Taxonomical investigation on some species of genus *Allium* based on the pollen morphology

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The aim of this research was to investigate the morphological characteristics of the pollen grain of some species of genus *Allium*.

Methodology: The pollen grains were examined by using Light Microscopy (LM), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and the pollen grains of one species under Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM).

Results: The pollen grains were oblate and medium in shape and size. The pollen ornamentation of exine surface, exine ornamentation on sulcus edge, lumina number in the exine surface and the state of pollen grain apex in the examined species were different. Semitectate and columellate ectexine with discontinuous endexine were seen in the pollen wall structure (sporoderm). The dendrogram obtained from the pollen characters in SEM observations by using the numerical taxonomy system (NTSYS) software placed the studied species in two types.

Conclusion: Our palynological dendrogram can be used for segregation the sections and subgenera taxonomical levels in the studied species of genus *Allium* and confirmed the phylogram of the recent phylogenetic research.

Keywords: Allium, Amaryllidaceae, Monocotyledons, Palynology, Phylogeny, Taxonomy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Allium is a member of the family Amaryllidaceae. This genus is one of the largest monocotyledons with a wide dispersion in central and south-east Asia, where the species of this genus constitute a great part of herbaceous societies [1, 2]. Approximately, fifty species of this genus are planted extensive or local level that economically have great importance. Some of the wild species of this genus are used as edible, medicinal and even decorative plants. Moreover, the wild species of this genus have valuable potential for supplying of human consuming [3].

The taxonomical position of *Allium* as the polymorph genus is sophisticated [4, 5]. Lately, the phylogenetic examination on this genus has been done on the endemic species on China [1] and confirmed monophyly in *Allium* by using the phylogenetic analysis of molecular data (ITS nuclear marker and *rps16* chloroplast marker); but, the obtained phylogram from the phylogenetic analysis wasn't confirmed for some subgenera. In their research, three main monophyletic groups were specified: the first clade includes subgenera *Nectaroscordum*, *Amerallium* and *Microscordum*; the second clade includes subgenera *Caloscordum*, *Anguinum*, *Vvedenskya*, *Porphyroprason* and *Melanocrommyum* and the third clade includes subgenera *Butomissa*, *Cyathophora*, *Rhizirideum*, *Allium*, *Reticulatobulbosa* and *Polyprason* [1].

The palynological studies of genus *Allium* from some researches are valuable to classify taxonomical level. Majority of these studies were investigated the following characters: exine ornamentation to specify position of the tribe *Allieae* [6, 7], being single sulcus and having extensive sulcus as a predominant morphological pollen character in the genus *Allium* is determined [8]. [9] examined the species belong to sections *Codonoprasum* and *Allium* and specified the homogeneity of sulcus and pollen grain ornamentation in the genus *Allium*. Moreover, they indicated that some morphological characters of the pollen

grain such as sulcus and presence or lack of operculum that have taxonomic importance in the section level. [2] examined the pollen grain morphology in some species of *Allium* (twenty three species in six sections including *Molium*, *Scorodon*, *Brevispatha*, *Codonoprasum*, *Allium* and *Melanocrommyum*) and characterized the shape of pollen grains was prolate and subprolate. Also, in all species extensive sulcus and the smallest and largest pollen grains are belonged to *A. guttatum* Steven. (section *Allium*) and *A. roseum* L. (section *Molium*), respectively. Palynological investigation had done in 30 *Allium* taxa belonging to 15 sections in Iran and the pollen grains were heteropolar, peroblate to suboblate shape, rugulate to microrugulate, perforate to striate in subgenus *Melanocrommyum* and striate exine ornamentation [10]. According to result of [11], the sulcus was observed in section *Allium* that this character wasn't observed in the other sections. [12] observed an extensive sulcus from the beginning to the end of the pollen grains in all taxa in sections of *Rhizirideum*, *Codonoprasum* and *Allium*. In ultrastructure wall of the pollen grains, the exine semitectate and simplicolumellate were observed in all investigated sections. In addition, the exine ornamentation in these sections and related species were heterogeneous and weren't synchronize in classification of these sections and three exine ornamentation including striate-perforate, striate-rugulate-perforate and rugulate-perforate were observed in these species. They also stated that availability of operculum as an apomorphic character and narrow endexine layer as a taxonomic character in the genus *Allium* determined in the sections of *Rhizirideum*, *Codonoprasum* and *Allium* [12]. [15] separated *A. ursinum* in subspecies level based on the exine ornamentation and stated that this character is an appropriate taxonomic character (granulate-rugulate, rugulate-striate ornamentation in the subspecies *Ucrainicum* and perforate-rugulate ornamentation in the subspecies *Ursinum*). [14] examined three types of pollen grains in seven subgenera and thirteen sections of *Allium* in Pakistan that weren't in

agreement with the mentioned classifications and determined the types of *A. fedtschenkoanum* (reticulate ornamentation), *A. grifthianum* (rugulate-foveolate ornamentation) and *A. roylei* (subpsilate ornamentation). [15] demonstrated characteristics of the pollen grain including qualitative and quantitative characters of some European species of genus *Allium* including three subgenera (*Allium*, *Amerallium* and *Rhizirideum*) and five sections that explicitly being synchronize with the section taxonomy level.

The main aim of our research was to evaluate the pollen morphology and its implications on the taxonomy and phylogeny of some species of the genus *Allium*.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The pollen grains were provided from the collected samples of Komarov Botanical Institute (LE), Moscow, Russia. Samples were collected since May and June 2003 and identified by E. Kalikov(Table 1). Also, taxonomic relationships among the studied species in this research showed in Table 1 [1]. For Light Microscopy analysis (LM), the pollen grains were acetolyzed based on Erdtman's method [16]. Then, mounted preparations with glycerine. Thirty pollen grains were measured by Leitz Light Microscopy (HM-LUX3) from each studied species and images were taken by Dino camera (AM-423). For Scanning Electron Microscopy analysis (SEM), non-acetolyzed pollen grains were put on metal stubs and transferred to the EMITECH sputter coater for coating by gold-paladium (K450X). Finally, the obtained micrographs were taken by VEGA-TESCAN Scanning Electron Microscopy. For Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) preparation, the pollen grains were fixed by 2% osmium tetroxide and stained by uranylacetate solution [17]. Then, dehydrated in ethanol series and were put in acetone. Finally, embedded in Epon mixture (Epon 812, Epon Harter DDSA, Epon Harter MNA) according to the standard method of [18]. Ultrathin sections of the pollen grains were obtained by an ultramicrotome (LKB 8800), then stained

with lead citrate (LKB 8800, Ultratome III) [17]. The micrographs were made by using a JEOL-JEM-100B Transmission Electron Microscopy. The terminology used for describing pollen grain characters follows [19, 20, 21]. For construction the dendrogram, the obtained characters by SEM observations from the pollen grains were coded (Table 4). Finally, the NTSYS software [22] was used along based on Single Linkage method and UN1 similarity coefficient (binary coefficient) (Table 5).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pollen grains in the studied species were observed oblate in shape and medium in size (Table 2 and Fig. 1). In SEM micrographs, the pollen grain characters were different in these species (Table 3, Figs. 2 and 3). The exine ornamentation on surface and the exine ornamentation on sulcus edge were different and these characters for each species are expressed as follows: striate exine ornamentation on surface and sulcus edge for *A. altissimum*, perforate-striate exine ornamentation on surface and perforate on sulcus edge for *A. fetisowii*, striate-perforate exine ornamentation on surface and striate on sulcus edge for *A. backhousianum*, exine ornamentation on surface and sulcus edge of macrostriate for *A. karataviense*, striate-psilate exine ornamentation on surface and psilate-striate exine ornamentation on sulcus edge for *A. obliquum*, perforate-striate exine ornamentation on surface and psilate exine ornamentation on sulcus edge for *A. rosenbachianum*, perforate-microstriate exine ornamentation on surface and sulcus edge for *A. schoenoprasum* (Table 3). The pollen grains of *A. fetisowii* and *A. schoenoprasum* species were acute in the end and in the other species were obtuse (Table 3). The size of lumina and muri in the studied species also was different. Lumina's size almost was observed similar in *A. altissimum, A. backhousianum* and *A. karataviense* (0.06- 0.13 µm) (Table 3). The number of exine surface lumina, was the least (4 lumina per 2 µm ^{2}) for *A. altissimum* and the most (30 and 31 lumina per 2 µm ^{2}) for *A. fetisowii* and *A. backhousianum* species, respectively (Table 3).

The palynological dendrogram were placed these taxa in two types: type one including subgenus *Melanocrommyum* and *Cepa* and the other types including subgenus *Polyprason* (Fig. 5).

This research indicated that there were no differences in pollen shape and pollen size characters; but, the dendrogram of pollen characters from SEM observations provided useful valuable taxonomical characters on the subgenera and sections classifications (Table 4 & 5, Fig. 5).

Various shapes of pollen grains were observed in *Allium* spp. on previous investigations and the main shape of the pollen grains in this genus is oblate shape. Medium pollen type was observed in the most species studied here and previous research [2, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15].

The results of *A. schoenoprasum* TEM micrographs belongs to section *Schoenoprasum* and subgenus *Cepa* revealed that the ectexine is semitectate, infratectum is simplicolumellate, foot-layer is discontinuous and endexine layer is very thin and discontinuous (Fig. 4). Our research on the genus *Allium* confirms previous palynological research on pollen wall structure on *Codonoprasum*, *Allium* and *Rhizirideum* sections [9, 12].

The perforate-striate exine surface ornamentation for two species including *A. fetisowii* and *A. rosenbachianum* belong to the subgenus *Melanocrommyum* was alike; but, these two species were different in the exine ornamentation on sulcus edge, the number of exine surface lumina, the state of pollen grain apex and the size of lumina and muri. The variations of exine ornamentation on the surface and sulcus edge for the other species were in agreement with the performed sections classification. Moreover, the number of

exine surface lumina for each species was also different and the least and the most number of lumina was counted in the subgenus *Melanocrommyum*. Our results also indicated that *A. obliquum* belong to section *Oreiprason* and subgenus *Polyprason* had no lumina in the exine surface. In the studied species in Iran, the exine surface ornamentation without lumina was observed in the subgenus *Reticulatobulbosa* in section *Campanulata* and also in the subgenus *Polyprason* in section *Falcatifolia* [11]. Therefore, the exine surface ornamentation without lumina can be defined as a useful morphological character in the subgenus *Polyprason* and its related sections. In flora of Pakistan *A. rosenbachianum* on section *Megaloprason*, *A. schoenoprasum* belongs to section *Schoenoprasum* and *A. roylei* in section *Oreiprason* were placed on *A. roylei* types based on the pollen grain morphology [14].

The dendrogram of the pollen characters analysis was in agreement with the taxonomical ranking and previous phylogram by [1] on these taxa in subgenus and section levels. The phylogram of the studied species were distinguished based on [1]. These authors had done the extensive phylogenetic analysis by molecular data (ITS nuclear marker and *rps*16 chloroplast marker) on *Allium* genus. The final dendrogram of our palynological investigation was in agreement with the obtained phylogram by [1]. According to the pollen dendrogram obtained from analysis by SEM observations in subgenus *Melanocrommyum*, *A. fetisowii* introduced as a sister group with the other species in this subgenus. In clade *Melanocrommyum*, *A. fetisowii* in section *Longibidentata* determined as the sister group of the remaining species of the subgenus *Melanocrommyum* based on the phylogenetic information of molecular markers [1]. *A. schoenoprasum* belongs to subgenus *Cepa* and section *Schoenoprasum* was different from the other species in SEM observation, although in the state of pollen grain apex was similar to *A. fetisowii.* The results also indicated that *A. altissimum, A. backhousianum* and *A. karataviense* species with similar size in lumina were

placed in the subgenus *Melanocrommyum*. The palynological dendrogram in this study put the species *A. altissimum* and *A. backhousianum* from subgenus *Melanocrommyum* and in sections *Procerallium* and *Acmepetala* together. Moreover, according to the molecular studies, these two sections were put together [1].

4. CONCLUSION

The dendrogram of palynological analysis data in the related species was in parallel with the divisions of sections and subgenera taxonomical rank and the phylogram of phylogenetic studies. Also, our research on the genus *Allium* confirms some previous palynological research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful from the Main Botanical Garden of Russian Academy of Sciences (MHA) for cooperation and provision the samples, Razi Metallurgical Institute, Tehran, Iran, for taking the SEM micrographs, cellular and molecular research center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran and interfaculty laboratory of the Lomonosov State University (Dr. Svetlana Polevova), Moscow, Russia for taking of TEM micrographs.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors of this manuscript declare that they have no competing interests.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors designed this research, conducted the laboratory work, and wrote the manuscript. All of the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Table 1. Taxonomic relationships and collecting data from the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae) [1].

Taxon	Section	Subgenus	Collector and detector , date of collecting and herbarium name
Allium altissimum Regel.	*Procerallium*	*Melanocrommyum*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE
Allium fetisowii Regel.	*Longibidentata*	*Melanocrommyum*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE
Allium backhousianum Regel.	*Acmepetala*	*Melanocrommyum*	E. Kalikov, 10.6.2003, gathering from LE
Allium karataviense Regel.	*Miniprason*	*Melanocrommyum*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE
Allium obliquum L.	*Oreiprason*	*Polyprason*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE
Allium rosenbachianum Regel.	*Megaloprason*	*Melanocrommyum*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE
Allium schoenoprasum L.	*Schoenoprasum*	*Cepa*	E. Kalikov, 30.5.2003, gathering from LE

Table 2. Pollen measurements of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae).

Taxon	Pollen size (µm)	Polar axis (µm) Min–Mean±SD–Max	Equatorial axis (µm) Min–Mean±SD–Max	P.E	Pollen shape	Pollen type size
A. altissimum	35.18±6.52	17.00-18.28±1.24-21.00	27.50-35.18±6.52-46.00	0.5	Oblate	Medium
A. fetisowii	30.74±5.13	15.00-16.16±1.51-20.00	22.50-30.74±5.13-37.50	0.5	Oblate	Medium
A. backhousianum	29.97±2.34	12.00-16.22±1.79-17.50	27.50-29.97±2.34-35.00	0.5	Oblate	Medium
A. karataviense	31.39±4.92	12.00-16.84±2.03-20.00	22.50-31.39±4.92-41.00	0.5	Oblate	Medium
A. obliquum	31.56±6.09	12.50-16.16±1.60-20.00	25.00-31.56±6.09-41.00	0.5	Oblate	Medium
A. rosenbachianum	33.70±1.92	14.00-19.60±3.63-25.00	30.00-33.70±1.92-37.50	0.6	Oblate	Medium
A. schoenoprasum var. *sibiricum*	30.82±5.08	15.00-16.46±2.24-20.00	25.00-30.82±5.08-39.00	0.5	Oblate	Medium

P.E: Pollar. Equatorial ratio

Table 3. Pollen data of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae) from the Scanning Electron Microscopy.

Taxon	Exorn	Sd	S	L	M	P
A. altissimum	Striate	Striate	Obtuse	0.06-0.13	0.13-3.46	4
A. fetisowii	Perforate-striate	Perforate	Acute	0.06-0.20	0.13-0.86	30
A. backhousianum	Striate-perforate	Striate	Obtuse	0.06-0.13	0.13-0.40	31
A. karataviense	Macrostriate-perforate	Macrostriate-perforate	Obtuse	0.06-0.13	0.06-0.40	12
A. obliquum	Striate-psilate	Psilate-striate	Obtuse	-	-	-
A. rosenbachianum	Perforate-striate	Psilate	Obtuse	0.06-0.26	0.06-1.20	27
A. schoenoprasum var. *sibiricum*	Perforate-microstriate	Perforate-microstriate	Acute	0.06-0.40	0.06-1.60	22

Exorn: Exine ornamentation, Sd: Sulcus edge ornamentation, S: The state of pollen grain apex, L: Lumina size, M: Muri width size, P: The lumina number on the exine surface

Table 4. The pollen traits from Scanning Electron Microscopy and coding of these characters by the analysis with NTSYS software.

Taxon	Exorn (code)	Sd (code)	S (code)	L (code)	M (code)	P (code)
A. altissimum	Striate (1)	Striate (1)	Obtuse (1)	0.06 (1)-0.13 (1)	0.13 (1)-3.46 (5)	4 (1)
A. fetisowii	Perforate-striate (2)	Perforate (2)	Acute (2)	0.06 (1)-0.20 (2)	0.13 (1)-0.86 (2)	30 (5)
A. backhousianum	Striate-perforate (3)	Striate (1)	Obtuse (1)	0.06 (1)-0.13 (1)	0.13 (1)-0.40 (1)	31 (6)
A. karataviense	Macrostriate-perforate (4)	Macrostriate-perforate (3)	Obtuse (1)	0.06 (1)-0.13 (1)	0.06 (2)-0.40 (1)	12 (2)
A. obliquum	Striate-psilate (5)	Psilate-striate (4)	Obtuse (1)	(0)	0	0
A. rosenbachianum	Perforate-striate (2)	Psilate (5)	Obtuse (1)	0.06 (1)-0.26 (3)	0.06 (2)-1.20 (3)	27 (4)
A. schoenoprasum var. *sibiricum*	Perforate-microstriate (6)	Perforate-microstriate (6)	Acute (2)	0.06 (1)-0.40 (4)	0.06 (2)-1.60 (4)	22 (3)

Table 5. The similarity coefficients of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae) compared with the others by using the NTSYS software.

Taxon	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
a	1.00						
b	0.40	1.000					
c	0.76	0.40	1.00				
d	0.54	0.222	0.66	1.00			
e	0.22	0.00	0.22	0.22	1.00		
f	0.40	0.400	0.40	0.54	0.22	1.00	
g	0.22	0.40	0.22	0.40	0.00	0.40	1.00

a.*A. altissimum*, b. *A. fetisowii,* c. *A. backhousianum*, d. *A. karataviense*, e. *A. obliquum*, f. *A. rosenbachianum*, g. *A. schoenoprasum* var. *sibiricum*.

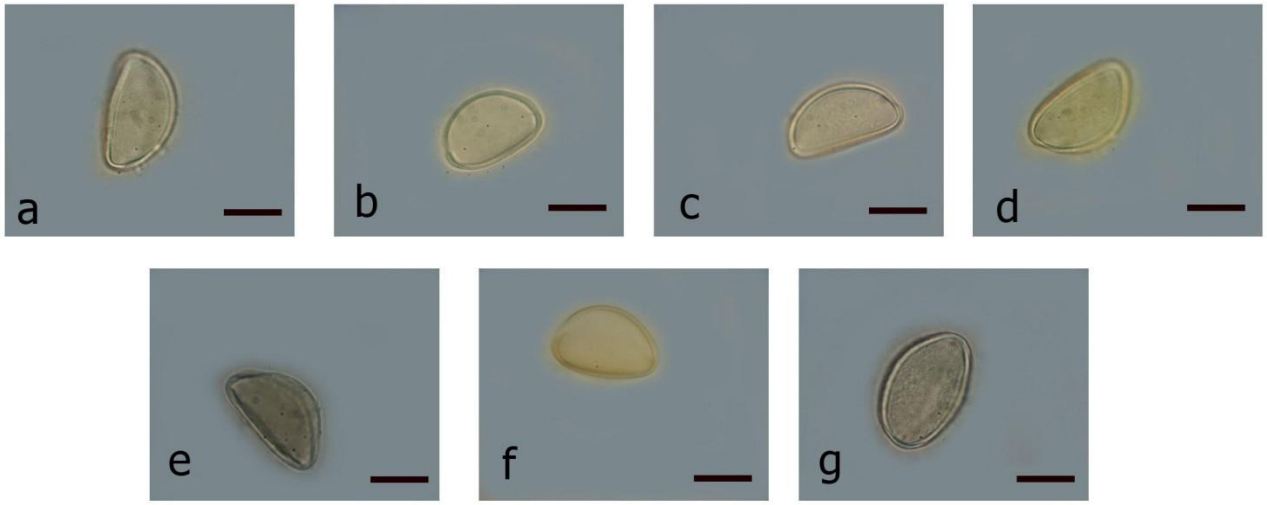

Fig. 1. Pollen grains of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae), seen on LM: a. *A. altissimum*, b. *A. fetisowii,* c. *A. backhousianum*, d. *A. karataviense*, e. *A. obliquum*, f. *A. rosenbachianum*, g. *A. schoenoprasum* var. *sibiricum*.(Light Microscopy, 1000X, scale: 10 µm)

