

**18th Century French Prints in the Collection of the Lucian Blaga
Central University Library**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the old book collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, more precisely on the works published in France during the 18th century. It investigates the acquisition modalities of the publications, their dissemination in the library collections, their subject and place of publication, as well as their physical aspect, such as their format, binding, or illustrations. It also analyzes their individual particularities such as bookplates and owners' notes.

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The 18th century represents an important moment in the history of books due to the increasing number of printed materials. At the same time, by the year 1800, according to Camil Mureșanu, the “heroic” age of the history of printing ended.¹ Beginning with the 19th century, with the mechanization of the printing process the interest in mass production appeared, which resulted in the decrease of the artistic component and of the typographer's role.

The Lucian Blaga Central University Library has an important old French book collection. These prints come from different sources, entering the library collections either as donations made by different persons and institutions, or by purchase. The collections of two institutions formed the basis of this collection: those of the Transylvanian Museum Society and of the University of Cluj, to which a series of private libraries had been added.

¹ Camil Mureșanu, *Istoria scrierii, a cărții și a tiparului* (The History of Writing, Books, and Printing) (Cluj-Napoca: s. n., 1995), 64.

An important donator was Gheorghe Sion. Among the books donated by him are: *Observations historiques et géographiques sur les peuples barbares qui ont habité les bords du Danube et du Pont-Euxin* authored by Claude Charles de Peyssonnel,¹ the French Ambassador in Crimea, *Voyages depuis St. Petersbourg en Russie, dans diverses contrées de d'Asie* by Jean Bell d'Antermony,² a book by Alexandru Ghica, signed with the pseudonym Elias Habesci, *État actuel de l'Empire Ottoman*,³ *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable* compiled by Pièrre Chompré,⁴ *Géographie moderne précédée d'un petit traité de la sphère et du globe* by Lacroix,⁵ *Annales de la Petite-Russie* by Scherer,⁶ a mathematics textbook compiled by the mathematician Étienne Bézout, and a travelogue written by Elizabeth Craven.⁷

Analyzing these publications we come to the following conclusion: from the approximately 400 titles 11 belong to the Sion Rare Books collection, 1 title⁸ to the Rare Book collection, Dimitrie

¹ Claude Charles de Peyssonnel, *Observations historiques et géographiques sur les Peuples Barbares qui ont habité du Danube et du Pont-Euxin* (Paris, 1765), shelfmark: Rare Sion 2336.

² John Bell, *Voyages depuis St. Petersbourg en Russie dans diverses contrée de l'Asie, à Pékin, (...); à Ispahan en Perse, (...); à Derbent en Perse, (...); à Constantinople, (...), on y a joint un description de la Sibérie et une carte des deux routes de l'auteur entre Moscow et Pékin, avec de remarques historiques, géographiques etc.* (Paris, MDCCLXVI), shelfmark: Rare Sion 494.

³ Elias Habesci, *État actuel de l'Empire Ottoman, contenant des détails plus exacts, (...) sur la religion, le gouvernement, la milice, les moeurs et les amusements des Turcs, avec une description paticulière de la cour et du sérail du grand Seigneur* (Paris, 1792), shelfmark: Rare Sion 524.

⁴ Pierre Chompré, *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable, pour l'intelligence des poètes, (...) dont les sujets sont tirés de l'histoire poétique* (Paris, MDCCLXVI), shelfmark: Rare Sion 496.

⁵ Louis Antoine Nicolle de la Croix, *Géographie moderne précédée d'un petit traité de la sphère et du globe (...)* (Paris, MDCCLXXXVIII), shelfmark: Rare Sion 518.

⁶ Jean Benoît Scherer, *Annales de la Petite-Russie, ou Histoire des cosaques-saparogues et des cosaques de l'Ukraine (...)* (Paris, MDCCLXXXVIII), shelfmark: Rare Sion 517.

⁷ Etienne Bézout, *Contenant les élémens de géométrie, la trigonométrie rectiligne et la trigonométrie sphérique* (Paris, 1793), shelfmark: Rare Sion 525.

⁸ Sophoclis, *Tragoediae septem ad optimorum exemplarium fidem emendatae cum versione et notis* (Strasbourg, 1786–1789), shelfmark: Rare 354.

Cantemir's writing about the Ottoman Empire¹ in two editions is the part of the old Romanian book collection, the rest of the prints being integrated in the old book collection.

From a thematic point of view, the books belong to various domains: history, literature (within this category several travelogues), law, geography, geology, religion, philosophy, veterinary medicine, architecture, and military tactics.

The most renowned writers are Jean Jacques Rousseau, Molière, Bossuet, Claude Fleury, Goldsmith, Buffon – whose monumental *Natural History* was printed in 44 volumes by the Royal Printing House beginning with 1749 –, Florian, Helvetius, Racine, Voltaire, Vauban, as well as classical writers such as Tacitus or Sophocles.

