

**The Botany Library and the Botanical Garden in Cluj**

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**Abstract**

The paper presents the history and activity of one of smallest branch libraries of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj, the Botany Library. The history of this branch institution has been closely intertwined with the history of the Botanical Garden in Cluj, which after several attempts was finally arranged in its present location after 1919. The Botany Library – with its 15,500 volumes of books, 10,000 volumes of periodicals and a valuable collection of offprints, having only one librarian – is a useful research area for Romanian and foreign professors, students and researchers alike.

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The Botany Library is one of the smallest branch libraries of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj with its collection of publications numbering 25,500 volumes altogether. Out of this 15,500 volumes are books, and the remaining 10,000 volumes are periodicals. It became an independent branch library in the year 1991, on account of the so called “separation” of some sections of the former Biology Library. Of course, the statement that the Botany Library is small refers only to the number of volumes therefore it is a purely quantitative characterization. In reality, it is one of the oldest and most beautiful collections, if we think of the infinite variety of forms and colours in the world of plants, of the diverse manners of discussion, all reflected in these publications.

Thus, the publications in this library treat and illustrate the most diverse branches of botany, as for example:

- systematic botany, a branch which studies and classifies plants on the basis of their relationship, together with taxonomy (the identification and nomenclature of plants),
- phytosociology, which studies the laws governing the association of plants in communities in close relationship with the environmental factors,
- phytopathology studying plant diseases as well as the measures necessary for preventing and fighting them off,
- horticulture, the science dealing with cultivated plants,
- phytogeography, which tries to discover the laws of the distribution of vegetal formations on the Globe,
- the protection of nature (or sozology), domain interested in the conservation of biodiversity.

Similarly, the readers of the library also “present” a great diversity. Not only the undergraduate and PhD students and the teaching staff of the Babeş-Bolyai University’s Biology–Geology Faculty come here to study, but also the researchers of the biological research institutes in Cluj, Bucharest etc., undergraduate and PhD students, professors of the University of Agricultural and Veterinary Sciences, of the University of Medicine and Pharmaceutics, of the Technological University (architectural studies) both of Cluj and of other university centres from this country and from abroad. It often happens that Romanian or foreign botanists, researchers who have come to study the rich material of the Botanical Garden – in the premises of which the library is situated – and of the Herbarium of the Botany Institute come also to the library in order to search for or check some information, data etc. they need in the publications we hold.

It must be said that the Herbarium and the Library offer to the public one of the richest collections of materials and information regarding the history of the botanical researches in the Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

The publications which form the present collection come from the library of some important cultural and educational institutions in Cluj and Transylvania. For example, in chronological order: the Transylvanian Museum Society, established in 1853, the “Franz Josef I” University of Cluj, founded in 1872, the two botanical gardens which existed in Cluj, the “Bolyai” University which functioned between the years 1945–1959.

Regarding the two botanical gardens in Cluj: the older functioned between 1872 and 1918 on a plot situated between the present

day Haşdeu Street and Clinicilor Street, reaching almost to Victor Babeş Street. There had been a park and Count Imre Mikó's summer residence before. He donated this area, in the year 1859, to the newly founded Transylvanian Museum Society in order to form a botanical garden here.

This happened only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with 1872, the year when the University of Cluj was founded. Then, because of an agreement concluded between the two institutions, the plot was handed over to the botany department, the head of the department, Professor August Kanitz becoming at the same time the Director of the botanical garden. In the following 20 years this garden developed beautifully, fulfilling its double role, educational – used for practice by the students of the Faculty of Natural Sciences – and recreational, for the general public, the visitors coming from everywhere. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Institute of Chemistry (at present the Faculty of Geography), the Institute of Zoology as well as the University Clinics and Hospitals had been constructed, all of which invaded on the territory of the Botanical Garden, to the despair of the directors then in charge, it was concluded that the Garden could no longer function under the given conditions. Professor Dr Aladár Richter, twice the director of the institution (1901–1904 and 1905–1913) made huge efforts to obtain the approvals and, of course, the funds necessary to create another botanical garden. This had to become “the most beautiful botanical garden in Central Europe, with a Botanical Institute in the middle, worthy of such an academic town as Cluj” – as he expressed himself. In the period 1910–1912 he managed to buy a plot of approximately 25 acres in the district called “Házsongárd”, between Grădinilor, Republicii and Pasteur Streets (actual names). Unfortunately, he was not able to realize his dream, because in 1913 he was forced to resign from the directorship of the Botanical Garden and to leave the Botany Department of the University. In 1914, because of the outbreak of World War I, the purchased plot remained unarranged and was used to grow vegetables and fruit. The idea to form a botanical garden was taken up again only in 1919, when Professor Alexandru Borza was named the Head of the Botany Department of the University of Cluj.

In the following ten years, besides his didactic activity, Professor Borza succeeded in building and forming a new botanical garden, constructing also a Botanical Institute, inaugurated in 1930. From the perspective of the history and the development of the Botany Library, these two institutions – by means of the two determinant personalities, Aladár Richter and Alexandru Borza at their head – had a

decisive role. They accorded special attention to the organization and enrichment of the library, considering it a basic instrument of work for the didactic and scientific activity.

The collection of offprints from periodicals owned by the Botany Library is of special importance. These articles were published in periodicals or other publications of which there is no collection in the library. How did they come here? At one time there was an interesting custom: a person who had published an article or some other work, receiving from the publishing house a certain number of offprints, sent them, in most cases with a dedication to those considered interested in that subject. In turn, this author himself received, as an answer, offprints and other works. In this way an extremely interesting change of information was ensured between the specialists of the same domain from all over the world. We mention here the offprints arriving from the collections of some professors and researchers, important personalities of the scientific life in Cluj, such as August Kanitz, Vince Borbás, Alexandru Borza, Iuliu Erasmus Nyárády and others. These off-prints are kept in cardboard boxes, made in the bindery of the Central University Library especially to ensure their protection. We have 160 such boxes, each containing approximately 100–120 offprints. Unfortunately, the material has never been thoroughly processed. There is no catalogue or index of the offprints, they are placed into the boxes simply in alphabetical order after the author's name. Thus, if someone is searching for a certain title by an author, he has to look through the whole box in question.

Although one loses much time searching in this way, I made an interesting observation: the readers, who rummage in these boxes and who often are passionate researchers in their field of study, do not resent and do not consider this search a loss of time. It often happens that they also discover other things, even more interesting than the article they were looking for initially, considered real treasures.

Another aspect of the activity in the Botany Library is that which we call "direct exchange of periodicals". One must know that the Botanical Garden has already started the publication of three scientific journals:

1. **Buletinul Grădinii botanice și al Muzeului botanic de la Universitatea din Cluj (The Bulletin of the Botanical Garden and of the Botanical Museum in the University of Cluj)**, published in 1921–1948;

2. **Contribuții botanice (Botanical Contributions)**, with its two series: 1921–1945 and from 1958 to the present;
3. The seed catalogue of the Botanical Garden in Cluj from 1921 to the present.

The volumes of these periodicals form the basis for the exchange of publications with other similar institutions: botanical gardens, research institutes and universities from the entire world. Sending these publications regularly, we receive, in turn, speciality works which enrich the collections of the Botany Library with 80–100 volumes each year, only from this source. Besides the other modalities of completing and enriching the collections (buying, donations and the exchange activity performed by the Central University Library), this exchange is very important for our branch library. Even now, when the Central University Library spends large sums in order to ensure access to the Internet and the collections of the databases, we must recognize that in our institution the printed publications are still considered of primary importance. At least, these two things happily complement one another.

Donations and publications which we receive due to research grants in which the professors, the researchers and the PhD students participate is also a source for our collections.

The Botany Library has always functioned with only one librarian, a fact which created a special situation inside the Central University Library. There are only a few such branch libraries where a single person answers for the good functioning of the entire section. In these branch libraries, the librarian as a “totum factum” must take care of everything and everyone, beginning with the order and the cleanliness of the reading room and the stacks, to the registering and processing of the publications, the serving of books to the readers for the reading room or for loan etc. One has to answer alone to the most diverse questions and to resolve the most unexpected situations, such as: give me something about plants which help one to lose weight, about the cultivation of mushrooms etc. or: do you happen to know a good dentist nearby?!

It is a particularly complex, difficult job, but one which can also give much satisfaction and joy to the librarian who has the courage and the responsibility to work in such a branch library.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi