

In memoriam Dr. Vera Csapody
(1890–1985)

By

J. SZUJKÓ-LACZA and Zs. DEBRECZY

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VERA CSAPODY was born in Budapest on the 29th of March 1890. She obtained her General Certificate of Education in the Capital's Community Primary and Secondary School for girls in 1908. In the same year she enrolled a course in mathematics and physics at the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. She finished her studies in 1912. By the spring of 1912, she had already worked as an unpaid assistant in the Institute of Physics on her doctorate dissertation about electrophoresis.

"As my father died that summer and our family of many children remained without any income, I decided to resign from my scientific career. Even during my practising year I held a job in the Secondary School for girls in the Andrásy Avenue Budapest. With the help of my former teacher of physics, IMRE KÉPESSY, and my university professor, JENŐ KLUPÁTHY I managed to get a job in the Secondary School for girls, where I was fortunate to be entrusted with holding the than newly established exercises of physics."

The ink could not even dry on her fresh degree when she had to learn a new profession. The first World War began, and for four years she served as a voluntary nurse, for which she later received the "Red Cross silver medal" of the "Patriae ac Humanitati 1864-1914 K. K." foundation.

Concerning her "civil" activity, her former Secondary School, (the Capital's Community Primary and High School for girls) employed her as a temporary lecturer for 12 hours a week. In addition, she also taught biology for two semesters in the Institute of Mary Ward's nuns. From September 1916 she began to work as an assistant teacher in the Catholic Secondary School "Sophianum" of the Sacre' Coeur for girls; she was given a full-time teaching appointment only in August 1917. In appreciation of her successful experimental teaching of physics, the government appointed her as a director in January 1936, but she became actually the head of Sophianum only in July 1939. In 1949 the Sophianum was secularized and a new director was appointed to replace VERA CSAPODY, who at that time was already 58 years old. The dismissal automatically brought about the loss of her employee rights, including the loss of her right for pension. Looking for a job now she turned to SÁNDOR JÁVORKA in the Hungarian Natural History Museum.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CSAPODY AND JÁVORKA

Many of the students and teachers of Sophianum had a passion for fine arts. VERA CSAPODY, who taught mathematics and physics painted water-colours of plants. She started collecting flowers and began to paint water-colours of plants. That period was represented on her first exhibition in 1921, held in the Sophianum.

SÁNDOR JÁVORKA, curator of the Hungarian Natural History Museum was invited to this exhibition. Very much impressed by the beauty and likeness of the water-colours, JÁVORKA

asked CSAPODY whether she would be willing to draw plants for the Botanical Department of the Museum. At that time JÁVORKA was working on the "Flora Hungarica" and he was looking for an illustrator. This book was published in 1925 by the Studium publishing association, decorated with VERA CSAPODY's illustrations. But their most important joint work, the "A magyar flóra képekben" Iconographia Florae Hungaricae [An illustrated flora of Hungary] was published in parts, in several fascicles in the edition of "Studium" and the Society of Natural Sciences (1929-1934).

From the works in the collection of the Botanical Department (of the Hungarian Natural History Museum) the aquarelle about Lilium Martagon L., is one of her earlier paintings about 1920. In 1921 she met SÁNDOR JÁVORKA; in the same year another illustration of a Tilia platyphyllos was painted.

In the "Iconographia" already we enjoy the very economical arrangement of numerous species without any disadvantage to the content of the illustration. In some difficult cases JÁVORKA first made sketches, planning the arrangement on the sheets.

The illustration in perspective was always one of the lasting technical problems of CSAPODY. She was not an experimental illustrator. Her style took shape very early and assumed a rather characteristic form. This "peculiarity" could be one of the reasons for her productivity. During her life she made about 6000 drawings, 11,000 original aquarelles, and 1500 copies of drawings or aquarelles.

The quick development of her illustrational style was evidently strictly connected with her close co-operation with SÁNDOR JÁVORKA.

In addition to the fascicules of the "Iconographia" another book was prepared: "Kis növényhatározó" [Short identification manual of plants], where new requirements were laid down. Beside the accurate and complete illustrations of the plants (with the exception of the arboreal species) the illustrations had to show details which were mentioned as important characteristics in the identification manual. So the authors first had to agree on the proportion of the emphasized details, and in the placing of the drawings and details.