Regarding the place of publication, the supremacy of Paris over provincial printing centres is obvious. Out of the 383 prints 336 were published in Paris, 16 in Lyon, 8 in Liège, Strasbourg, and Orléans, 4 in Rouen, 1 in Dijon, and 2 in Avignon. This was due to the monopoly held by some printing houses in the capital of France on certain books and also to the privileges given by different kings to Paris typographers, as a strategy of the authorities attempting to control the typographic production. Here activated the famous family of typographers, the Didots, Firmin Didot and his sons, François-Ambroise and Pierre, as well as other important 18th century typographers such as Durand, Charles Saillant, Desaint, Panckoucke, Jean Debure, etc.

Many books are still in their original calf skin binding with golden ornaments. The format of the books is varied, ranging from folio format to smaller editions in octavo or in duodecimo.

The book owners can be identified by bookplates, property stamps, and different owner's and reader's notes which can be found in the books. Property stamps on the verso of the title page with the inscription "Erdélyi Muzeum Könyvtára" (Library of the Transylvanian Museum), or bookplate labels with the inscription "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Muzeum Könyvtáré" (Property of the Library of the Transylvanian National Museum) pasted on the recto of the first cover are to be found in the books which belonged to the Transylvanian Museum Society.

The books belonging to the Sion Rare Books collection are marked with the property stamp "Donațiunea G. Sion" (G. Sion's donation), "G. Sion", "Sion: Brătești", or the ex-libris label "Biblioteca

¹ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Histoire de l'Empire Othoman* (Paris, 1743), shelfmarks: BRV 231 and BRV 231 A.

Antiohie Sion” (Antiohie Sion’s library), the latter belonging to the donator’s grandfather. We also encounter the property and donation stamps with the inscriptions “Victor M. Popp. Cluj. Calea Victoriei No. 63” and “Donățiunea Dr. Vasile Popp” (Dr Vasile Popp’s donation) or “Dr. Tarcsay Izabella ajándéka 1941” (Dr Tarcsay Izabella’s gift 1941).

Owners’ notes are another sign to be found in these prints by which the owner’s identity can be determined. On the publications owned by József Benigni¹ the words “Ex-libris Benigni aerar” can be observed written with brown ink on the title page. On another publication – *Pensées de monsieur le comte d'Oxenstirn* – the owner’s name is written “Ex collectione Josephi Sraka (...)”. Other notes on the books are: “Francisci Fekete de Frits. 1772. 4. Septembr.”, “Ez a könyv B. Kemény Annae” (This book is the property of Baroness Anna Kemény), “Barthelemy Loze”, “Milano 1893 Decem. G. Sion”, “Friedrich Pascher”, “C. Volfgangij de Bethlen”. On the title page of a book “Biblioteca Malvi[nescu]” (Malvinescu Library) is written with blue ink; on the back of the flyleaf an additional note was made by Gheorghe Sion also with blue ink: “Această carte a aparținut marelui Mălinescu care a luat parte la Unirea Moldovei cu Muntenia. G. Sion” (This book belonged to the great Mălinescu who participated in the union of Moldavia and Wallachia. G. Sion).

The books are decorated with engravings, frontispieces, and decorated initials. The subjects are various, from landscapes illustrating travelogues to sketches of fortifications by Vauban, geometric figures with calculations, or images of conches, plants, fossils, etc. The period 1755–1775 was characterized by prints decorated with vignettes and frontispieces with floral motifs. Towards the end of the 18th century, as Neoclassicism appeared in art, and also under the influence of the events which marked the end of the 18th century, there was a return to simpler forms.

¹ József Benigni (1782–1849) was a passionate book collector. In 1855 his library was bought by the Hungarian state for 4500 forints. After 1859 the Benigni collection was put in the care of János Matusik who made the first inventory of the printed materials transferred to Cluj. According to this inventory made in 1863 the collection brought to Cluj consisted of 2800 titles in 6868 volumes. In 1873 it was transferred to the University Library. After the transfer the collection was integrated in the general collection besides other publications, and in 1974 it entered the national cultural heritage collection of the Central University Library.

One of the most renowned illustrators is Jean Michel Moreau (1741–1814), but there are engravings made by Pietro da Cortona, Cochin, Gravelot, Eisen, Niquet, Maillet or Giraud the Younger.

From among the techniques of creation mono- or polychrome aquatint and aquaforte engraving are predominant, procedures which offer more possibilities than woodcuts.

Besides engravings some books were illustrated with maps made by the well-known cartographer D’Anville.

The fate of books can be discovered, at least partially, by analyzing the owner’s notes and bookplates in them. Studying them we may form an idea on the cultural environment of Transylvania at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi