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PALM PORTRAIT

A *Roystonea* with a Double Trunk

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Five genera of large palms, each with a single species, are conspicuous in the vegetation of the Gulf coastal plain of the State of Veracruz, Mexico (Smith, 1958). *Scheelea liebmannii* Becc. is common in humid forests; *Sabal mexicana* Mart. often forms dense stands in savannalike or seasonally inundated forests; *Acrocomia mexicana* Mart. is mostly found in the dry, deciduous thorn-scrub; *Acoelorrhaphe wrightii* (Griseb. & H. A. Wendl.) Becc. is found only in the marshes of the southeast (Orozco and Lot-Helgueras, 1976); and *Roystonea dunlapiana* P. H. Allen is seen occasionally in seasonally inundated forests.

Branched stems are very unusual in palms except in *Hyphaene* (Hodge, 1965) and a few other genera. A picture of an unidentified double-headed *Roystonea* in Haiti was published in *Principes* 1: 126, 1957; another was mentioned by Smith (1958) from the nearby state of Tabasco, Mexico. In the central plaza of Cosamaloapan, Veracruz, I was very surprised to encounter the double-trunked royal palm shown in the photos (Cover and Fig. 1). The tree is about 15 m tall and is divided halfway up into two equal trunks; it appears as healthy and vigorous as the other *Roystonea* (and *Cocos nucifera*) in

the plaza. It is not known what caused the tree to branch but it does not show any sign of the trauma now.

The town of Cosamaloapan is situated on the levee of the Rio Papaloapan, about 5 m above sea level and 50 km (by air) south of the river's entrance into the Gulf of Mexico at Alvarado; it was an important river port long before roads were built in the region. The surrounding area is now devoted mainly to cattle ranching, mangos, sugar cane and other crops but it was formerly covered with a seasonally inundated forest. I presume that these cultivated trees were obtained from native trees in the general region.

It was not possible to obtain very satisfactory herbarium material, only fallen leaf bases and fruits (Nee 29252 at BH, F, NY, XAL). Collections of *Roystonea* from Veracruz are very few and this "palma real" is only tentatively assigned to *R. dunlapiana*. The trunks are sometimes split to make "boards" for house construction and the leaves are sometimes used for thatch, but it does not produce edible fruits, hence another name, "palma macho" (male palm). It seems to be becoming less common with land clearing for I have not noticed it along roads which were new when travelled by Smith in 1958.

LITERATURE CITED

- HODGE, W. H. 1965. Branching palms. *Principes* 9: 98-100.
 OROZCO, A. AND A. LOT-HELGUERAS. 1976. La vegetacion de las zonas inundables del Sureste de Veracruz. *Biotica* 1: 1-44.
 SMITH, D. 1958. Palm letters from Mexico. *Principes* 2: 9-16.



1. Close-up of the division of the trunk in *Roystonea dunlapiana*; see also the Cover Photo.