

Wegener-Köppen, Else and Jörn Thiede (eds.): *Wladimir Köppen – Scholar for Life; Wladimir Köppen – ein Gelehrtenleben für die Meteorologie.* – Stuttgart: Borntraeger 2018. – 313 pp., 52 Figs. – ISBN: 978-3-443-01100-0 – € 34.80

Wladimir Köppen probably does not need any further introduction in the community of biogeographers and climatologists. The Köppen-Geiger climate zones – although slightly updated to fit the needs of modern digital climatology (e.g. *Kottek et al.* 2006; *Peel et al.* 2007) – have survived more than a century, since their first publication that appeared in 1900 in *Hettner's Geographische Zeitschrift*. But there is much more to learn from *Köppen's* career with the present book that is an extension of the German edition by *Else Wegener-Köppen* from 1955 by a full English translation to make contents available also to non-German readers. It also contains an updated bibliography of *Köppen's* work. In 1955, *die ERDE* mentioned the appearance of the first edition (in Vol. 68, Issue 2, 1955), but without a detailed book review, which is somewhat surprising, given the relevance of *Köppen* in this field of geography.

The new edition may reach a much wider readership than the German-only edition, although it must be mentioned that all readers mastering German texts will quickly switch to the German part of the book since some subtleties, namely in personal letters and notes, were not fully carved out in its English translation. Already the subtitle indicates the problem: the German version rather means “A scientist's life devoted to meteorology” (which is a fully appropriate summary of the book's content), whereas the English version “Scholar for life” is very general and could be said about almost any life-long scientist no matter what she or he achieved in her or his life.

The first part of the biography was written by *Köppen* himself (until year 1903) and then extended by *Else Wegener-Köppen*, one of the daughters of *Köppen*. She had married with *Alfred Wegener*, another great German name in science (the father of the continental drift theory), and *Wladimir* and his son in law *Alfred* enjoyed a fruitful collaboration until *Alfred's* much too early death during his 1930/31 Greenland expedition.

Born in St. Petersburg into a family of a well-respected member of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences of German descent, the life history of *Wladimir Köppen* also reflects a time period when the Russian

Tsar engaged many foreigners from western countries, including Germany, to modernize his country and catch-up with the 19th century developments in Europe. Although *Köppen* kept his family ties with their Crimean vineyard estate in Karabagh during his entire life, he moved to Germany for education to go to the best professors at German and Austrian universities of his time. He not only felt the need for climate classification, but also for modern meteorological research, including the need for weather forecasts. He was the driving force behind the establishment of the German Meteorological Society in 1883, 18 years after the leading Austrian Meteorological Society had been established. This event even made it into *Science* (1884, Vol. 3, No. 71, p. 734), which was also very new and in its third year. It was noted that *Dr. W. Köppen* had edited the first issue of “*Meteorologische Zeitschrift*” (that was established with the foundation of the German Meteorological Society), in close collaboration with the Austrian Journal of Meteorology. The *Science* reporter at that time already classified *Köppen* as “one of the greatest of living meteorologists”, and this was notably 16 years before *Köppen* delivered his first attempt for the climate classification that is still in use today, and for which *Köppen* is recognized by the vast majority of present-day scientists.

Köppen also promoted regular atmospheric profile measurements using winched kites (1903–1913) with which he could reach heights up to the tropopause (roughly 10 km above Earth surface), a rather risky system that had to be discontinued due to the first world war and was later replaced by the new opportunities provided by aircraft flights. When reading the book, it is enlightening to see how a great scientist born 175 years ago had to face similar challenges by quick technological changes as we all face at present, and that many ideas did not succeed in the way it was initially expected. This aspect is worth focusing on: there is no guarantee for success in science, but successful scientists always have tried many ideas and approaches, and have accepted many challenges irrespective of frequent failures.

Köppen also was one of the old-style leading scientists who devoted much time also to engagements in public life. He for example served as a board member of the *Eimsbüttler Verein*, a social society of his home town, but he also profited from interactions and collaborations with key persons of his time, among them *Bunsen*, *Kirchhoff*, *Helmholtz*, *Hann*, *Espy*, *Hellmann*, *Wild*, *Neumayer*, *de Quervain*, *Brückner*, and *Alfred*

Wegener who became his son in law. The reading of *Wladimir Köppen's* life history can be recommended to all interested in science history, but also to younger scientists who often struggle with the challenges and insecurities that (family) life as a scientist brings about – *Köppen* is a positive example how both excellence in science and a quality family life are possible, and were possible already more than a century ago.

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