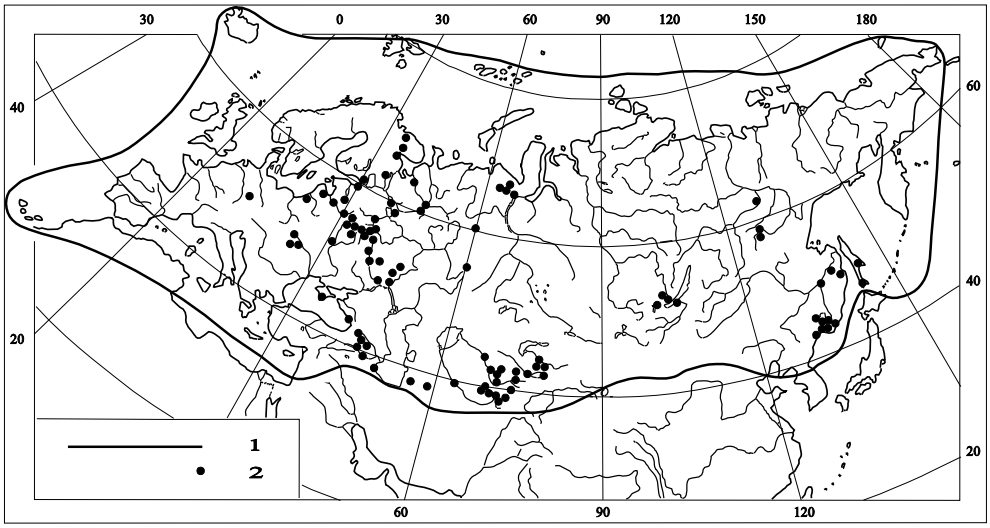

Fig. 1. Study area (*1*) and places of the author's own observations and collections (*2*)

complete geographical descriptions for the majority of species: their areas appear to be cut by political boundaries, and parts of areas beyond the borders remain unclarified. After a long period of hesitations, I made a decision to broaden my research in order to include a revision of the systematics of willows within floras of a number of adjacent and other closely located countries, particularly, those of Western Europe, Northern Africa, Asia Minor, and also the western part of China, Northeast China, Mongolia, and North Korea. That made it possible to present complete species ranges, at least their Old World parts. To accomplish this task, I had to include 18 European species alien to the USSR flora. See Fig. 1 for boundaries of the area under consideration.

We never know beforehand, which characters in any particular case will prove to be most important for species discrimination. Therefore, the most critical issue for the systematics of species is a possibility to study the largest possible number of characters in the largest possible number of specimens. Today, these are mostly traditional macromorphological characters that can be studied in accordance with that requirement. That is why consideration of these characters still remains the basis for the species systematics. The most effective methods are observations in nature, studies of herbarium collections, and, to a lesser extent, observations of cultivated plants. According to the literature data, the study of chromosomes is so far practically useless for the systematics of the willows; preliminary results of the research done by my colleague, M. Golysheva, appear to be similar. Therefore, I did not use the caryological method. The investigation of leaf anatomy proved to be much more fruitful.

Results of the research revealed that the real species composition of the USSR willows is very different from the one described in the literature. For example, of 203 species named in the literature for the USSR flora, 96 have proved to be synonyms and are to be eliminated from the list of distinct species. And this is not the matter of merely lumping "small" species into "large" ones. The author is by no means an advocate of "large" species-conglomerates.

8

9