

**In memoriam Dr. Vera Csapody  
(1890—1985)**

by Zs. DEBRECZY, Budapest

On the night of 6th November, 1985 the outstanding representative of Hungarian botanical illustration, VERA CSAPODY passed away. She was born in 1890 in Budapest, into a family of doctors and artists. Her father was a well-known eyespecialist and an expert on natural sciences at the same time. Her mother was the daughter of the composer GÉZA ALLAGA. As the eldest of eight children, she was first taught by a governess. She matriculated from a state secondary school with excellent marks (1908). The same year she entered the Péter Pázmány University of Budapest, becoming one of the first female stu-



**Dr. Vera Csapody on her 95th birthday  
(29th of March, 1985) (photo I. RÁCZ)**

dents ever admitted to a university in Hungary. She graduated with remarkable success and was immediately offered the possibility of beginning her doctoral dissertation on electrophoresis at the department of physics. Dramatic changes happened in her life when her father unexpectedly died in 1912 and she had to shoulder all the burdens of raising her seven sisters and brothers. She gave up her scientific carrier and started a new profession, teaching. First she worked as an assistant teacher in a boys' school and from 1916 she was a teacher of the Sophianum, the educational establishment of the Sacré Coeur Institute. In 1938, in recognition of her pioneering teaching methods and educational achievements, she was promoted to head of the institution. In 1948 the Sophianum was secularized and VERA CSAPODY was dismissed, causing a break in the continuity of her employee rights. We should add that VERA CSAPODY was not a passive member of society; all her botanical and educational publications reflected her philanthropy and love of work from a religious aspect, which in those days did not accord with the requirements of her job at the times. Looking for a solution, she turned to one of her earlier friends SÁNDOR JÁVORKA, the subsequent director of the Botanical Department of the Hungarian National Museum, applying for a job as a botanical illustrator. She was not only accepted, but treated as a highly respected colleague. How could a teacher of mathematics and physics become a successful botanical illustrator?

The story goes back to 1912, when she spent a happy holiday with her grandfather in the country. There she discovered the beauty and variety of the plant world; an inspiring thought came into her mind: "how wonderful and useful it would be to paint all the plants native to Hungary, to capture them in shape and colour"! Turning to her former school teacher for advice on how to collect and identify plants, she received an identification book, practically the only relatively comprehensive and up to date work at that time, the "Short identification manual" of CSEREY. Being a teacher, during her long holiday she could take collecting trips all over the country to paint the flowers in their natural habitats. The First World War interrupted her activity as an illustrator. She cared for wounded soldiers as a volunteer nurse for some years. But she did not give up, and her collection grew to become more comprehensive. Thanks to the idea of then director of the Sophianum, she was able to show her works in an exhibition held in the building of the school. At the opening she met SÁNDOR JÁVORKA, scientific officer and future director of the Botanical Department of the Hungarian National Museum, the institute which was the predecessor of the present Botanical Department of the Hungarian Natural History Museum. He was looking for someone to illustrate his already completed identification manual (28, 29), which was to embrace all species of the Hungarian flora. The acquaintance turned into a co-operating friendship lasting for 40 years until the death of SÁNDOR JÁVORKA in 1961. Over 20 books have been published as a result of their co-operation, including their greatest work: "The Hungarian Flora in Pictures" (*Iconographia Florae Hungaricae*) (30). When the last fascicle was published in the 1934 after 5 years of work, it marked the conclusion of a treatise had been finished that was one of very few in Europe at that time, giving complete diagnostic illustrations of all the species included in JÁVORKA's textbook (28) and which occurred within the large Central European area of the same geographical and natural boundaries. With a total of 4238 illustrations (3978 black ink drawings and 260 aquarelles), the *Iconographia* became the fulfilment of a scientific activity which started in the 18th Century with the "Description et Icones..." of WALDSTEIN-KITAEIBEL.

Following the success of the "*Iconographia*" she received numerous commissions for school textbooks and articles illustrations too and from experts of different special (2, 10, 15, 22, 27, 31, 34, 37, 41) and applied botanical fields (1, 7, 19, 23, 36, 38, 42, 44, 46, 47 etc.). After the long period of work on flora she also joined JÁVORKA's efforts on popularizing botany. The most outstanding result in this field was the book "Erdő mező virágai" (The

flowers of woods and meadows) in 1950 (34) which was a long awaited help in botany teaching and a fieldbook for many generations of naturalists. This book was followed by weed-identification books (48, 49), a colour guide to ornamental plants (36) and an atlas for trees and shrubs edited only 20 years later (18). She also made an interesting "excursion" to the field of ethnographical botany collecting folk names of plants. Her largest collection consists of more than 7000 expressions. A small selection has also been published in a book (17). Her seedling identification manual (10) filled a long-felt gap in international specialised literature. The accurate drawings made of seedlings germinated between the double windows of her study in the museum for over 17 years were also used in an Austrian weed identification book (26). Beside painting aquarelles on dendrological subjects she began to work systematically as a dendrologist in 1969 with her young colleague. The book soon completed (19) was the beginning of an undertaking to compile the woody plants of the temperate climate zone of the world (20). She made 4000 full-table drawings in the following 14 years. Though she knew that she would not live to see the completion of the work, she was convinced that this work would be continued by her followers.

She was capable of intensive work with enviable self-control and accuracy. This attitude gave her amazing stamina in both physically and mentally for field-work. During her life she spent thousands of days, often under harsh and simple circumstances, on excursions to paint her plants. Her life-work of illustrating over 60 books and publications and producing an estimated 20,000 drawings and 12,000 aquarelles founded a "school" in plant illustration in her country: many of her young followers consider her as their master. In recognition of her achievements she was awarded the highest official award, the State Prize in 1980.

Of her valuable collection nearly 10,000 aquarelles are the property of the Botanical Department of the Hungarian Natural History Museum—only the beautiful orchid painting collection has remained in the hands of her family. For technical reasons, her paintings have always been published repainted after fitting together in tables. It is a pity that except for some exhibitions the public has not yet been able to enjoy her aquarelles in their original beauty, to admire the accuracy combined with artistic brilliance and scientific humility.

[Dr. Vera Csapody's publications in alphabetical order of the co-authors\*]

1. AUGUSTIN, B., JÁVORKA, S., GIOVANNINI, R. & ROMVÁRI, P. (1948): Magyar gyógynövények I-II. (Hungarian medicinal herbs.)—Földművelésügyi Minisztérium, Budapest (190 colour plates)
2. BOROS, Á. (1953): Magyarország mohái. (Mossflora of Hungary.)—Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (519 drawings)
3. CSAPODY, I. (1982): Védett növényeink. (Protected plants.)—Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest (70 colour plates)
4. CSAPODY, V. (1932): Mediterrán elemek a magyar flórában. Doktori értekezés. (Mediterranean elements in the Hungarian flora.)—Doctoral diss. (4 maps, 10 plates)
5. CSAPODY, V. (1939): Érdekes fák. (Interesting trees.)—Magyar Cserkész, 20/20, p. 12–13.
6. CSAPODY, V. (1953): A rizs gyomnövényei. (Weeds of rice fields.)—*Annls. hist.-nat. Mus. natn. hung.* 4: p. 35–45.
7. CSAPODY, V. (1961): Színes atlasz „Magyarország Kultúrflórája”-hoz. (A colour atlas of the cultivated plants of Hungary.)—Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (180 colour plates)
8. CSAPODY, V. (1965): Keimlingsbestimmungsbuch der Dicotyledonen. (Review.) — *Fragm. bot.* 3 (1–4): p. 109–126.
9. CSAPODY, V. (1965): Idegen cserjék és fák parkjainkban. (Exotic shrubs and trees in our parks.) — *Term. tud. Közlöny*, 9 (9): p. 39–41.
10. CSAPODY, V. (1968): Keimlingsbestimmungsbuch der Dicotyledonen. — Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (1491 drawings)
11. CSAPODY, V. (1968): Die Ziergehölze Ungarns. — *Fragm. bot.* 4 (1–4): p. 109–114.
12. CSAPODY, V. ANTUSZEWICZ, M. (1973): Atlas roślin uprawnych. (A colour atlas of the cultivated plants of Hungary.) — Budapest-Warszawa, Polish edition (130 colour plates)

13. CSAPODY, I., CSAPODY, V., JÁVORKA, S. (1980): Erdő mező növényei. (Plants of woods and meadows.) — Natura, Budapest (120 colour plates)
14. CSAPODY, I., CSAPODY, V., JÁVORKA, S. (1983): Rosliny lesov a luk. (Plants of woods and meadows.) — Bratislava, Slovak edition (120 colour plates)
15. CSAPODY, I., CSAPODY, V., ROTT, F. (1966): Erdei fák és cserjék. (Forest trees and shrubs.) — Országos Erdészeti Főigazgatóság, Budapest (114 plates)
16. CSAPODY, V., HORÁNSZKY, A. (1972): Vadvirágok 1. (Wild flowers 1.) — Móra Ferenc Kiadó, Budapest. Further editions: 1975, 1978, 1981. (29 colour plates)
17. CSAPODY, V., PRISZTER, SZ. (1966): Magyar növénynevek szótára. (A dictionary of the Hungarian plant names.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest p. 301.
18. CSAPODY, V., TÓTH, I. (1982): A colour atlas of flowering trees and shrubs. — Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (141 colour plates)
19. DEBRECZY, Zs., CSAPODY, V. (1971): Télen is zöld kertek. (Gardens also green in winter.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (327 drawings)
20. DEBRECZY, Zs., CSAPODY, V., RÁ CZ, I. & collab.: Dendrological Atlas I. (Under work since 1971.)
21. D. NAGY, É., CSAPODY, V. (1976): Vadvirágok 2. (Wild flowers 2.) — Móra Ferenc Kiadó, Budapest. Further edition: 1978. (29 colour plates)
22. FÁY, A. (1936): A magyar szikesek növényzete. (The vegetation of the Hungarian alkaline area.) — Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, Budapest (7 plates)
23. GIOVANNINI, R. (1941): Útmutató gyógynövénygyűjtők részére. (A technical guide for collectors of medicinal herbs.) — Urbányi István Könyvnyomda Műintézet, Budapest (16 colour plates)
24. GIOVANNINI, R., SZATMÁRY, G. (1958): Gyógynövényeink. (Our medicinal herbs.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (190 colour plates)
25. HALMAI, J., NOVÁK, I. (1963): Farmakognózia. (Pharmacognostics.) — Medicina Kiadó, Budapest (36 colour and 41 black and white plates)
26. HOLZER, W. (1981): Ackerunkräuter. Bestimmung, Verbreitung, Biologie und Ökologie. — Leopold Stocker Verlag, Graz (268 drawings)
27. HORTOBÁGYI, T. (ed.) (1952): Növényhatározó. (Plant identification manueł.) — Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest. Further editions: 1955, 1962, 1968. (2031 drawings and 5 morphological plates)
28. JÁVORKA, S. (1924–25): Magyar Flóra I. II. III. (Flora Hungarica.) (The flora of Hungary.) — „Studium” Könyvkiadó, Budapest (13 morphological plates)
29. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1926): A magyar flóra kis határozója. (A short identification manueł of the Hungarian flora.) — „Studium” Könyvkiadó, Budapest (1002 drawings)
30. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1929–1934): A magyar flóra képekben. (Iconographia Florae Hungaricae.) (An illustrated flóra of Hungary.) — M. K. Természettudományi Társulat és „Studium” Könyvkiadó, Budapest (40 colour Plates and 4017 drawings)
31. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1937): A short identification manueł of the Hungarian flora — second enlarged edition. — „Studium” Könyvkiadó, Budapest (1002 drawings)
32. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1975): Közép-Európa délkeleti részének flórája képekben (Iconography of the flora of the south-eastern part of Central Europe.) — Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (40 colour plates and 4017 drawings)
33. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1979): Ikonographie der Flora des südöstlichen Mitteleuropa. (German adaptation by Sz. Priszter.) — G. Fischer und Akadémia Verlag, Stuttgart—Budapest (40 colour plates and 4017 drawings)
34. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1950): Erdő mező virágai. (Flowers of woods and meadows.) — Tudományos Könyvkiadó, Budapest. Further editions: 1955, 1958, 1965, 1972. (80 colour- and 20 black and white plates)
35. JÁVORKA, S., FUTÁK, J., CSAPODYOVA, V. (1959): Květy lesov a luk. (Flowers of woods and meadows.) — Slovak edition: Bratislava. Further editions: 1965, 1973. (80 colour- and 20 black and white plates)
36. JÁVORKA, S., CSAPODY, V. (1962): Kerti virágaink. (Garden flowers.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (116 plates)
37. JÁVORKA, S., SOÓ, R. (1951): A magyar növényvilág kézikönyve I-II. (A handbook of Hungarian flora I-II. — Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (178 plates)
38. MAJER, A. (ed.) (1962): Erdő és termőhelytipológiai útmutató. (A guide to forests and nature habitats.) — Országos Erdészeti Főigazgatóság, Budapest (133 drawings)
39. MAJER, A. (1963): Erdő és termőhelytípusok útmutató növényei. (Indicator plants of forest and habitat types.) — Idem (139 colour plates)
40. POLNER, I., RÁPÓTI, J. (1951): Gyógynövénygyűjtés és termelés. (Collection and cultivation of medicinal plants.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (39 drawings)

41. PRISZTER, SZ., CSAPODY, V. (1963): A növényiszervtan terminológiája. (A terminology of plant morphology.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (17 plates)
42. RÁPÓTI, J., ROMVÁRI, V. (1969): Gyógyító növények. (Medicinal herbs.) — Second enlarged edition. (181 drawings)
43. SIMON, T., CSAPODY, V. (1966): Kis növényhatározó. (Small identification book.) — Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest. Further editions: 1967, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1976, 1977, 1978, enlarged editions: 1982, 1983, 1984. (5 morphological and 65 colour plates)
44. SOMOS, A. (1955): Zöldségtermesztés I-II. (Vegetable cultivation I-II.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (24 colour plates)
45. SOMOS, A. (1958): A paradicsom. (The tomato.) — Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest (4 drawings)
46. SZÚCS, L. (1957): Növények a lakásban. (Plants in the home.) — Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest (11 drawings)
47. SZÚCS, L. (1960): Kaktuszok, pozsgás növények. (Cacti and succulent plants.) — Gondolat Kiadó Budapest (47 drawings)
48. ÚJVÁROSI, M. (1951): Szántóföldi gyomnövényeink. (Weeds of our plough-land.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (176 drawings)
49. ÚJVÁROSI, M. (1957): Gyomnövények, gyomirtás. (Weeds and their control.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (475 drawings)
50. ÚJVÁROSI, M. (1973): Gyomnövények. (Weeds.) — Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (5 colour plates and 805 drawings)

#### Reviews from Dr. Vera Csapody

- SZUJKÓNÉ-LACZA, J. (1971): Csapody Vera 80 éves. (Vera Csapody is 80 years old, 1970.) — *Bot. Közlem.* 58: 1.
- LAWRENCE, G. (ed.) (1968): Catalogue of 2nd International Exhibition of Botanical Art and Illustration. — *Hunt Botanical Library*, Pittsburgh, p. 54–55.

#### Chronological order of Vera Csapody's publications\*

1924: 28	1950: 34	1962: 27, 36, 38	1975: 16, 32
1925: 28	1951: 37, 40, 48	1963: 25, 39, 41	1976: 43
1926: 29	1952: 27	1965: 8, 9, 34, 35	1977: 43
1929: 30	1953: 2, 6	1966: 15, 17, 43	1978: 16, 21, 43
1932: 4	1955: 27, 34, 44	1967: 43	1979: 33
1934: 30	1957: 46, 49	1968: 10, 11, 27	1980: 13
1936: 22	1958: 24, 34, 45	1969: 42, 43	1981: 16, 26
1937: 31	1959: 35	1971: 19, 43	1982: 3, 18, 43
1939: 5	1960: 47	1972: 16, 34	1983: 14, 43
1941: 23	1961: 7	1973: 12, 35, 43, 50	1984: 43
1948: 1			

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\* This is a selected list of literature with the most important works only and those concerned with the text. For a comprehensive list of V. CSAPODY's works, see SZ. PRISZTER: *Acta botanica hungarica* (1987, vol. 32) and *Botanikai Közlemények* (1988, vol. 75).

