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# A New Moss Record for Algeria: *Orthotrichum macrocephalum* F. Lara, Garilleti & Mazimpaka



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THE BRYOFLORA of the Setifian High Plains, which situated in the Northeastern region of Algeria is poorly known. Megriss Mountain is one of the most important ecosystems in this region. The examination of Orthotrichaceae samples collected during bryophytes diversity investigations in the northern part of Megriss resulted in the identification of the epiphytic species; Orthotrichum macrocephalum F. Lara, Garilleti & Mazimpaka. The identification was made based on its leaves with rounded or obtuse apices, recurved margins, pluripapillose laminal cells, the presence of propagules, emergent capsule with eight longitudinal orange ribs and star-shaped mouth when dry, scarcely constricted below the mouth, immersed stomata in the capsule wall and the papillose endostome segments. This acrocarpous moss with a marked affinity for the Mediterranean climate has never been recorded in the Algerian bryoflora. A comprehensive description, microphotographs, and distribution map in Algeria of this species are provided. Moreover, its ecology is also discussed.

**Keywords:** Algeria, Mediterranean Region, Megriss Mountain, Orthotrichaceae, Setifian High Plains.

#### **Introduction**

Bryophytes are a group of non-vascular plants (Patiño & Vanderpoorten, 2018; Das et al., 2022) that include mosses, liverworts, and hornworts (Mishler, 2001). Approximately 18,000-25,000 species of bryophytes have been identified globally (Sabovljević et al., 2022), which makes them considered as the most diverse group after the flowering plants (Mishler, 2001; Renzaglia et al., 2007; Goffinet et al., 2009; Bahuguna et al., 2013; Chandra et al., 2016). Among the bryophytes, mosses are the most diverse in terms of species richness (Crandall-Stotler & Bartholomew-Began, 2007), with about 12,000 (Vanderpoorten & Goffinet, 2009) and 14,000 (Asakawa & Ludwiczuk, 2017; Das et al., 2022) species worldwide. Moreover, bryophytes are ubiquitous plants (Hodgetts et al., 2019) that can occupy a variety of habitats (Crandall-Stotler & Bartholomew-Began, 2007; Budke et al., 2018; Taha, 2020; Dziwak et al., 2022) compared to vascular plants (Sabovljević et al., 2022). Due to their structure, bryophytes are very sensitive to environmental conditions (Sabovljević et al., 2022), which makes them good indicators for environmental changes (Hallingback & Hodgetts, 2000; Mishler, 2001; Das et al., 2022), especially the epiphytic bryophytes which are predictably sensitive to global warming because of their direct connection to atmospherical conditions (Gradstein, 2008).

Despite the progress of research for this group in general and epiphytes in particular, there remains a paucity of knowledge regarding their ecology and geographical distribution, mainly in countries where they are understudied or

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neglected, the case of Algeria. Indeed, vascular plants are extensively studied and updated. In contrast, except for the only study conducted in northeastern Algeria by Boukhatem et al. (2017), all bryological explorations in Algeria are very ancient (Jelenc, 1955, 1967). Ros et al. (1999) summarized all available sources to compile an annotated bryophyte checklist of North Africa that was also updated in the Mediterranean checklists of liverworts and mosses (Ros et al., 2007, 2013). To update the Algerian bryoflora, particularly that of the northern part of the Setifian High Plains, Megriss Mountain was chosen to be explored, which is considered one of the most interesting and important ecosystems in terms of biological and landscapes diversity (Boulaacheb, 2013). This landscape diversity allows the creation of microhabitats and offers favorable conditions for the growth of bryophytes, such as trees on which epiphytic bryophytes develop. According to Bahuguna et al. (2013), epiphytic bryophytes play a crucial role in water balance and humus formation in habitats, specifically in gymnosperm forests.

The present work aims to provide knowledge on the geographical distribution and the ecology of an epiphyte moss reported for the first time in Algeria. Knowledge of the distribution and ecological conditions is very important for the future conservation of the species in general and for those rare and threatened in particular. Their survival and existence depend on the preservation of their habitat.

#### **Materials and Methods**

Study area

Megriss Mountain culminates at 1737m elevation. It is a part of the Setifian High Plains, which are situated in northeastern Algeria on latitude 36°19'54" N and longitude 5°21'14" E (Fig. 1). It is characterized by a sub-humid bioclimatic stage with a cold winter variant. Average annual rainfall is 500 mm, of which an important quantity falls as snow; the warmest month is August, with a maximum of 26.4°C, while January is the coldest one, with a minimum of -0.6°C (Boulaacheb, 2013).

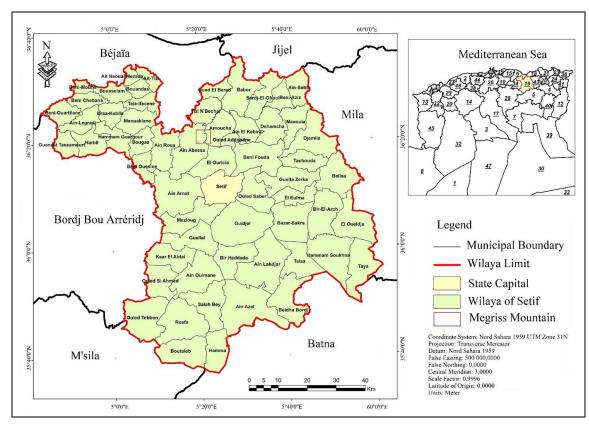


Fig. 1. Study area location in Northern Algeria [Megriss Mountain belongs to the Wilaya of Setif (number 19 in the upper right map), situated northwards of the city of Setif (the base map is from GeoJamal website with the permission of the author)]

The study area constitutes a heterogeneous ecosystem (lowlands, grasslands, streams, temporary pools, material of *Quercus ilex* L. and reforestation of Cedrus atlantica (Endl.) Manetti ex Carrière (Boulaacheb, 2013). Additionally, there are a few species of trees such as Fraxinus angustifolia Vahl, Populus alba L., and Salix alba Kern (Boulaacheb, 2009).

#### Data collection

The collection of samples was carried out in the northern part of Megriss Mountain on two ecologically different localities; the first one is a private property next to a gabion by the road side characterized by a more or less dry soil and temperate atmosphere and the second one is a forest of *Cedrus atlantica* with a rich soil on organic matter and a humid atmosphere (Fig. 2).

Samples were macroscopically and microscopically examined in the *laboratory of urban project, city and territory* (PUViT) which is affiliated with the Department of Architecture, team of Urban-Periurban Ecology and Biodiversity, using Zeïss stemi 2000-c stereomicroscope and Optika microscope. Photomicrographs

of the studied samples were captured using Optika proview 4,8,15529 software. For mosses nomenclature, Hodgetts et al. (2020) was followed.

#### Results

During the fieldwork, a new Algerian record of Orthotrichaceae was found: *Orthotrichum macrocephalum* F. Lara, Garilleti & Mazimpaka.

#### Specimens studied

Algeria. Sétif: Djebel Megriss Mountain, Ain Guelou, 36°21'40.0"N 5°20'19.8"E, *ca* 1108 m a.s.l., on the lower part of the bark of *Fraxinus angustifolia*, 01.06.2021, *leg*. A. Mazari 11, Boulaacheb private herbarium n° 95; *Idem*, 04.10.2022, *leg*. A. Mazari 12, Boulaacheb private herbarium N° 67; Djebel Megriss Mountain, Oued El Bordj, 36°20'5.8"N 5°20'31.5"E, *ca* 1554 m a.s.l., on the lower part of the bark of *Cedrus atlantica*, 01.06.2021, *leg*. N. Boulaacheb 10, Boulaacheb private herbarium n° 66; *Idem*, 25.10.2022, *Leg*. N. Boulaacheb 03, Boulaacheb private herbarium N° 94.

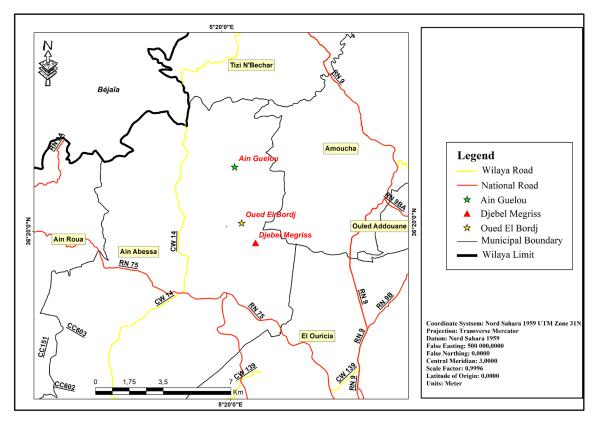


Fig. 2. Sampling localities in Megriss Mountain

#### Morphological characteristics

Orthotrichum macrocephalum was readily recognized as the samples showed all the diagnostic characteristics stated by Lara et al. (2009) and Lara & Garilleti (2014): small-sized plants, lingulate or lanceolate-lingulate leaves with rounded or obtuse apices and costa ending below the apex, recurved and unistratose margins,

pluripapillose and unistratose laminal cells, cylindrical gemmae with 6 to 15 cells. Other morphological characters observed were the emergent capsule with eight longitudinal orange ribs and star-shaped mouth when dry, scarcely constricted below the mouth, immersed stomata in the capsule wall, and very papillose endostome segments (Fig. 3).

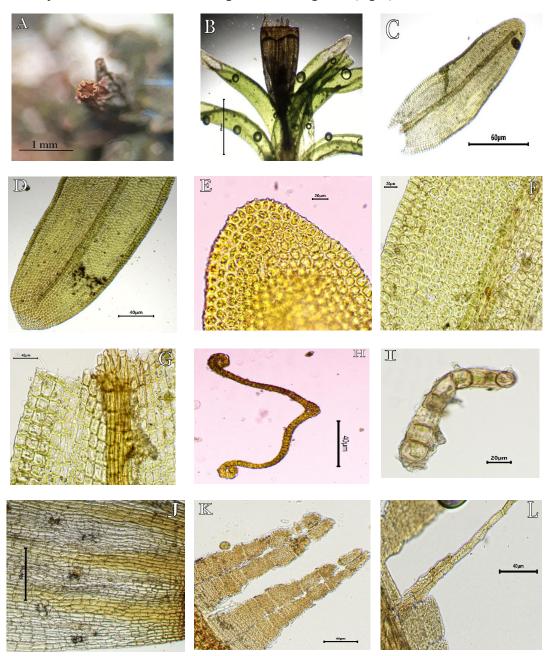


Fig. 3. Microphotographs of Orthotrichum macrocephalum from Djebel Megriss (Boulaacheb private herbarium n° 95 and n° 66) [(A) capsule showing the star-shaped mouth, (B) habitus of the plant, (C-D) leaves, (E) apical cells, (F) median cells, (G) basal cells, (H) leaf cross-section at the basal part, (I) gemmae, (J) capsule wall showing ribs and immersed stomata (K) exostome teeth, (L) endostome segment. A,B,J,K,L MAZ 11 C,D,E,F,G,H,I. BOU 10]

#### **Discussion**

Orthotrichum macrocephalum is a neutrophytic and toxitolerant epiphyte (Garilleti et al., 1997). It extends in Mediterranean climate areas, and it was known from Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, Corsica, Sicily, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus (Lara & Garilleti, 2014), this species has now also been recorded in Algeria, as was expected by Garilleti et al. (1997).

The specimen collected in Ain Guelou locality was growing at 1108 m on the lower part of the bark of Fraxinus angustifolia with other epiphytic mosses such as Orthotrichum diaphanum Brid. and other Orthotrichaceae species, as well as Syntrichia laevipila Brid. while in Oued El Bordj, it was growing at 1554m on the lower part of Cedrus atlantica bark. According to Lara et al. (1994) and Garilleti et al. (1997), O. macrocephalum grows on the trunks angiosperms, especially the Fagaceae (Quercus canariensis Willd., Q. faginea Lam., Q. ilex, Q. suber L.) and the Oleaceae (Fraxinus angustifolia). The species also grows on bases and trunks of different phorophytes between 1000 and 2600m (Draper et al., 2006). In Oued El Bordj locality, the species was observed to grow for the first time on Cedrus atlantica, one of the endemic Northern Africa species and which is ecologically the most important of the Mediterranean mountains (Demarteau et al., 2007). Probably this xerophytic moss (Draper et al., 2006) appears to thrive in the humid atmosphere of cedars. This new habitat provides an opportunity to gain insight into the ecology of the Orthotrichum genus generally, which typically grows in dry, sunny habitats as epiphytes on the bark of deciduous trees or shrubs (Plášek & Ochyra, 2020) and of the species O. macrocephalum particularly; Additionally, this finding can help to provide more information on the tolerance and ecological requirements of Mediterranean epiphytes. Unfortunately, the species may be endangered due to climate change threatening Cedrus atlantica.

O. macrocephalum can sometimes be confused with Nyholmiella obtusifolia (Brid.) Holmen & E.Warncke (Orthotrichum obtusifolium Brid.) due to their similar small size, compact habit, rounded leaf apex, and often with propagules. O. macrocephalum has, however, leaves with recurved margins and pluripapillose laminal cells while N. obtusifolia has erect-incurved margins

with a single central papilla (Lara & Garilleti, 2014).

According to the checklist of Ros et al. (2013), a total of 16 species and one variety of the genus Orthotrichum s.l. were reported from Algeria, which at present correspond to Pulvigera lyellii (Hook. & Taylor) Plášek, Sawicki & Ochyra, five species of Lewinskya, and ten species and one variety of Orthotrichum s.s. The last one through this discovery reaches 11 species in Algeria, and the number may well increase if surveys further. Compared to the Grand Maghreb countries, Orthotrichum s.l. is well represented with 40% of the total 40 Mediterranean species. In order to update the Algerian bryoflora, it is necessary to widen the explorations, including all the geographical areas. With more collections and discoveries, our knowledge of the bryophytes of the country, especially the Orthotrichaceae, will be better.

Although numerous and recent studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of this botanic family, their knowledge and diversity worldwide are still moderately known (Draper et al., 2022). According to Lara & Mazimpaka (2001), the high species diversity exhibited by *Orthotrichum s.l.* suggests that the Mediterranean region may represent a center of the diversity of this group. Algeria, such a large Mediterranean country and characterized by its varied geography and climate, can considerably contribute to this context.

The variability of the Algerian climate and landscapes can give rise to the richness and diversity of bryophytes. The discovery of a new moss species pushes us to broaden surveys to update our bryoflora on the one hand and on the other hand to contribute to a better understanding of the ecology and distribution of the Orthotrichaceae in general and the species *O. macrocephalum* in particular.

#### Conclusion

This study identified new moss record of the family Orthotrichaceae in Algeria: O. macrocephalum. The leaves with rounded or obtuse apices, recurved margins, pluripapillose laminal cells, the star-shaped mouth of capsule when dry, scarcely constricted below the mouth are important distinguishing features of this

new recorded species. Moreover, the study provides useful information to differentiate between the two morphologically similar species, *O. macrocephalum* and *N. obtusifolia* (*O. obtusifolium*). Further detailed bryological surveys in Algeria may reveal other interesting discoveries regarding bryophytes in the region.

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Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions: Amira Mazari and Nacira Boulaacheb were responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, as well as writing the initial draft. Rosa María Ros contributed to interpreting the data, reviewing, and revising the final draft.

Ethics approval: Not applicable.

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### Orthotrichum macrocephalum F. تسجيل نوع جديد من الحزازيات في الجزائر Lara, Garilleti & Mazimpaka

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إن النباتات الطحلبية الخاصة بالهضاب العليا لمنطقة سطيف، الواقعة في شمال شرق الجزائر غير معروفة بشكل جيد ويعتبر جبل مغرس أحد أهم النظم البيئية في هذه المنطقة. خلال الخرجات الميدانية والتي كان الهدف منها دراسة وجرد تنوع النباتات الطحلبية في الجزء الشمالي من جبل مغرس، أدى فحص عينات عائلة Orthotrichaceace إلى تسجيل نوع هوائي Mazimpaka وقد تم تحديده بناءً على أوراقه ذات القمم المستديرة أو المنفرجة والحواف المنحنية إلى الخارج، Mazimpaka وقد تم تحديده بناءً على أوراقه ذات القمم المستديرة أو المنفرجة والحواف المنحنية إلى الخارج، خلاياه الصفيحية أحادية الحليمة، وجود الجيمات، كبسولته المغطاة جزئيا مع ثمانية خطوط برتقالية طولية وفم على شكل نجمة عندما جفافها، تضيق بشكل خفيف أسفل الفم، ثغور مغمورة في جدار الكبسولة والأسنان الداخلية الحليمية. لم يتم تسجيل هذه الحزازية وحيدة التفرع ذو التقارب الملحوظ لمناخ البحر الأبيض المتوسط في النباتات الطحلبية الجزائرية من قبل. قد تم توفير وصف شامل وصور دقيقة وخريطة توزيع في الجزائر لهذا النوع. علاوة على ذلك، تمت مناقشة بيئتها أيضاً.