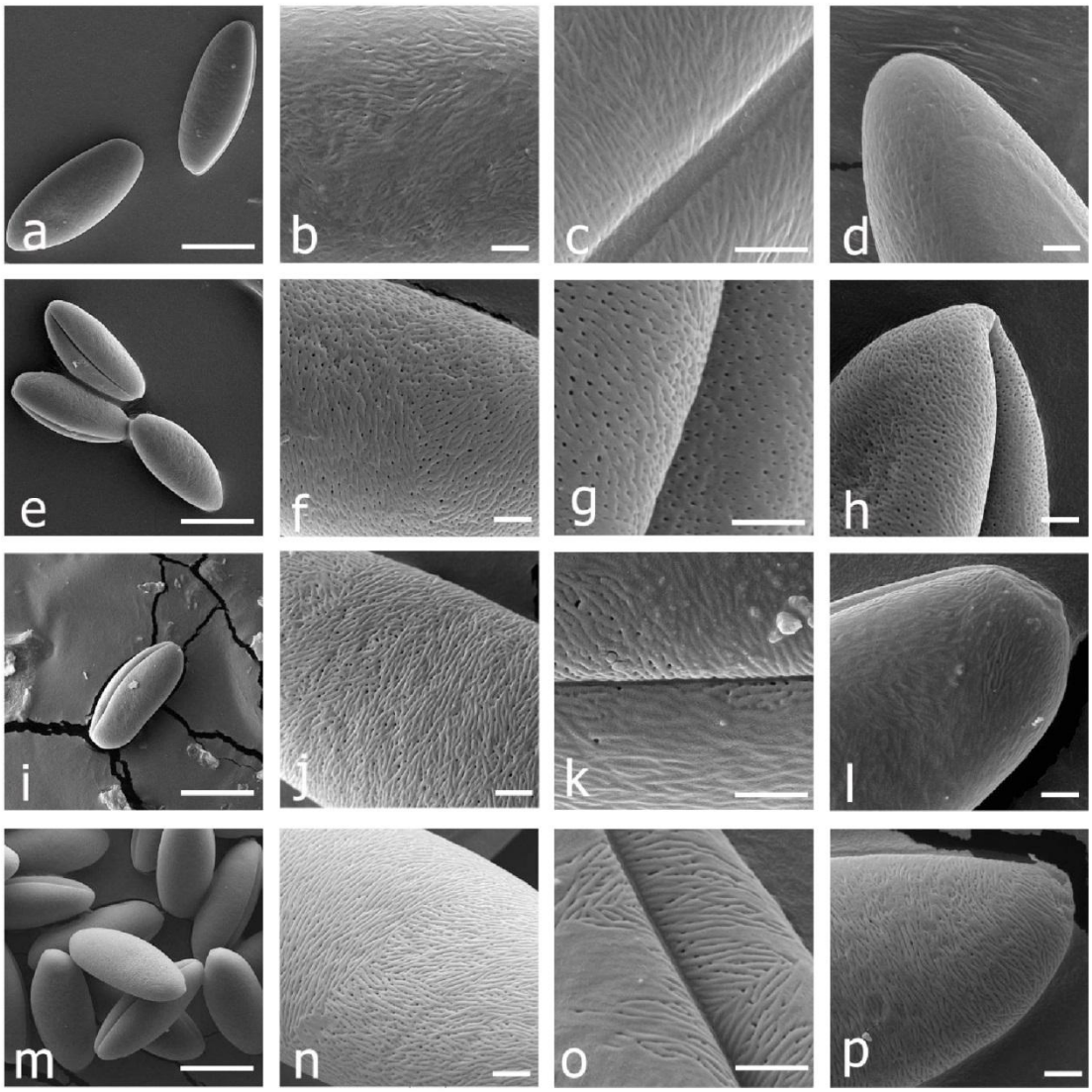

Fig. 2. Pollen grains of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae), on SEM: (for each species, the equatorial view of pollen grain, exine ornamentation, sulcus edge exine ornamentation and the state of pollen grain apex have been determined, respectively). *A. altissimum* (a–d), *A. fetisowii* (e–h), *A. backhousianum* (i–l) and *A. karataviense* (m–p). (Scale bar: 20 µm for a, e, i & m., scale bar: 2 µm for b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, n, o & p.)