Most of CSAPODY's aquarelles (namely 9864) are deposited in the Botanical Department of the Hungarian Natural History Museum. The black and white illustrations of "Iconographia" can also be found here. Our "Vera" always held in high esteem her relationship with the Botanical Department, all of her important works were presented to the Museum.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR GENERATIONS

"The main work of my life was the aquarelling of native and cultivated plants living in the Carpathian-basin, from living examples. The time spent on my collecting trips, was taken away from my holiday, and the cost of these trips were also covered by myself, the result of the collection and illustrational work made from 1912 is reflected in 4800 aquarelle-sheets, representing 3150 plants." - she wrote in her autobiography in 1950. In 1950 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences asked V. CSAPODY to take part in the accomplishment of the planned task aimed at "picturing of the country's flora and fauna in photos and aquarelles". Preceding the first fascicules of the "Iconographia" another work was published in 1926 by the co-authors JÁVORKA and CSAPODY "A magyar flóra kis határozója" [Short identification Manual of the Hungarian Flora]. Many excursions of numerous student-generations became more enjoyable with the help of this book, and many enthusiasts and scholars have been won for botany, who originally have come from other walks of life. The same illustrated book was published again in 1937 in an enlarged edition. The latest, revised 15th edition of the SIMON and CSAPODY "Kis növényhatározó" [Short identification manual of plants] is nowadays the teaching book of the secondary school student.

CSAPODY also illustrated the book of A. O. HORVÁTH on the common flower rarities of the Mecsek and the Transdanubian Central Mts. published in 1973 with 24 drawings. His other small monograph "A Mecsek hegység és déli síkjának növényzete" [The Flora of the Mecsek mountains and the plain in the south] was also illustrated with 3 coloured and 12 black and white illustration plates by VERA CSAPODY.

After the Second World War the need arose for a new plant identification book for botanists, agriculturists and university students. SOÓ and JÁVORKA: "A magyar növényvilág kézikönyve I-II." [The Handbook of the Hungarian Flora I-II] was published in 1951, and it was one of the first

successful undertakings of the Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The illustrations of the 2nd volume, including 1218 miniature plant drawing were made by VERA CSAPODY. The publishing company planned the edition of other identification series too. The second volume was published in 1953. The illustrations of cryptogamous plants were far removed from her sphere of interest; only once she participated in such work, when she illustrated the book written by BORCS: "Magyarország mohái" [Moss Flora of Hungary], where all species known at that time from the area were depicted. The book written by JÁVORKA & CSAPODY entitled "Erdő mező virágai" [Flowers of woods and meadows] spoke not only to the students, but to the great masses of people too. This popular book, illustrated with Csapody-aquarelles was first published in 1950, had many further editions in Hungary and even in Slovak language.

WHERE THE DETAILS ARE IMPORTANT

The first attempt of CSAPODY to depict morphological concepts was in 1926, when she made drawings about different plant organs for the book of JÁVORKA: "A magyar flóra kis határozója" [Short identification Manual of the Hungarian Flora]. Such illustrations can also be found in the "Handbook of the Hungarian Flora" (1951 first volume). The "A növényiszervtan terminológiája" [Terminology of plant morphology] (1953) also belonged to the works of VERA CSAPODY. The first acquaintance with the medical plants originated from 1941 through GIOVANNINI's "Utmutató gyógyszer-növénygyűjtők részére" [A technical guide for collectors of medicinal herbs] (16 illustrations). For many years she had prepared the text part of the book "Magyar gyógynövények" [Hungarian medicinal herbs I-II] written by AUGUSTIN, JÁVORKA, GIOVANNINI & ROMVÁRI. The second volume (1948) with the subtitle "Coloured Plates", shows medicinal plants with the required accuracy. The third joint work (1958) of GIOVANNINI and CSAPODY was the illustrated book "Gyógynövényeink" [Our medicinal herbs] written by two excellent experts: GIOVANNINI & SZATMÁRY. VERA CSAPODY also took an active part in the enterprise "Magyarország kultúrflórája" [The cultivated plants of Hungary]. That was a rather modern undertaking, to satisfy all demands, introducing all the cultivated species (in Hungarian). The latest joint work of JÁVORKA and CSAPODY was: "Garden flowers" (1962), which was published by the Agricultural Pub. Co. Nowadays it is a most wanted book.

Her dendrological activity may be divided into three, rather distinct periods:

The first period is marked by drawing for "Iconographia Florae Partis Austro-Orientalis Europae Centralis", the elaboration of the indigenous flora with the drawing of the most common woody species that are native and almost belong to the flora. This period began in the 1920s and lasted till the beginning of the 1930s, or with the various revisions and plant identification handbooks, till the 1950s. The second period began in the 1950s, in partnership with SÁNDOR JÁVORKA, who turned towards popularization. With the colourful aquarelles and drawings this is the period of the expansive representation and popularization of botany. In the books produced in this period, representation of the dendroflora received a due place as a part of the indigenous and the cultivated plant life (flora). The third period began in 1971 and lasted till her death, is the systematized, pictured representation of the woody flora of the temperate zone of the world.

In the Iconographia the tables are arranged according to a system, showing about 289 indigenous and 77 cultivated or "escaped" species, ranging over about 25 families and 60 genera. After the aquarelles and the dimensional illustrations of the plants, an unusual work began: "Jávorka did not allow shadowing and the use of fantasy. I was only to draw the exact outline of the herbarium plant which was considered to be specific. I almost had to steal secretly into my drawings the shadowing and the dimensional demonstration". That is how she remembered her drawings were made at that time. The drawings of the plant identification handbooks that were made parallel with or after the "Iconographia", reflect the principals of the Iconographia I. The volumes of JÁVORKA & CSAPODY (1926), SOÓ & JÁVORKA (1951) and other later edited plant identification handbooks were all made on the basis of these drawings. The popularizing period started when they had finished the revisions according to the geographical limits of the Carpathian Basin, and later the area delimited by the 1920 political borders. Using the plant identification handbooks, with some practice it became possible to identify most of the indigenous species (even without using the keys). JÁVORKA's view was that even people who come from other walks of life should easily acquire knowledge about the plants. This is how the first edition of "Erdő-mező virágai" [Flowers of

woods and meadows] was prepared in 1950. There are the trees and shrubs of the Pannonian plain and low hills, the high and the snow-capped mountains. In the case of this work there was no need for new field work, it meant "only" the construction of tables and repainting and redrawing the previously made drawings and the pictures of the aquarelle-collection. "During my life my aim was to paint every plant that I had not painted before in order to create a collection" - so she said.

By this time she seldom went out to the field with JÁVORKA - and mostly into the forests around Budapest.

"The dendrological period" started really after the death of JÁVORKA. Between 1962 and 1967 she made 150 successive visits into different parks in Hungary, so that she could examine the same trees and shrubs (if possible) in the different seasons. Usually she painted plants which were named in the arboretums and botanic gardens, but she always checked the names in identificating keys. Her everyday reference books were: "Rheder" (Hardy trees and shrubs), and a newer edition, KRÜSSMANN: "Die Nadelgehölze" and "Die Laubgehölze", and the renewed editions of these works, and the two-volumed dendrology by SCHNEIDER "Illustriertes Handbuch der Laubholzkunde" and other, mainly North-American works about the flora. Collecting trips with DEBRECZY were made to prepare the book entitled "Télen is zöld kertek" (Gardens Green in Winter), which was completed in 1969-1970, as an afterthought of an evergreen exhibition. It was published in 1971 with the description of 860 evergreens on 85 tables, 327 tint-drawings. The homogeneous style requires that every drawing should be made with dimensional demonstration. So this is how in 1974, with a total change of style, the dendrological work was started by the 84 years old VERA CSAPODY.

Her original idea was to arrange the drawings according to their colour and the mood they convey, but in the end it remained to be a taxonomical arrangement in which from the relevant families only the most interesting and beautiful specimens were shown on the tables. The completed 120 coloured tables contain the copies (made after the original aquarelles) of 520 ornamental shrubberies and trees, with the painting of 3-5 species on each table. No descriptive text was attached to the tables that were submitted to the Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, under the title: "Virágzó fák, virágzó cserjék" [Flowering Trees and Shrubs], only a few words of explanation. However, a detailed description was made of the locality of the nearly 600 species grown in the arboretums of Hungary. After the name of each species the abbreviated names of the parks in Hungary and in Malonya where the species could be found, were given. V. CSAPODY and I. TÓTH's work was published with the title: "Colour Atlas of Flowering Trees and Shrubs".

"For the outstanding activity in the field of gardening-culture ..." The Council of the Academy of Horticulture and Wine-Growing presented her the "Ferenc Entz Commemorative Medallion" (5th of September, 1966). In 1979 the University of Horticulture celebrated the 125th anniversary of the foundation of its predecessor and the professional training of gardening itself. On the occasion of the anniversary, "in appreciation of her activity in the sphere of professional training in gardening and preservation industry ..." the University awarded VERA CSAPODY, retired research scientist, with the "Anniversary" memorial plaque.

VERA CSAPODY received her university doctorate degree in Szeged in 1932 for a dissertation entitled "Mediterranean elements in the Hungarian Flora".

She was the main illustrator of numerous popular, and some scientific articles and more than 20 books. The textwriters of the botanical handbooks could always rely upon her accuracy (concerning the fixed terms as well as the quality of the work). There are 9864 aquarelles registered in the Botanical Department, but still some hundreds of her pictures are in the property of her family (mainly illustrations of orchids). Thus it happened that some of her illustrations (explanations) were used several times, while some of her aquarelles remained unpublished. Even these unknown aquarelles were shown in some encyclopaedias, on some exhibitions held in Hungary and abroad, the largest of which was held in Budapest (Hungarian Botanical Exhibition). Her first foreign debut was in Milano (1928) and since that time she had exhibited to international audiences on several occasions. Edinburgh (1964), Pittsburgh (1967), Seattle (1969), Johannesburg (1974), Frankfurt am Main (1975). On these exhibitions the best works of the illustration masters were represented. She is considered to be one of the greatest illustrators of 20th century botanical art and illustration.

Her co-authors appreciated her excellent talent, among others, by naming taxa after her:

1. *Aconitum firmum* Rchb. f. *Csapodyae* Jáv. (1930)
2. *Dianthus spiculifolius* Schur. var. *Csapodyae* Jáv.
3. *Veronica bellidoides* L. ssp. *Csapodyi* Péntzes (1948)
4. *Centaurea* x *Csapodyana* Kárp. (*C. Sadleriana* x *salonitana* var. *taurica*) (1949)
5. *Crataegus monogyna* Jacq. ssp. *intermedia* Schur. var. *Csapodyae* Péntzes (1954)

6. *Crocus Heuffleriana* Herb. var. *Csapodyae* Horvát et Jáv. ex. Jáv. - *Soó* (1951) nom nud.; descr. Jáv. ex Priszter (1964)
7. *Pyrus x pannonica* Terpó nm. *Csapodyana* Terpó (1960)
8. *Potentilla argentea* L. ssp. *macrotoma* (Borb.) Jáv. f. *Csapodyae* Borhidi et Izsépy (1965)
9. *Colchicum hungaricum* Janka f. *Csapodyae* Priszter (1967)
10. *Quercus cerris* L. var. *austriaca* (Willd.) Loud. f. *Verae-Csapody Mátyás* (1970)

Beyond the acknowledgement and respect of the professionals, VERA CSAPODY enjoyed the recognition of the state and society too: Red Cross Silver Medal 1915, For socialist culture 1963, Work Order (Silver Grade) 1965, 1970, Hungarian State Prize 1980.

On 12th of September, 1973, the Eötvös Lóránd University of Sciences presented VERA CSAPODY the "Diamond Degree" for her 60 years of professional career. In December 1983, she received the "Ruby Degree" presented to those lucky few who graduated 70 years previously.

In the spring of 1984 when she celebrated her 94th birthday, she planted some cedar-trees on the Gellért-hill, where she had so many pleasant walks. The planting was a symbol of what she proved with her whole life: "only the unselfish man can live for the future" ...

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EXPLANATION OF PLATE

1. On a field trip.
2. Working with Sándor Jávorka (photo: MTI Reissmann Mariann)

Authors' address: Dr. J. SZUJKO-LACZA
 Dr. Zs. DEBRECZY
 Botanical Department of the
 Hungarian Natural History Museum
 Budapest, Pf: 222
 H-1476
 HUNGARY



Vera Csapody (1890–1985)

Plate

