

Károly Szabó – Librarian, Bibliographer and Historian

*Maria-Stela CONSTANTINESCU-MATIȚA
Lucian Blaga Central University Library, Cluj*

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Abstract

The present paper tries to emphasize aspects related to the life and activity of Károly Szabó, prominent personality of the Hungarian culture in Transylvania in the 19th century, well-known historian and bibliographer.

Károly Szabó was first librarian of the Transylvanian Museum Society beginning with the year 1860, first Director of the Cluj University Library in the period 1872–1890, Professor of the History Department of the Ferencz József Royal Hungarian University in cluj and the Rector of this institution in the academic year 1882–1883.

He lived between 1824 and 1890 and dedicated his entire life, all his energies and creative power to old Hungarian history, the study of historical sources in their original languages (he was familiar with several classical and modern languages), the translation of numerous texts, the elaboration and editing of a considerable number of books, studies and articles, and to his library and bibliographic work. His bibliographic activity resulted in his chief work entitled: *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* (Old Hungarian Bibliography) which is the basis of all modern Hungarian retrospective bibliographical works, and its author, Károly Szabó is considered the founder of Hungarian national bibliography. This work, which consists of 3300 pages contained by 4 volumes, belongs to the first patrimonial collections owned by the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj.

E-mail: stela@bcucluj.ro

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Károly Szabó was a prominent personality of the Hungarian culture in Transylvania in the 19th century, a well-known historian and bibliographer for whom work, the spirit of truth, modesty, the sense of

duty, seriousness constituted defining elements which accompanied him permanently during his life, career and intellectual development.

He was remembered by his contemporaries, moreover, he was the image of a many-sided scholar, a well educated intellectual with a high moral standing. Honesty, strength of character, warm human nature close to his fellowmen, extraordinary perseverance and capacity of work, love of mankind, self-denial are only some aspects of his personality.

A series of personalities, historians and librarians, men of culture admired him exceedingly and dedicated to his memory beautiful pages, their words showing the respect and admiration they bore for him.

The periodicals *Erdélyi Múzeum* (Transylvanian Museum), *Akadémiai Értesítő* (Academic Gazette), *Ellenzék* (Opposition), *Nemzet* (Nation), *Századok* (Centuries), *Vasárnapi Újság* (Sunday Paper), *Ország-Világ* (The Wide World), *Érdélyi Híradó* (Transylvanian News), *Fővárosi Lapok* (The Capital's Newspaper) dedicated to him, when he died, different articles to honour and commemorate him.

From among the historians, bibliographers and librarians who admired him and some even knew him we can mention: Lajos Szádeczky-Kardoss,¹ Gedeon Borsa,² Dezső Csánki,³ Sándor Szilágyi,¹ Leona Váczy.²

¹ Lajos Szádeczky-Kardoss (Apr. 5, 1859, Pusztafalu–Dec. 29, 1935, Budapest), historian, Professor of the University of Cluj from the year 1891 and Rector of this University in 1910–11. He investigated the history of Transylvania in the 16–18th centuries and the Hungarian–Polish relationships. He edited historical sources. He became a member of the Hungarian Academy (corresponding member 1888, permanent member 1909). Cf. *Magyar Nagylexikon* (Great Hungarian Lexicon), 16th vol., Sel–Szö, Budapest, Nagylexikon Kiadó, 2003, p. 420.

² Gedeon Borsa (born on Oct. 11, 1923, Budapest), historian specialized on the history of books and printing, bibliographer. He obtained his doctorate in Budapest in 1945. Beginning with 1952 and until his retirement he worked at the National Library of Hungary. From 1961 he was chief editor of the bibliography *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok* (Old Hungarian Printed Materials). His research in the domain of old Hungarian books and of printing reach back to the 18th century, and in the case of foreign books and printing to the end of the 16th century. Cf. *Ibid.*, 4th vol. Bik–Bz., 2001, p. 356.

³ Dezső Csánki (May 18, 1857, Füzesgyarmat–Apr. 29, 1933, Budapest), historian, archivist, member of the Hungarian Academy (corresponding member 1891, permanent member 1900, Director 1925). Cf. Agnes Kenyeres, *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* (Hungarian Biographic Lexicon), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, p. 297.

Károly Szabó's name is connected to three important such as: the Transylvanian Museum Society, the University and University Library of Cluj, institutions with which he had direct contacts.

Károly Szabó was born in Tarcsa (Békés County) in Hungary on 14 December 1824, where his father was a Calvinist priest. His grandfather was a farmer and this side of the rural environment left its mark on the young man, he always shown affection towards Hungarian language and popular poetry.

His interest and curiosity towards science, his love of books was shown already in his childhood.

He spent his childhood in Tarcsa and he got a good stimulus for study in his parents' house. He studied at the Calvinist College of Debrecen in the years 1833–1842, where he obtained the highest qualifications for each subject. In 1843 he continued his studies at the Faculty of Law in Kásmárk, his interest being roused under Professor Pál Hunfalvy's direction by the classical Greek writers. He was not at all attracted to a carrier in law and this profession was not compatible with his soul. "Then he threw his diploma to the bottom of a box – said Károly Szabó – and never took it out."³ Giving up the carrier as a lawyer, he went to Fiume in the spring of 1846⁴ to the Naval Institute in order to become a sailor. There is a journal among his manuscripts preserved in the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj which contains the inscriptions of this period. In Fiume he finished the first course, but as he became seriously ill he was forced to return home though he regretted this greatly. During the few months he spent at home, he made translations from Thucydides, returning thus to the Greek classics.

¹ Sándor Szilágyi (Aug. 30, 1827, Kolozsvár–Jan. 22, 1899, Budapest), historian, member of the Hungarian Academy (corresponding member 1857, permanent member 1873). He studied law and philosophy at the University of Cluj. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2nd vol. (L–Z), 1969, p. 778.

² Leona Váczy (1913–1995), bibliographer at the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj.

³ Lajos Szádeczky, "Szabó Károly emlékezete" (Károly Szabó's Memory), *Századok*, XXVIII (1894), p. 198.

⁴ Fiume, city in Western Croatia, on the Adriatic Sea and the Gulf of Quarnero. Nowadays it is called Rijeka. The name Fiume was given to this port when it belonged to Italy in the period 1919–1945. Cf. *Mic dicționar enciclopedic*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2005, p. 1206.

After his health had returned, in spring 1847 he went to Pest invited by Ferenc Toldy,¹ Director of the University Library in order to help Toldy to prepare the work *Magyar tudósok tára* (Collection of Hungarian Scholars). The aim of this work was to offer a list of every Hungarian writer with their biographic data and activity. In a year and a half they prepared eight volumes, the work being published to the letter H, when it was interrupted by the events of 1848.

In this same period Szabó debuted in the field of literature. He presented in a meeting of the Kisfaludy Literary Society his translation, *Mutatvány Thukydidesből* (Fragments from Thucydides) which was published in the *Új Magyar Múzeum* (New Hungarian Museum) in 1851.

In the 1859, urged by Ferenc Toldy, a literary critic as well, he worked on the translation of Greek tragedies by Euripides (*Electra*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*) and by Sophocles (*King Oedipus*), as well as of the texts of great Greek historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides. In this period he began to prepare a Greek–Hungarian comparative dictionary which however remained in manuscript and unfinished.

When the 1848–49 Revolution began he joined the national militia participating in many events and reaching the rank of lieutenant. He was an example for his comrades not only because of his courage but also due to his love of books. He was called by them “little Thucydides” since in his shoulder bag he always carried a copy of the Greek historian’s works.

After the end of the revolution he withdrew to his native palce for a time. In 1850 he arranged the Teleki archives. His scientific inclinations and his love of books attracted him towards the library. He applied for a job to the National museum, respectively the University Library of Budapest. On April 25, 1850 at the personal request of Baron Geringer he was appointed a probationer to the University Library of Budapest. Imperial commissar Geringer himself sent him the following answer: “Taking into consideration your familiarity with Hungarian, German, Latin, Greek, Italian and French languages, and mainly for your knowledge of classical languages you are allowed to be accepted at the

¹ Ferenc Toldy, Hungarian writer, born in 1805 in Budapest, he studied philosophy and medicine. He was the editor of the first medical journal in Hungarian. In 1841 he became the President of the Kisfaludy Society, and in 1849 the professor of Hungarian literary history at the University of Budapest. Cf. C. Diaconovich, *Enciclopedia Română* (Romanian Encyclopaedia), vol. III, Kemet–Zymotic, Sibiu, W. Krafft’s Press, 1904, p. 1108.

University Library of Budapest as a trainee without salary.”¹ Károly Szabó, however, did not accept this offer, since at the same time at Ferenc Toldy’s recommendation he was hired to work besides Count József Teleki,² first President of the Hungarian Academy, as his secretary and collaborator. In this quality Károly Szabó worked with Count Teleki at his great work entitled *A Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon* (The Hunyadis’ Age in Hungary), a task he accepted with great pleasure. Beginning with 1850 and until the Count’s death in 1855 this was his main occupation. During the five years he stayed beside Count Teleki Károly Szabó also studied and investigated historical sources. In fact, this period was a turning point in his life, decisive for the development of his career, since he then became a true historian and began to publish important articles and studies. Count Teleki was for Szabó a spiritual master from whom he learned objectivity and thoroughness and whom he followed especially for his precision and seriousness in work.

Károly Szabó was a historian who studied the foreign sources referring to Hungarian history in their original language. He made known the writings of Byzantine authors such as Priscus Rhetor, Constantinus Prophyrogenetos, Emperor Leon VI the Philosopher (or the Wise) referring to Hungarian national history and published fragments from these. Other reference works written by him are: *A bolgár–magyar háború 888-ban* (The Bulgarian–Hungarian War in 888), *Előd vajda* (Voivode Előd), *A hét magyar nemzetiségről* (On the Seven Hungarian Tribes), *Az 1533-ki székely krónika hitelességének védelme* (The Defence of the Authenticity of the 1533 Székely Chronicle), *A’ tizedik századi bessenyőkről* (On the 10th Century Petchenegs), *A’ régi Mikóváráról* (On the Old Mikóvára).

During this time, working at Cernești Castle situated in the wonderful Mureș Valley he got to know and love Transylvania.

After a few years of search, his youth being characterized by extremes: lawyer, sailor, soldier, historian – a profession he finally followed in his entire life. After Teleki’s death he became the Greek

¹ Von Geringer’s German letter among Károly Szabó’s documents. Apud Lajos Szádeczky, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

² József Teleki, Hungarian historian, born in 1790, he occupied administrative functions (main county head, executive officer at the Court Chamber, Custodian of the Crown and in the period 1842–48 the last Governor of Transylvania). After 1849 he was the President of the Hungarian Academy. His main works are: *A Hunyadiak kora* (The Hunyadis’ Age), *Történeti adatok* (Historical data). He died in 1855. Cf. C. Diaconovich, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 1073.

teacher in Nagykőrös. In this period this college had eminent teachers in the domains of history, literature and science such as: the poet János Arany, the historian Ferenc Salamon and Sándor Szilágyi the future Director of the University Library of Budapest and history professor at the university, an aspect which could only make Károly Szabó happier. With Sándor Szilágyi he became friends and they made different historical works together, for example the collection entitled *Történeti emlékek a magyar nép községi és magán életéből* (Historical Memories from the Communal and Private Life of the Hungarian People). He translated the French historian, Thierry Amadé's work Attila into Hungarian also in 1855. Károly Szabó corresponded with the famous historian who used the Hungarian historian's data in the new edition of his work.

Szabó translated in Hungarian and published other works as well by Thierry: *Attila mondák* (Legends about Attila) and *Attila és utódai történelme a magyarok Európába telepedéséig* (The History of Attila and his Successors until the Hungarian's Arrival to Europe). He added different notes to these which raised the scientific value of these books.

Besides his didactic and scientific work at the College of Nagykőrös he also administered the school library.

His exceptional merits were appreciated and he was elected correspondent member of the Hungarian Academy's history section in 1858.

Károly Szabó by his exemplary work and tireless diligence discovered a series of unique copies of old Hungarian books.

He translated and edited in Hungarian the chronicle written by the anonymous scribe of King Béla III, Master Rogerius's *Carmen miserabile* and Simon Kézai's chronicle.

At the end of the 1860s he published the work *A magyar vezérek kora, Árpádtól Szent Istvánig* (The Age of the Hungarian Chieftans, from Árpád to Stephen I), through which he was elevated among the best Hungarian historiographers and became the permanent member of the Academy in 1871. This is a work of major importance on which further studies of old Hungarian history were based.

As an honest man he had the courage to serve historical truth, to attack and to criticize on the basis of authentic sources, to support old Hungarian history and to build the Hungarian historical literature on this basis of truth.

His scientific works in the domain of old Hungarian history written in the spirit of historical truth are among his most valuable creations. He always took over data directly from the sources from, never using second hand information and accepting nothing as certitude before a preliminary research.

The Hungarian writer and politician, Imre Mikó, known also for his patronage of talented young people, invited him to teach at the College of Aiud: "Pray be assured of your future. Maybe another circle could offer you a more brilliant domain of activity, but you won't be given greater and sincerer sympathy."¹

Meanwhile at Cluj the idea was raised to found a museum and a library. In 1859 the Transylvanian Museum Society was born and at its founding session on November 25, 1859 Károly Szabó is elected librarian unanimously. This election made true his old wish. "If I get settled in Cluj with my family and if, according to my wish, I get to live and work in a museum library, I shall not wish to leave that until I die"² – wrote Szabó to his good friend Pál Gyulai.

Károly Szabó was 36 years old when full of energy and zeal he began to organize the Library of the Museum. This library would become one of the best organized libraries.

His literary activity began with translations from classical Greek literature. Later on he translated historical sources as well, fragments from chronicles written in Latin, Greek and French which contained information regarding old Hungarian history Szabó was interested in.

Another direction of his research was the history of Székelys. Thus he edited the collection *Székely Oklevéltár* (Collected Székely Documents).

Besides his more than 200 studies he also published numerous documents regarding Romanians, such as two donation letters by Mihai the Brave.

In 1872, when the University of Cluj was founded, he was appointed Professor of history. He held a series of university functions,

¹ Imre Mikó's letter to Károly Szabó, Cluj, February 13, 1859, in Leona Váczy, *Un mare bibliograf maghiar: Szabó Károly* (A Great Hungarian Bibliographer: Károly Szabó), in Corneliu Dima-Drăgan (ed.), *Târgoviște, cetate a culturii românești. Lucrările sesiunii științifice din 21-23 dec. 1972* (Târgoviște, the Strogold of Romanian Culture. The Papers of the Scientific Conference Held on December 21–23, 1972), Bucharest, Editura Litera, 1974, p. 446.

² Károly Szabó's letter to Pál Gyulai, November 6, 1858, in *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (Bulletin of Literary History), XXIV (1914), p. 106. Apud *Ibid.*

being Dean, Prorector and, in the academic year 1882–1883, Rector of this institution.

Knowing very well old Hungarian history he kindled in the course of time the love for study and research in generations of students who admired him exceedingly. And he returned the love these young men bore him.

Other works he published are: *Erdélyi történelmi adatok* (Transylvanian Historical Data), *Kisebb történelmi munkák* (Short Historical Works), translations from Greek: *Kritobulosz. II. Mehemet élete* (Critobulus. **Life of Mehmed the Conqueror**), *Gyulafi Lestár főljegyzései 1565–1605* (Lestár Gyulafi's Notes 1565–1605), *Kun László* (László IV, the Cuman), etc.

His bibliographical masterpiece which made him renowned and an authority in this field was *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* (Old Hungarian Bibliography). This remarkable, precise and authentic work can be considered the basis of Hungarian bibliography.

His health declined since the winter of 1889, but he continued to work with the same perseverance as when he was healthy. He had no hope of getting well. In his last days of life he walked as a shadow dragging himself silently. Only a week before he died he consented to lie down in bed. He passed away on August 31, 1890 in Cluj.

He was remembered by his contemporaries as a man “with blue eyes, inclined to cheerfulness, loving society, with a heart that knew nothing but love, ignorant of hate. Indulgent and even delicate in his manifestations, basically, however, having an impulsive nature. Sincere, faithful, with a clear and realist reasoning, perseverant and prompt in work. Short in stature, with a high forehead, bearded, he was not exactly a beauty. He was, however, a personality.”¹

“He was a serious and rigorous scholar at the working table, in the family he was a delicate husband and father, and in society a well beloved and the merriest friend.”²

In his address to the students in 1882 he said the following words: “Only for the souls thirsting for science the endeavour to find the truth is in itself a true joy; only the fact to have a good conscience that you used your time, your abilities, the forces of your spirit and of your body to fortify yourself from an intellectual and moral point of view, to

¹ Dezső Csánki, “Szabó Károly emlékezete” (Károly Szabó's Memory), *Századok*, 1924, p. 195.

² Szádeczky Lajos, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

improve yourself; that you strived conscientiously and faithfully to attain the goal of your life, is in itself a moral reward.”¹

Károly Szabó's love of books was already revealed in his youth and it is doubtless that Ferenc Toldy with whom he had a fruitful collaboration had an important role in the constancy of this sentiment.

His activity as a librarian began when he was a teacher in the denominational school in Nagykörös. He arranged the school library in an exemplary way, a work all the more difficult because the collection of the institution was increased by significant donations in that period.

He was consecrated as a librarian and bibliographer in Cluj “where he found his true mission in the scientific atmosphere and social life which suited his personality best.”²

He was elected first librarian of the Transylvanian Museum Society in 1860, and between 1872 and 1890 he is the first Director of the University Library of Cluj. He was elected by the Museum Society at the Count Imre Mikó's recommendation, a choice which proved to be auspicious for his later career.

In the course of his activity he wandered all over the country, he searched “new” old books in the libraries of schools and monasteries, in the house of aristocrats, in dusty attics and damp cellars being the happiest when he discovered one. He journey tirelessly beaten by the sun and the rains, in fair and bad weather, by couch, on horseback, but mainly on foot, and he directed his attention everywhere to the discovery of materials for the Museum Library. Where it was possible he bought the book. There were scarcely any particular or public libraries which he did not searched and investigated.

A valuable book collection being at his disposal in the Museum Library he was aware that this had to be enriched and then investigated. He always carried in his travelling bag the index cards with the bibliographical description of the books, which cards are still preserved in the Central University Library in Cluj.

Besides printed materials he collected manuscripts and documents. We must remember Károly Szabó as the type of the collector librarian.

¹ *Beszéd mellyel Dr. Szabó Károly rectori székét elfoglalta és az 1882/3 tanévet megnyitotta* (Dr Károly Szabó's inaugural address as a Rector with which he opened the 1882/3 academic year), in *Acta Reg. Scient. Universitatis Claudiopolitane Francisco-Josephinae*, 1882–1883, fasc. II, p. 89.

² Etelka Zaharia, “Bibliograful Szabó Károly” (The Bibliographer Károly Szabó), in *Philobiblon*, I (2005), no. 1, p. 219.

He was greatly interested in the enrichment of the library and in old Hungarian books not gathered that far.

From the moment he began his activity, he started to select, sort and describe the old books. The index cards he made on them were the basis of his bibliography. An important bibliophile of his age, expert in old books and in several classical and modern languages (Latin, Greek, Hungarian, German, Italian and French), he worked with enthusiasm, zeal and talent in the newly founded library full of bibliophilic values.

He had begun to publish detailed bibliographical descriptions in the *Museum's Yearbook* already since the 1860s. He had felt since then the lack of a reference bibliographic work on old Hungarian books. His bibliographical descriptions later became the three volumes of the *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* (1879–1898), the basic work of the Hungarian bibliographical literature.

During the thirty years while he was the custodian of the Museum and during the twenty years of his directorship of the University Library of Cluj, he laid the bases for the later development of the two libraries united in 1872.

The University Library began its activity with far less volumes than the Museum Library, though the University Council Board together with the Library Committee made everything in their power to raise the standard of the library, especially with regard to the university fields of studies. The problem consisted in the lack of funds.

Károly Szabó as a librarian and in all his activities followed the line marked by the Museum, understanding the mission of the University Library to gather the erudite scientific works if possible without lacks. When he died, he left behind a library arranged according to library techniques, the library part belonging to the Museum with its systematic catalogues and for the University Library the beginnings of the subject catalogues. The arranging of the two libraries, which in fact coexisted, is due to his exceptional merits.

He performed all kinds of library works. In the catalogues of the Central University Library we can easily recognize the index card written with quill in his beautiful handwriting. He also separated the old Hungarian books from the other documents creating thus the Special Collection section of the library.

His special qualities, conscientiousness combined with patience and meticulousity, intelligence and morality, tenacity and his unparalleled work made him one of the main personalities of Hungarian bibliographic literature. His role was similar to that of Ioan Bianu and Nerva Hodoş –

who were influenced by his activity – for the Romanian bibliographic research.

While selecting, sorting, describing and arranging the books he realized that some works in the library were incomplete and some were missing. He also became aware of the fact that the library owned duplicates from many books. On the basis of what he observed he published twice the list of incomplete works and duplicates and sent them to bigger public libraries, to particular libraries and booksellers. He made permanent efforts to enrich the library collections by means of book exchanges and on the money obtained from the selling of duplicates he bought other books.

As a scientist he realized that researchers needed good speciality works. To obtain these and to satisfy the readers' wishes he resorted to interlibrary loans and international book exchanges.

As a great specialist of library science he tried to help smaller libraries as well. Thus he communicated with renowned librarians and archivists, such as Ioan Micu Moldovan, librarian from Blaj, who was ever grateful for the guidance Szabó gave him. Personalities such as Vladimir Stanislav from Kiev, Emil Darschgrave from Berlin, Amadé Thierry and Emil Legrand from Paris, the above mentioned librarian from Blaj are only a few from among the scholars of the age who addressed him for different bibliographic data. Besides these, he also maintained relations with Hungarian specialists.

In his bibliographic work he noted faithfully, letter by letter, the author, the entire title of the book, the author, the year and the place of publication, the format, and the page and leaf number. He made certain observations related to the books, indicating the precise place where it could be found. When the bibliographic data of a book were missing he tried to determine them by minute investigations. From this descriptions was compiled the work entitled *Régi Magyar Könyvesház* which by its precision, authenticity and scientific rigour put the bases of modern Hungarian retrospective bibliography, and its author, Károly Szabó, becoming the founder of Hungarian national bibliography.¹

Szabó was aware what a huge amount of work was before him, therefore he chose as a limit the year 1711 (the year of the Satu-Mare Peace).

¹ Etelka Zaharia, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

The attempt to write the history of Hungarian literature was David Czvittinger's work¹ published in 1711. His example was followed by other important scholars such as Péter Bod, József Benkő József, Elek Horányi, István Veszprémi, György Jeremiás Haner, János Seivert, János Molnár, Pál Wallaszky.

On the basis of the bibliographic data given by their works, and using the partially or completely published data referring to the libraries of Dániel Cornides, the Counts Sámuel Teleki and Ferenc Széchenyi as well as the unpublished data of other libraries, in 1803, István Sándor edited the work *Magyar Könyvesház* (Hungarian Library), which enumerated in short the publications printed in the period 1553–1800. This was the first Hungarian bibliographical work and it became a rarity which could not be purchased even for a high price. Károly Szabó was grateful to Sándor for his difficult and significant work, but he also acknowledged that this had many deficiencies, inaccuracies, striking errors, and research based on it could not correspond to later scientific requirements. All these inadvertencies have, however, an excuse, if we take into consideration the fact that the exploration of libraries was extremely difficult, if not impossible in this period, and because the works included in bibliographies could not be seen error were inherent.

In the 19th century, Ferenc Toldy – through his valuable studies and books on the history of Hungarian literature –, József Lugossy (linguist and Orientalist), Count József Kemény (historian), Imre Révész (Calvinist priest and church historian), Vilmos Fraknói (historian and writer), Lajos Eötvös (librarian and literary historian) enriched the bibliographic literature with different communications, in most cases published sporadically in periodicals. Meanwhile it was concluded that specialists must take steps towards the organization and classification of the documents owned by libraries and then towards the using of these “treasures”. To attain this aim, one of the most important conditions was to edit a bibliographic work of high quality, necessary to both science and library users.

Károly Szabó himself avowed: “I have myself felt the lack of such a guide for a long time, since I was elected the librarian of the Transylvanian Museum Society established at the end of 1859, and when I catalogued and arranged the various donations offered by Count József

¹ David Czvittinger, historian and bibliographer. His masterpiece was written in Latin: *Specimen Hungariae Literatae...*, 1711. Cf. *Magyar Nagylexikon*, vol. VI, Csen–Ec, Budapest, Magyar Nagylexikon Kiadó, 1998, p. 250.

Kemény and the mass donations of Transylvanian people which mounted to 20,000 volumes, and today (after twenty years) amount to 40,000 volumes.”

To write such a valuable work was an engagement which surpassed the powers of a single man. This was the reason why Károly Szabó limited his bibliographical research to the period ending with 1711. The renowned Hungarian bibliographer considered that it would be sufficient if he could fulfil what he had taken on himself, and hoped at the same time “that there will be among the youngest ones people who will have the strength and who will feel the pleasure to continue what he began”.

Károly Szabó began his bibliographic activity in 1860. His work started with the Museum Library and was then extended to the libraries of the Roman-Catholic, Calvinist and Unitarian schools in Cluj, to the rare copies of the old Hungarian books owned by Count Imre Mikó, Baron István Radák and Sándor Mike. Having finished with these, his investigations were extended to the Transylvanian libraries, such as the Teleki Library in Târgu-Mureş, the Batthyaneum Library in Alba-Iulia and the Brukenthal Library in Sibiu. Later on, his research comprised the entire Transylvania, all the places he suspected that he could find something.

In this huge effort he was helped, without restraint by all those whom he contacted, for which fact he expressed his gratitude in the preface of his work.

He often imparted his discoveries to Ferenc Toldy, who had a great influence on him and who maintained in him the love for the Hungarian literature and the passion for books as well. Károly Szabó also communicated willingly with the bibliographer József Lugossy, a passionate collector, the owner of a library rich in rarities and also retained relations with different persons who had a passion for literature.

As his work increased, Károly Szabó felt that he was yet far from his final goal. Therefore, he used all his free vacations and every occasion to explore one by one the provincial libraries. He did not omit naturally the libraries of the Hungarian National Museum, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Hungarian University Library in Budapest. To all these institutions he added the libraries of Késmárk, Pozsony (Bratislava), Sâmbăteni, Szeged and some Saxon libraries.

This 18 years long effort resulted in the publication in 1879 under the aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of the first

volume of the bibliographical work *Régi Magyar Könyvtár*, which contains 1789 titles.

It is worth mentioning that 327 old Hungarian books out of these were published in the printing houses of Cluj, 262 titles printed in Debrecen, 238 in Lőcse and so on and so forth. Buda and Pest, which were paralyzed by the Ottoman occupation, is represented by a very small number of publications.¹

Károly Szabó said that “this work could be useful to every researcher and specialist of old Hungarian literature, to the teachers of Hungarian literature, to library users, to book lovers and collectors alike”.

In the elaboration of this masterpiece he emphasized certain aspects connected to honesty, authenticity and usefulness, indicating at the copies he had personally seen also the place where they could be found in order to increase veracity and to facilitate the specialists and the readers’ access them.

The librarian and bibliographer Károly Szabó did not only desire to elaborate a fundamental reference book in the domain, but also made efforts to create an exemplary work trying to avoid errors, otherwise inherent, as far as possible, and the mistakes which nevertheless slipped in he enumerated and drew the readers’ attention to ulterior rectifications.

He did not stop at the first volume, but continued his work helped by happy circumstances. In the spring of 1882, the Hungarian Museum of Applied Arts organized a book exhibition which was a real success and “from the perspective of the history of books had great significance”.² Károly Szabó was a member of the organizing committee. The Director of this Museum, György Ráth had the idea that the success of this exhibition should be strengthened and the rich material kept here should be valorised scientifically by means of a work which would gather the bibliographic descriptions of Hungarian printed materials

¹ Leona Vaczy, “Szabó Károly könyvtárosi munkássága” (Károly Szabó’s Activity as a Librarian), in *Könyvtárosok Tájékoztatója* (The Librarian’s Review), 1958, no. 2, p. 41.

² Mária Újvári, *Szabó Károly, az EME kiemelkedő könyvtárosa* (Károly Szabó the Outstanding Librarian of the Transylvanian Museum Society). Manuscript in the author’s possession. This paper was presented in the 4th forum entitled *Magyar Tudomány Erdélyben* (Hungarian Science in Transylvania) on November 18, 2005 in the festive hall of the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj.

published before 1711 in other languages than Hungarian. The Hungarian Academy offered instantly to publish it.

The provocation was accepted by Károly Szabó, because here, as he said himself, found an imposing collection of old prints which themselves ensured the success.

The second volume of the *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* was published in 1885 in a “relatively short time” and it was, according to its author, “superior to the first one, more complete and without mistakes”. This volume contains 2453 bibliographical descriptions. The first one, which contains 1793 works, was increased meanwhile to 2000 items by means of new discoveries and the additions made in six years time. But, Szabó said, “an attentive examiner will observe that the literature of the 16th and 17th centuries, the circulation of some works, their importance and scientific value and taking into consideration their influence, is far above the literature published in the country (Hungary) in other languages”.

The first volume contained the works in Hungarian between 1531 and 1711, the second the works published in Hungary between 1473 and 1771 in other languages.

Hardly had the second volume appeared, the Hungarian Academy entrusted the bibliographer to prepare the third one. Károly Szabó himself considered necessary a third volume, in order to have a general view on the fertility of Hungarian literature in the 16–17th centuries and to gather all the historic material until 1711 necessary for research.

The third volume, which has two parts, publishes the works of Hungarian authors printed abroad between 1480 and 1711. This volume was finished by the librarian and bibliographer Árpád Hellerbrant. The first part of volume III was published in 1896 and the second part of the same volume in the year 1898.

Until his death in 1890, though he could not finish his work, Károly Szabó managed to gather over 2000 bibliographic descriptions.

His work was continued by Árpád Hellebrant who succeeded in gathering almost 5000 titles – together with those left by Károly Szabó – of works which were born in 130 European cities. This considerable number exceeds the material gathered by the two anterior volumes.

Among the works to be found in the *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* there are many authors with considerable reputation and activity such as Gáspár Heltai, Ferenc Dávid, Péter Melius, Péter Pázmány, Albert Szenci Molnár, Pelbárt Temesvári, Miklós Istvánffy, Márton Brenner, Johannes

Sambucus, Johannes Honterus, András Dudith, Janus Pannonius, János Sylvester and many others.

In the four voluminous books of almost 3300 pages there are discussed works which mirror in their typographic aspect the cultural history of Transylvania. Károly Szabó included in his bibliography booklets of 2–3 pages as well, which would be of small value, but being rare, preserved in 1 or 2 copies and sometimes containing data on schools, churches or writes they can become interesting bibliographical and cultural reference points.¹

Károly Szabó crowned in fact his entire activity as a writer, historian, translator, librarian and bibliographer with this huge creation. The work *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* belongs to the first patrimonial collections owned by the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj, a fact recorded by the historian of this institution. Károly Szabó, due to this work, remained for ever among the outstanding personalities of the bibliographic domain.

He was one of those exceptional men for whom work is the basis of life, for whom to reveal the historical truth is a duty, an element of their nature, for whom the love of books is above anything else.

His activity as a librarian, an expert of rare and exceptional books, and as a bibliographer placed him to the field of bibliography.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

¹ Etelka Zaharia, *op. cit.*, p. 219.