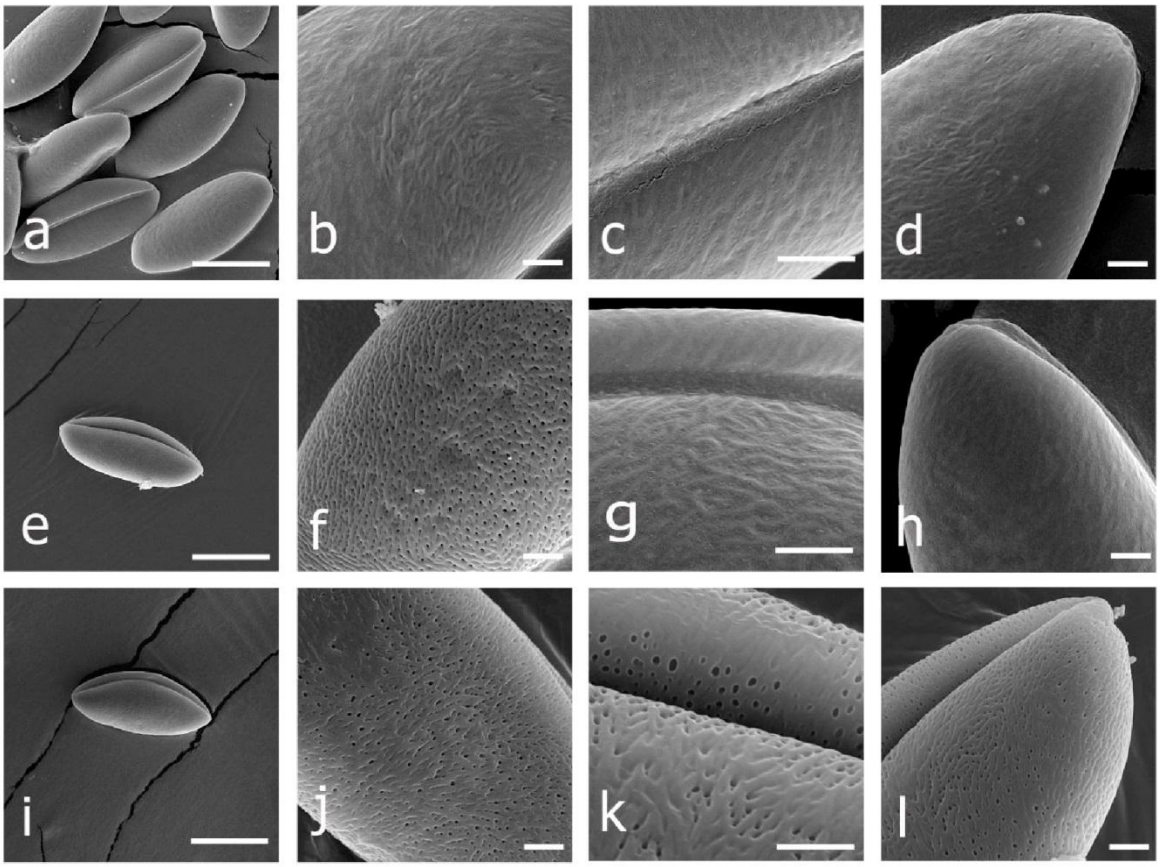

Fig. 3. Pollen grains of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae), on SEM: (for each species, the equatorial view of pollen grain, exine ornamentation, sulcus edge exine ornamentation and the state of pollen grain apex have been determined, respectively). *A. obliquum* (a–d), *A. rosenbachianum* (e–h) and *A. schoenoprasum* var. *sibiricum* (i–l). (Scale bar: 20 µm for a, e & i., scale bar: 2 µm for b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k & l)

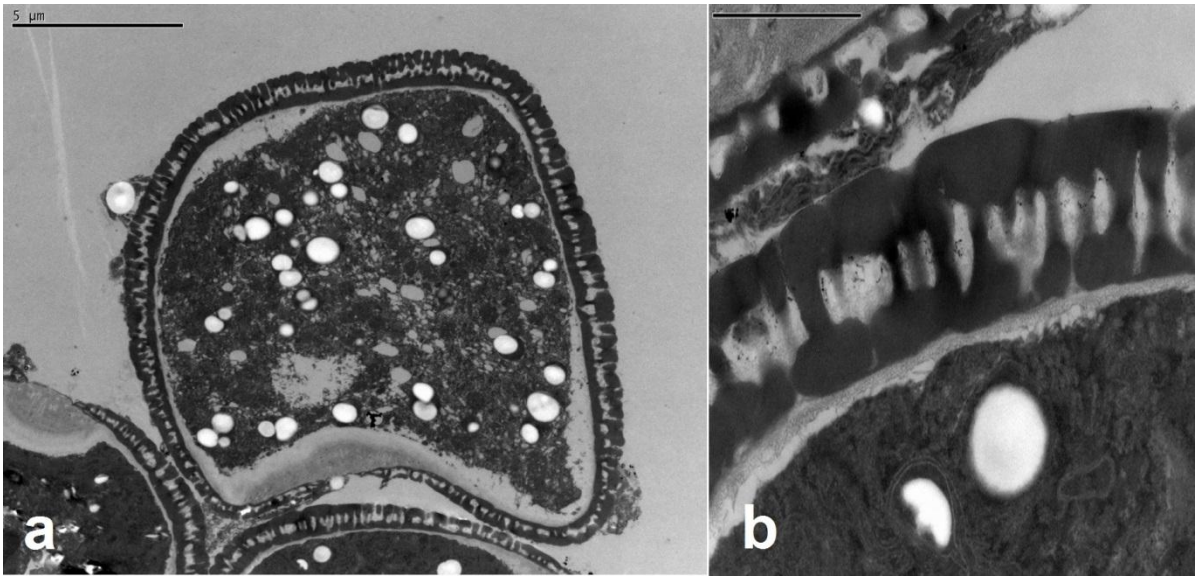

Fig. 4. Ultra-thin section on pollen grain of *A. schoenoprasum* var. *sibiricum* (Amaryllidaceae): a. pollen grain (Scale bar: 5 µm), b: exine structure (Scale bar: 1 µm).

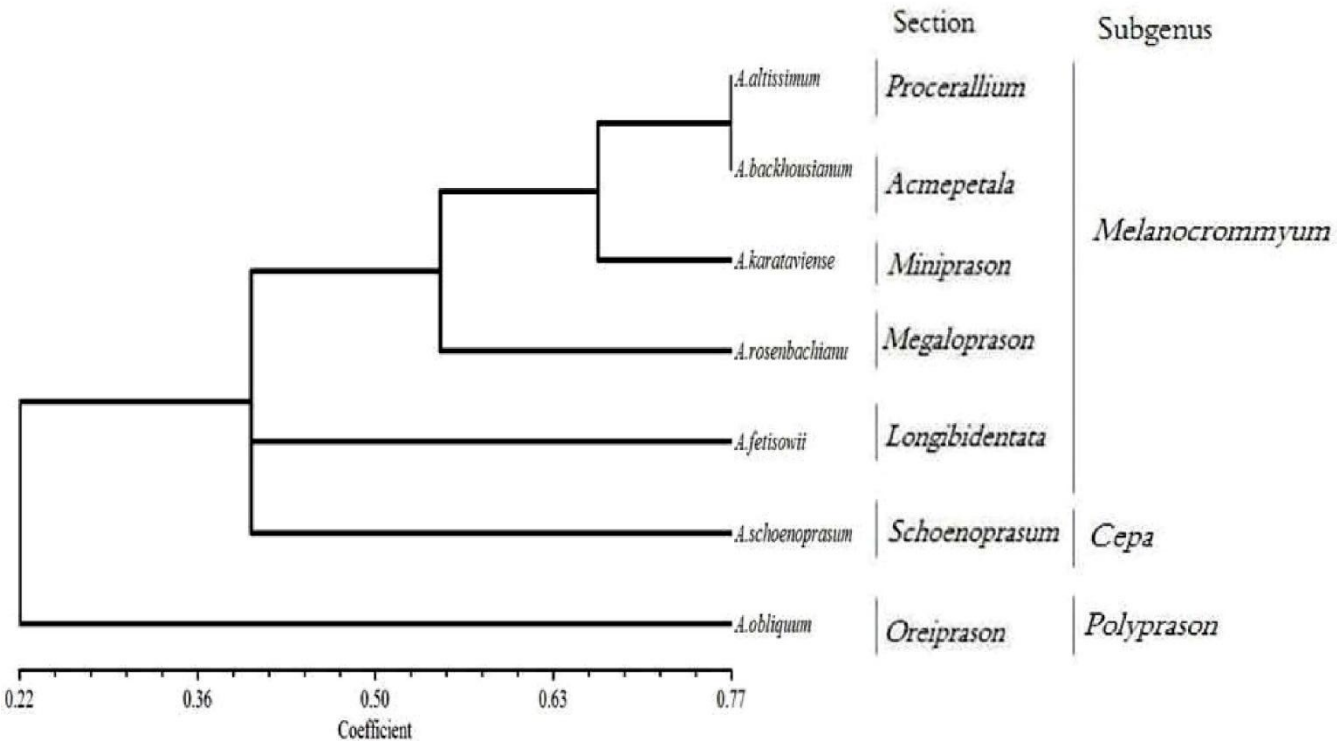

Fig. 5. Dendrogram obtained from implication of pollen morphology on taxonomic relationships of the studied species of *Allium* (Amaryllidaceae).

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