendel's "Covington Connection", *The Mendel Newsletter* 17, pp. 13–14.

war.<sup>423</sup> In a special issue of the journal *Verhandlungen des Naturforschenden Vereins*, Richter not only followed up on his older biographical studies from 1920s and 1930,<sup>424</sup> but also presented the outline of his anticipated but never published (and probably even finished) Mendel biography whose working title was *P. J. G. Mendel als Forscher, Priester und Mensch* [Br. J. G. Mendel As Scientist, Priest and Man].<sup>425</sup>

At that time, that is, in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mendel's papers were thought to be possibly kept in three main locations: in the Augustinian monastery in Brno (Brünn) where he used to be the abbot, at the *Naturforschender Verein* [Natural History Society] in Brno whose member he was for many years, and with his relatives, especially his two nephews, Dr. Ferdinand Schindler and Dr. Alois Schindler (1859–1930), both physicians. And it was especially Oswald Richter's research that uncovered valuable official archive materials after Iltis's work was published.

After 1900, many scholars were convinced that Mendel's manuscripts, especially the result sheets of his experiments and any existing diaries, would be of key importance for further understanding of his research.<sup>426</sup> Given later controversies surrounding Mendel's methodology, their potential value was not only symbolic or historical.<sup>427</sup> Later analyses showed that there were some discrepancies between the published version of Mendel's key work, which played a crucial role during the constitute period of genetics<sup>428</sup> and the fair copy of the article.<sup>429</sup>

Still, as decades of later Mendelian research have shown, except for the manuscript or rather fair copy of Mendel's key work *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden* [Ex-

<sup>423</sup> Richter, O. (1943/44) Johann Gregor Mendel wie er wirklich war. Neue Beiträge zur Biographie des berühmten Biologen aus Brünns Archiven, Verh. d. Naturf. Ver. Brünn 75.

<sup>424</sup> See Richter, O. (1931) Mendel und seine Heimat [Mendel and His Native Land], Aufwärts 5(10–11), pp. 4–9; (1931) P. Gregor Mendel, der Reiseprälat [Br. Gregor Mendel, the Travelling Prelate], Aufwärts 5(6–7), pp. 4–10; (1931) P. Gregor Mendels Reisen [The Travels of Br. Gregor Mendel], Verh. d. Naturf. Ver. 63, pp. 1–11; (1925) Biographisches über Pater Gregor Mendel aus Brünns Archiven [Biographical Information on Br. Gregor Mendel from Brno Archives], in Růžička, V. (1925) Memorial Volume in Honour of the 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday of J. G. Mendel, Fr. Borový, Praha, pp. 266–280; (1924) Ein kleiner Beitrag zur Biographie P. Gregor Mendels [A Small Contribution to the Biography of Br. Gregor Mendel], in Festschrift der Deutschen Technischen Hochschule in Brünn zur Feier ihres fünfundsiebzigsten Bestandes im Mai 1924, Brünn, pp. 123–141.

<sup>425</sup> Archiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (hereinafter A ÖAdW) Vienna, Nachlass Erich v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, C1, Box 3, No. 95, O. Richter to E. v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, 25.1.1948.

<sup>426</sup> It is not the aim of this paper to deal with another Mendel's manuscripts like meteorological etc.

<sup>427</sup> Fisher, R. A. (1936) Has Mendel's Work Been Rediscovered?, *Annals of Science* 1, pp. 115–137. See Weiling, F. (1991) Historical Study: Johann Gregor Mendel, *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 40(26), pp. 1–25.

<sup>428</sup> Reprint of J. G. Mendel's *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden* published 1901 by Erich von Tschermak-Seysenegg in the series Ostwald's *Klassiker der exakten Wissenschaften*, No. 121, Engelmann, Leipzig. See Heimans, J. (1969) Ein Notizblatt aus dem Nachlaß Gregor Mendels mit Analysen eines seiner Kreuzungsversuche, *Folia Mendeliana* (hereinafter FM) 4, pp. 5–37; (1970) A recently Discovered Note on Hybridization in Mendel's Handwriting, FM 5, pp. 3–5.

<sup>429</sup> Matalová, A. (1973) A Critical Review of Different Editions of Mendel's Pisum Paper, FM 8, pp. 243–55; Stern, C. (1969) A Note on the Facsimile Reproduction of Mendel's Manuscript on 'Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden', FM 4, pp. 41–45.

periments on Plant Hybridization], only fragments of written source material related to his experiments was ever found.<sup>430</sup>

It is therefore not surprising, that the story of the 'lost' and 'found' manuscript of his key work attracted to much interest (see, e.g., The New York Times, May 31, 2010), and the unique status of this document makes it the more important that some historical facts surrounding this event be corrected.

## 1. Manuscript Found

Among the first scientists to search for Mendel's papers in Brno was the famous British botanist and geneticist William Bateson (1861–1926) from Cambridge.<sup>431</sup> After a visit to the Augustinian monastery, he commented somewhat despondently on November 23, 1905: "*Whether these notes do still exist or not, I cannot tell, but my impression is that no one at the Cloister (sic) knows of them.*"<sup>432</sup> Already before his visit, Bateson learned from F. Schindler about some possible problems. According to Schindler, Mendel's mental health was towards the end of his life rather precarious, and it is therefore possible that he destroyed all of his writings before his death on January 6, 1884. "*It is possible that in this state, wishing to deprive his enemies of all possible weapons against him, he destroyed the manuscripts which he intended to leave for publication to us,*"<sup>433</sup> wrote Mendel's nephew.

Some rather confusing statements about the manuscript appear later in the work of Mendel's first biographer, Dr. Hugo Iltis. In his above mentioned Mendel's biography, Iltis claims that he discovered the manuscript of Mendel's '*Versuche*' in a wastebasket used for burning in the library of the Natural History Society.<sup>434</sup> This statement, however, stands in contradiction with the less dramatic claim Iltis made already in his January 31, 1909 letter to W. Bateson, where he says that "*(...) I discovered the original manuscripts of Mendel's main work here in the archives of the Natural History Society.*"<sup>435</sup> Since this must have been the final draft rather than the original working version of the manuscript of Mendel's '*Versuche*', we can assume it

<sup>430</sup> See Coleman, W. (1967) Ferdinand Schindler's Letters to William Bateson, 1902–1909, FM 2, pp. 9–17; Heimans, J. (1969) Ein Notizblatt aus dem Nachlaß Gregor Mendels mit Analysen eines seiner Kreuzungsversuche [One Sheet with Note from Possession of Gregor Mendel With the Analyses of his Hybridisation Experiments], FM 4, pp. 5–37; Heimans, J. (1970) A recently Discovered Note on Hybridization in Mendel's Handwriting, FM 5, pp. 3–5; Richter, O. (1944) Johann Gregor Mendel, pp. 85, 88–99.

<sup>431</sup> The authors are especially grateful to Mike Ambrose, JIC Norwich.

<sup>432</sup> American Philosophical Society (hereinafter APS) Philadelphia, GMS – Iltis H., W. Bateson to H. Iltis, 23.11.1905.

<sup>433</sup> JIC Norwich, Bateson W., Mendel-Papers 37, F. Schindler to W. Bateson, 9.9.1902; in German original: "*Vielleicht hat er auch in diesem Zustande seine Manuskripte, die er uns zur Publication hinterlassen wollte, selbstzerstört, um seinen Feinden keine Waffe gegen ihn zu bieten.*"

<sup>434</sup> Iltis, H. (1924), op. cit., p. 121; Hanson, H. C. (1948), *The Mendel Tradition in Brno, Czechoslovakia*, Agricultural History 22(3), pp. 205–208[206].

<sup>435</sup> JIC Norwich, Bateson W., Mendeliana – G.2q., H. Iltis to W. Bateson, 31.1.1909. See Figure No. 1.

was filed in the archives of the Natural History Society after the paper was submitted. It is definitely not mentioned among 58 items Iltis borrowed from the monastery's abbot in 1910 and returned on November 8, 1924.<sup>436</sup>

In the same 1909 letter where Iltis informed Bateson of his discovery of the manuscript, he also enquired about the possibility of selling it to England (Cambridge) for the amount of 4,000 Austrian Kronen. In a few days, he received a reply from Bateson to the effect that the offer was discussed with “*a few biologists (...) and they agreed with me that the offer should be considered a good one.*”<sup>437</sup> In the end, however, the transaction did not materialise. On December 20, 1920, Iltis asked the American biologist and eugenicist Charles B. Davenport (1866–1944) about a possible sale of the manuscript of the ‘*Versuche*’, this time with a view of finding American buyers and asking for 6,000 \$. As before, his intention was to use the money to support the Natural History Society.<sup>438</sup> As before, however, the sale fell through, and the manuscript remained in possession of the Natural History Society in Brno all through the inter-war years.

In the 1930s, Iltis organised at *Masaryk Volkshochschule* [Masaryk’s Higher People School] in Brno, of which he was the headmaster, an exhibition devoted to Mendel. These materials were later transferred to the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Kunst* [German Society for Science and Arts], also in Brno, and formed the core of the so-called Mendel Museum.<sup>439</sup> The exhibited material included original documents, photographs, boards with explanations, and several books and journals.<sup>440</sup>

## 2. Manuscript Lost

After the German occupation of the Czech Lands in March 1939, the Natural History Society in Brno was fused with a newly founded German Society for Scientific and Ethnic Research in Moravia [*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Volkstumsforschung in Mähren*], and within the new entity, the Natural History Society became only a Department for Natural Science Research [*Abteilung für Naturforschung*].<sup>441</sup>

Before long, other local German institutions started to take over the activities connected with Mendelian research.<sup>442</sup> The German Technical University [*Deutsche*

<sup>436</sup> APS Philadelphia, GMS – Iltis H., list of the items borrowed 1910 from the Old Brno Monastery signed by F. Bařina, 8.11.1924. See Figure No. 2.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., W. Bateson to H. Iltis, February 4th, 1909.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., H. Iltis to Ch. B. Davenport, 20.12.1920.

<sup>439</sup> Iltis, H. (1932) *Das Gregor-Mendel-Museum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Wissenschaft und Volkstumsforschung in Mähren* [The Museum of Gregor Mendel of the German Society for Science and Arts], Brünn, p. 4.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–6; Kříženecký, J. (1974) The Past of the G. Mendel Memorial in Brno, in: FM 9, pp. 231–243. See Figure No. 3.

<sup>441</sup> Annual Report for the Year 1942, *Verh. des Naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn* 74, p. III.

<sup>442</sup> Paleček, P. (2004) Project of Gregor Mendel-Forschungsinstitut at Brno Planned During WWII, *Verhandlungen zur Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie* (Bd. 10), pp. 159–162; Balcárek, P., Paleček,

Technische Hochschule] in Brno "(...) established a Mendel working group whose aim it [was] to collect and protect everything Mendel left behind or things that are related to him".<sup>443</sup> At the same time, a similar plan was hatched on the level of Lower Austrian branch of the Nazi Party (NSDAP), namely by the NS-Dozentenführung Niederdonau,<sup>444</sup> where the 'Science Office' [Amt Wissenschaft] established a so-called 'working circle 'Gregor Mendel' [Arbeitskreis „Gregor Mendel" der Gaudozentenführung]. It was envisioned that in March 1942, the two working groups should be united and form a Gregor Mendel Research Institute [Gregor-Mendel-Forschungsinstitut] at the German Technical University.<sup>445</sup> This was justified as follows: "(...) places where great scholars worked should be turned into research centres, which would build on their results, continue and develop their legacy, and steer it in a National Socialist sense."<sup>446</sup> The mission of this Institute was defined as follows: i. administration of places connected with Mendel (garden, study, memorial collection) and foundation of Mendel's Museum; ii. publication of a series of documentary works focused on Mendel's life and work; iii. establishment of a collection of all scientific publications (so-called 'Mendels Bibliothek'), which was supposed to be exhaustive and equipped with an efficient registry;<sup>447</sup> iv. foundation of an own Mendel Research Institute [Mendels Forschungsinstitut], intended for the use by NS-Dozentenführung members as well as external scholars; v. publication of research results in a new independent edition ('Berichte'), vi. establishment of an experimental garden.<sup>448</sup> The institute was to have at its disposal some facilities of the former (Czech) Masaryk University, which was forcefully closed on November 17, 1939, in particular its zoology institute, and a botanical garden.<sup>449</sup> By May 1942, the budget and plans of requisite building alterations were ready. Yet, though the plans were developed and some activities undertaken (collaboration with the plant research station of Mendeleum in Lednice/Eisgrub<sup>450</sup>, organisation of future joint

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P. (2002) Gregor-Mendel-Forschungsinstitut a snahy o vybudování genetického ústavu v Brně (Gregor Mendel-Forschungsinstitut and Activities Aiming at the Establishment of the Institute of Genetics in Brno), *Časopis Matice moravské* 121(2), pp. 417–29. See Orel, V. (2003) *Gregor Mendel a počátky genetiky* (Gregor Mendel and the Beginnings of Genetics), Academia, Praha, p. 18, 162.

<sup>443</sup> Weyrich, R. (1942) Die Mendel-Arbeitsgemeinschaft Brünn, *Deutschlands Erneuerung* 26(1), pp. 73–75. In German original: "(...) eine Mendel-Arbeitsgemeinschaft gebildet hat, deren Zielsetzung es ist, alles, was Mendel seinerzeit hinterlassen oder was auf ihn Bezug hat, zu erfassen und zu hüten."

<sup>444</sup> The documents of this particular NSDAP segment were destroyed at the end of WWII. Letter of Mr. Stefan Eminger, Regional Government of Lower Austria/Dpt. of Culture, Science and Education to the authors in the matter of the archival sources on the NSDAP Lower Danube, October 2nd, 2009.

<sup>445</sup> Bundesarchiv (hereinafter BA) Berlin, R4901/13207, J. Jehlicka to Leitmeyer, 23.3.1942.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., Jehlicka to the Reich Ministry of People's Education and Science, 23.3.1942; in German Original: "(...) die Wirkungsstätte des großen Gelehrten zum Ort eines Forschungsbetriebes zu machen, der auf seinen Ergebnissen aufbaut, sein Lebenswerk fortgesetzt und entwickelt und im nationalsozialistischen Sinne ausrichtet."

<sup>447</sup> The designed library should preserve "(...) ein großer Teil der Bibliothek, der Mendel-Andenken und der durch sonstige Spenden aufgebrachten Sachwerte Eigentum der Dozentenführung ist und auch bleiben soll (...)."

<sup>448</sup> Balcárek – Paleček, op. cit., pp. 420–421. See Figure No. 4.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>450</sup> The so-called 'Mendeleum' was a private research and plant breeding station established in 1913 under the auspices of the nobleman Johann von Liechtenstein in the southmoravian centre of his domain in Lednice/Eisgrub. The scientific director became Erich von Tschermak-Seysenegg.

projects with various institutes both local and foreign, plans for adding a department for anthropology and ‘race research’<sup>451</sup>), the war ended before the ambitious project was realised.<sup>452</sup>

It is clear that gathering the original manuscripts related to Mendel was part of these ambitious plans. What is unfortunately not clear, is whether or to what extent any legally binding handover of collections – such as that in possession of the Natural Science Society – actually occurred. Certainly, there existed the so-called ‘Mendel House’ headed by Oswald Richter<sup>453</sup>, who took significant part in all these activities, and it is known that he intended to gather for his museum all the relevant papers and documents related to Mendel. The ‘Mendel House’ might have been in possession of Mendel’s papers owned by the Natural History Society. Richter certainly managed to obtain other Mendel’s manuscripts, such as the letter to his mother (the ‘Napoleon Letter’) from 1859. That document was given to him on March 4, 1943, by Erich von Tschermak-Seysenegg who obtained it from F. Schindler.<sup>454</sup> Richter at that time worked on a book, called also ‘fighting treatise’ [Kampfschrift], which aimed at disproving Iltis’s interpretation, and was intended as a correction of a ‘deformed picture’ [das verzerrte Bild] of Mendel<sup>455</sup>, with an emphasis on the ‘real’ meaning of the scientists work. Richter described Mendel’s experiments, compared them with Correns’s research, and considered a possible inspiration by Darwin, in particular his theory of pangenesis, as well as some issues of cytology. He also presented a facsimile of one page with Mendel’s original notes, which he identified as working notes for the key article ‘*Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden*’.<sup>456</sup>

Richter’s work was published at a time when obviously ideologically driven interpretations of Mendel’s work “*gained recognition and just this thinking [began] to dominate National Socialist Germany*”.<sup>457</sup> Beside some novel,<sup>458</sup> Richter’s work was the only local contribution of a historical nature that on substantive scale and with original archive material dealt with Mendel studies and was published in 1939–45. The large and formal publication marking the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mendel’s birth (in 1942) was in the end never published.<sup>459</sup> Instead, a special issue of the official jour-

<sup>451</sup> Balcárek – Paleček, op. cit., pp. 425–427.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>453</sup> Besides this particular collection there were two other outside Brno. The first one was placed in the diocesan Archives of Covington, KY and the second one, created after Iltis’ emigration to the U.S.A., at the Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, VA. See (1940) A Mendel Museum in America, J. Hered. 31(6), pp. 259–261.

<sup>454</sup> Richter, O. (1943/44) op. cit., pp. 115–117. See Orel, V., op. cit., pp. 42, 107.

<sup>455</sup> Richter, O. (1943/44), op. cit., 173.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., p. 93; in German original: „(...) können wir aber das Eine wohl mit einem hohen Grade von Wahrscheinlichkeit erklären, daß sich das Protokoll auf einen der von Mendel in seiner berühmten Hybridenarbeit als beabsichtigt bzw. noch fehlend bezeichneten S. 34/5 (...) bezieht“. See Figure No. 5.

<sup>457</sup> Richter, O. (1943), Johann Gregor Mendel, p. 110. In German original: “(...) Anerkennung gewinnt und das Denken gerade des nationalsozialistischen Deutschlands zu beherrschen beginnt.“

<sup>458</sup> Heinen, W. (1941) Der junge Genius J. G. Mendel. Ein biographischer Roman [The Young Genius J. G. Mendel. The Biographical Novel]. Fels Verlag, Essen.

<sup>459</sup> A ÖAdW Wien, Nachlaß E. v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, C-1, Box 3, No. 95, letter from Frimmel to Erich v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, 6.11.1942.

nal *Böhmen und Mähren* (Bohemia and Moravia) was published under the auspices of the Office of Reich Protector in Prague. There, Mendel's importance was put in close connection with Germany's autarky in plant production as well as with 'preservation of a race', i.e., with 'care of race and heredity'.<sup>460</sup> No less clear, however, was also the effort to revive an older tradition, advocated already in 1910s and 1920s by Erich and Armin von Tschermak-Seysenegg, which made a link between the intellectual legacy in theoretical and practical botanical research between Brno (southern Moravia) and Vienna (Lower Austria).<sup>461</sup> The exhibition 'Mendel-Gedächtnis-Ausstellung', which opened in Brno on July 2, 1942, then carried in a similar spirit.<sup>462</sup>

In connection with this tradition (see awarding of the Treskow-Friedrichsfelde prize to Erich von Tschermak-Seysenegg in 1941), and as part of preparation of anniversary celebrations, photographs of Mendel's manuscript of '*Versuche*' were taken in 1941, probably by professor of technical photography from Graz, formerly Brno, Ing. Karl Zaar.<sup>463</sup> These pictures then appeared as a supplement to the German journal *Der Züchter* (The Breeder).<sup>464</sup> This was the first time photographs of the entire manuscript appeared in print.<sup>465</sup> Before the manuscript disappeared for decades, a picture of its front page was published in a rather obscure pro-Nazi booklet written by Dr. Alois Fietz (b. 1890), Professor of Botany at the German Technical University in Brno.<sup>466</sup> It was called *Gregor Mendel, der Bahnbrecher der Vererbungslehre* [Gregor Mendel, the Pioneer of the Science of Heredity],<sup>467</sup> and on page

<sup>460</sup> See Zankl, A. (1942), Johann Gregor Mendel, Böhmen u. Mähren 3(7–8), p. 229.

<sup>461</sup> The special issue contained following contributions: Fischer, E., Mendels Weltbedeutung [The World Importance of Mendel], pp. 224–5; Tschermak-Seysenegg, A. v., Die führenden Ideen Gregor Mendels [The Leading Ideas of Gregor Mendel], pp. 225–9; Zankl, A., Johann Gregor Mendel: Zum 120. Geburtstag des Forschers [Johann Gregor Mendel. On the 120th Birthday of the Scientist], pp. 229–36; Rudolf, W., Wiederentdeckung und Ausbau des Mendelismus [The Rediscovery and Build-Up of the Mendelism], pp. 236–7; Frimmel, F., Der Mendelismus in der landwirtschaftlichen und gärtnerischen Pflanzenzüchtung [The Mendelism in the Agricultural and Garden Plant Breeding], pp. 238–9; Nitsche, M., Die Bedeutung des Mendelismus für die praktische Tierzucht [The Relevance of Mendelism for the Practical Husbandry Breeding], pp. 239–41; Thums, K., Mendel als Voraussetzung der Erb- und Rassenpflege [Mendel as a Precondition for the Hereditary and Racial Care], pp. 241–2; Tschermak-Seysenegg, E. v., Wien als Ausgangspunkt des praktischen Mendelismus [Vienna as a Point of Departure of the Practical Mendelism], pp. 242–244.

<sup>462</sup> Fietz, A. (1942), Zum 120. Geburtstage von Gregor Mendel (20.7.1822) [On the 120th Birthday of Gregor Mendel (20.7.1822)], in: Deutschlands Erneuerung 26(7), pp. 365–369.

<sup>463</sup> Richter, O. (1943), Johann Gregor Mendel, p. 66, footnote 45.

<sup>464</sup> *Der Züchter* 13(10–11) 1941, pp. 221–268. A ÖAdW Vienna, Nachlaß E. v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, Kt. 3, No. 95, Richter to Erich v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, 12.11.1942. Richter mentioned "(...) nice original photos of the facsimiles".

<sup>465</sup> For the facsimile of the first page of Mendel's 'Versuche' Manuscript prior to 1941 see Iltis, H. (1924) op. cit., Table No. 8 placed between p. 121 and 122.

<sup>466</sup> A ÖAdW Vienna, Nachlaß E. v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, C-1, Box 3, No. 95, Richter to Erich v. Tschermak-Seysenegg, 12.11.1942.

<sup>467</sup> Fietz, A. (1944) *Gregor Mendel, der Bahnbrecher der Vererbungslehre* [Gregor Mendel, the Pioneer of the Science of Heredity], Schriftenreihe für Heimat und Volk, published by Gaupresseamt Niederdonau der NSDAP, Heft Nr. 99, St. Pöltener Zeitungs-Verlags-Gesellschaft m.b.H., St. Pölten.

15, where the first page of ‘*Versuche*’ was reprinted, it contains an important note regarding the source. It reads as follows: “*The beginning of the first manuscript page of Mendel’s famous work on hybrids. With permission of the direction of the Natural History Society, Brno.*”<sup>468</sup> This can be taken as a clear indication of the fact that in 1944, the manuscript was in possession of the Brno Natural History Society. According to post-war testimonies of Czech employees of the German Technical University, it was Oswald Richter who took Mendel’s manuscript from Brno at the end of the war. This is attested by H. C. Hanson,<sup>469</sup> who in his report writes: “*Richter*<sup>470</sup> *carried Mendel’s manuscript about with him in his brief case. Richter secured the manuscript apparently when he assumed charge of the quarters of the Natural History Society. (...) When the German soldiers evacuated Brno, it is thought that Richter took the manuscript with him to Germany or Vienna. Some attempts have been made through the War Criminals Commission in Nuremberg to locate the manuscript without success.*”<sup>471</sup> Richter himself after the war said about his departure from Brno: “*Two days before the Russians attacked Brno, Professor Richter left the town of Brno in compliance with orders received from Prague, and handed over the keys to the safe box to the still remaining military person of Assistant Dipl. Ing. Wilhelm Wisicow, who then, until a possible engagement of his Volkssturmkommando on April 21, 1945, took quarters there.*”<sup>472</sup> After a direct hit by a shell, the contents of the safe box were allegedly taken away: “*Since the walls in which the safe box of the Institute was built, remained standing, Wincow took away the Mendel document.*”<sup>473</sup> Richter’s correspondence, however, seems to indicate that at that time, the manuscript of the ‘*Versuche*’ was not in the safe of his institute. It was most probably entrusted either to the Natural History Society or kept in the Society’s safe box with one of the local banks. It is known, however, that when the Soviet troops marched into the city, that safe box was found open and empty. This was officially confirmed by Czechoslovak authorities in 1961 when the bank’s safe box was scrapped.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 15; in German original: „Anfang der ersten Manuskriptseite aus der berühmten Hybriden-Arbeit Mendels. Mit Bewilligung der Leitung des Naturforschenden Vereines, Brünn.“ See Figure No. 6.

<sup>469</sup> Hanson, H. C. (1947) “Mendel’s manuscript ‘Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden’“, in: *Science* 105, p. 64; (1948), op. cit., pp. 205–208.

<sup>470</sup> Richter is here incorrectly named as Otto.

<sup>471</sup> Hanson, H. C. (1948), op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>472</sup> A ÖAdW Wien, Kt. 3, Nr. 95, Richter quotes the letter from Wisicow to him from November 11th, 1945. In German original: “Zwei Tage vor dem Angriffe der Russen auf Brünn verliesst Professor Richter auf Grund der Anordnungen von Prag die Stadt Brünn und übergab die Tresorschlüssel dem militärisch noch festgehaltenen Assistenten Dipl. Ing. Wilhelm Wisicow, der sich bis zum möglichen Einsatz durch sein Volkssturmkommando am 21. April 1945 einquartierte.“

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. In German original: “Da die Mauer, in der der Institutstresor eingebaut war, stehen geblieben war, entnahm Wincow (...) den Mendelbrief.“

### 3. Search for the Manuscript

Search for the manuscript started soon after the end of the war.<sup>474</sup> Parallel to already mentioned H. C. Hanson, Hugo Iltis also took part, which is somewhat ironic considering that some sources erroneously claimed that he took the manuscript with him when he emigrated to the U.S.A. in February 1939.<sup>475</sup>

Iltis also unequivocally connected Richter with the disappearance of the manuscript, writing: „*I heard with indignation that Herr O. Richter stole all important Mendel documents, among them many which were my property.*“<sup>476</sup> Based on the supposition as was later articulated by H. C. Hanson, he even suggested an Allied search for him, which, however, did not yield any results.

Nonetheless, if this was right assumption, the manuscript may have travelled with Oswald Richter immediately after the end of the war from Brno to Český Krumlov [Krummau], and then on to the Austrian cities of Ried and Graz.<sup>477</sup> None of this, however, was ever conclusively proven.

So it came about that after 1945, the manuscript of the article that so crucially influenced the very foundations of 20<sup>th</sup> century biology was regarded as lost for several decades.

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<sup>474</sup> (1947) Disappearance of a Mendel Manuscript, *Nature* 159, p. 22.

<sup>475</sup> Olby, R. C. (1965), *The Mendel Centenary*, *BJHS* 2(4), pp. 343–349[343]. Moravské zemské muzeum (hereinafter MZM) Brno, *Mendelianum*, Kříženecký J, 6921, Kříženecký, J., *Minulost, přítomnost a možná budoucnost Mendelova památníku v Brně* [History, Present and Possible Future of the Mendel's Memorial in Brno], manuscript.

<sup>476</sup> MZM Brno, *Mendelianum*, Iltis H., 52, Iltis to Podpěra, 5.10.1946.

<sup>477</sup> Archiv der Tierärztlichen Hochschule Hannover, Sign. TiHo A 1.14.1.7, Oswald Richter – Lebenslauf, 1951.

Figures

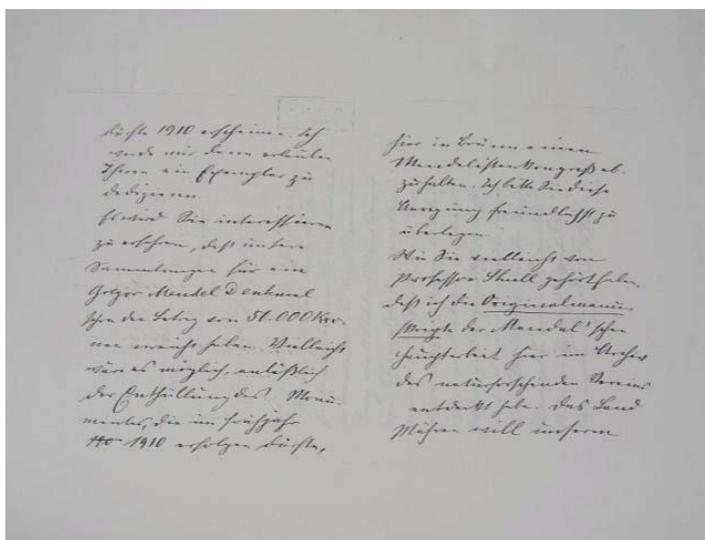


Fig. 1 Letter from H. Iltis to W. Bateson, 31.1.1909

VERZEICHNIS  
der im Jahre 1910 vom Altbrüner Stift erhaltenen Mendelakten.

	Stücke:
1. Taufschein Mendels	1
2. Zeugnis der Kreishauptstadt Troppau	1
3. Gymnasialzeugnis / Troppau /	1
4. Kuhpockenimpfungszeugnis	1
5. Vier Zeugnisse über die Philosophie / Olmütz /	4
6. Rekommandationsschreiben	1
7. Krztliches Zeugnis	1
8. Einwilligung	1
9. 10 Aktenstücke des Konvents, Mendel betreffend	10
10. Profession Mendels	1
11. 3 Zeugnisse über Subdiakonat, Diakonat und Presbyteriat	3
12. Zeugnis über die Theologie	1
13. 2 Akten über die Bestellung Mendels nach Znaim	2
14. Zeugnis des Znaimer Lehrkörpers	1
15. 4 Aktenstücke über Mendels Wiener Studien	4
16. 4 Aktenstücke der Realschule Brünn	4
17. Heimatsschein Mendels	1
18. 3 Meldungsbogen Mendels	3
19. 16 Aktenstücke von Behörden an Prälaten Mendel	16
20. Ordensdiplom	1
Zusammen.....	58 Stücke.

Der gefertigte Prälat des Altbrüner Augustinerstiftes bestätigt die Rückgabe der seinerzeit an Dr. Hugo Iltis übergebenen 58 Gregor Mendel betreffenden Aktenstücke.

Brünn, am 8. November 1924.

*F. J. Barina*  
Abt.

Fig. 2 List of items given back by H. Iltis to F. Bařina, abbot of the Augustinian Monastery, 1928



*Fig. 3 Exposition of the 'Mendel's Museum' at the Masaryk Volkshochschule in Brno, around 1920*

1

K. L. I - 75 - 61/42

**Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei**  
Gau Niederrhein

**NSD.-Dozentenbund**  
Der Gaudozentenführer

Brünn, den 23. März 1942.  
Comeniusplatz 2, Fernsprecher 14580

An den  
Herrn K u r a t o r  
der D.T.H.  
im H a u s e.

Ph.-J.: Dr. Jehl./No/B29/42.  
Unter Zeichen und Tgb.-Nr. bei der Antwort stets angeben!

Tgb.-Nr.: B/29.

Ihr Zeichen:

Betrifft: Amt Wissenschaft.

Sehr geehrter Herr Kurator!

Der Arbeitskreis Gregor Mendel, der beim Amt Wissenschaft der Gaudozentenführung errichtet worden ist, hat sich zur Aufgabe gestellt, die Wirkungsstätte des grossen Gelehrten zum Ort eines Forschungsbetriebes zu machen, der auf seinen Ergebnissen aufgebaut, sein Lebenswerk fortsetzt und entwickelt und im nationalsozialistischen Sinne ausrichtet. Da die alte deutsche Stadt Brünn der Ort ist, an der Mendel gewirkt und alle seine grossen Entdeckungen ausnahmslos gemacht hat, ist es sicher kein Zufall, dass gerade in Brünn dieser Arbeitskreis errichtet worden ist. Von allem Anfang an ist daran gedacht gewesen, nicht nur gelegentliche Veröffentlichungen herauszugeben, sondern erbbiologische Forschungen weiterzuführen. Die Ziele des Gregor Mendel-Forschungsinstituts, die in diesem Zusammenhang aufgestellt worden sind, erlaube ich mir, nachstehend mitzuteilen:

- 1.) Verwaltung der Mendel-Gedenkstätten. (Versuchsgarten Arbeitsraum, Andenkensammlung und die Errichtung eines Mendel-Museums. Der Zustand, dass heute noch ein Großteil der Andenken und die Mendel-Gedenkstätten in kirchlicher Verwaltung stehen, kann nicht befriedigen und es wäre sicherlich zweckmässig, wenn auch die übrigen Sammlungen zusammengefaßt wären, in ein einziges Mendel-Museum.
- 2.) Sammlung aller Veröffentlichungen über die Persönlichkeit Mendels.
- 3.) Sammlung und Verzeichnis aller wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, die mit den Forschungsergebnissen Mendels zusammenhängen

W. H. 1089/42

Fig. 4 Draft of the NS-Dozentenbund suggesting the establishment 'Gregor-Mendel-Research Institute', 23.3.1942



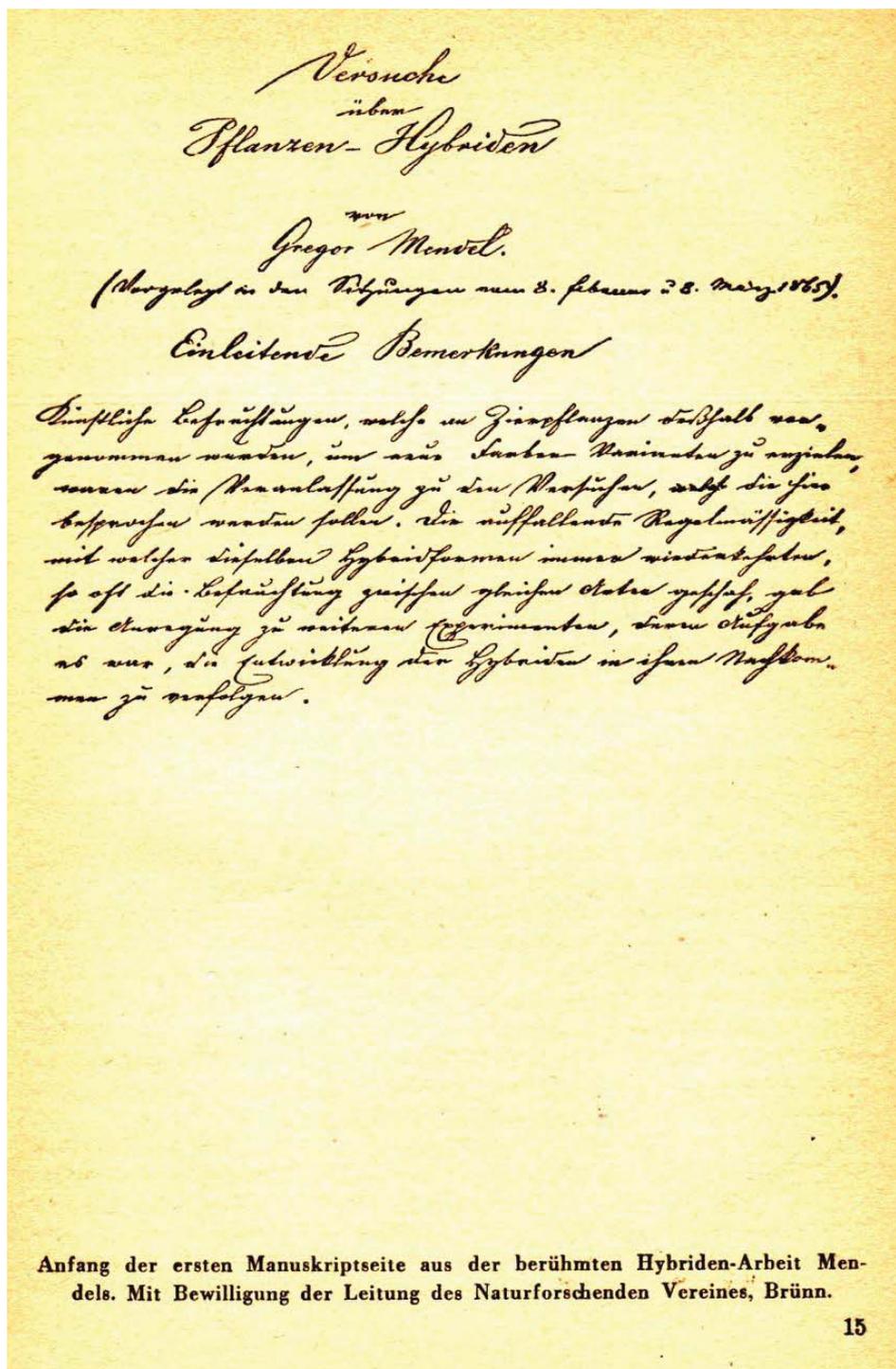


Fig. 6 The last published facsimile of the first page of Mendel's 'Versuche'-Manuscript before it became unknown in May 1945, 1944

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**Authors' Affiliations:**

Michal Simunek PhD.  
Centre for the History of Sciences and Humanities/ÚSD,  
Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic,  
Puškinovo nám. 9,  
CZ-16000 Prague.  
E-mail: [simunekm@centrum.cz](mailto:simunekm@centrum.cz)

Uwe Hoßfeld Prof. Dr.,  
AG Didactics of Biology, Friedrich-Schiller-University, Am Steiger 3, D-07743  
Jena. e-mail: [uwe.hossfeld@uni-jena.de](mailto:uwe.hossfeld@uni-jena.de)