

## THE CENTENARY OF REZSŐ SOÓ' BORNING (1903-1980)

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This year on 1st August was the centenary of REZSŐ SOÓ's borning. The memorial meetings and anniversaries organized in different centres of the whole Carpathian Basin (Budapest, Debrecen, Székelyudvarhely) presented a holistic view about the interesting life and the great scientific contributions of REZSŐ SOÓ, considered as one of the prominent and foremost Central European botanist of last century. The themes related to his monumental scientific performance the immense and various published works, characteristic, colourful but controversial personality, created several debates, consideration and appreciation, sometimes with a profound subjectivity. A whole century stay behind him, period in which he received from the rich laudation to the fashionable scolding. Even in life he „achieved” diverse characterisation and appreciation given by his collaborators and students because he was a leader scientist with a tremendous knowledge in botany and cultural things, but a severe critic and autocritic of works, great of inspiration and information, impulsive and strong-willed personality. A just not narrow collaborator, but familiar with his life and work, disciple from the natal region can observe perhaps better and with more objectively the enduring values of his contribution for the new world of databases, his teacher's work and the school-founder activities which ensure him a privileged place on the Hungarian science and culture.

### The last visit in Transylvania

After an intensive professional relation by scientific correspondence more than a decade, I met REZSŐ SOÓ in the summer time of 1977 in Transylvania (Romania), where he came for visiting and remembering to the youth research places, the natal region and localities, the lovely towns Kolozsvár and Székelyudvarhely, leaving part from friends and his parents grave. The 10 days visit was organised and guided by myself and remain unforgettable as a serial of nice lessons in the field of history of botany.

The first appointment was realised in the house of CSÜRÖS-family (MARGIT and ISTVÁN CSÜRÖS) in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Klausenburg) with the participation of other

Transylvanian botanists. After an interesting discussion about the new botanical books, journals, stamps and herbarium collections (Soó and Csűrös were great stamp's collectors also) we started in three (REZSŐ Soó professor of botany, ARANKA TÍMÁR nurse-attendant, ATTILA J. KOVÁCS scientific researcher) to the interesting trip. We visited several small towns in Eastern Transylvania like: Marosvárárhely (Tg. Mures), Gyergyószentmiklós (Gheorgheni), Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc), Tusnád (Tusnad), Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sf. Gheorghe), Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu-Secuiesc), Székelykeresztúr (Cristuru-Secuiesc), Segesvár (Sighisoara), Brassó (Brasov) etc. We admired the wonderful natural places, the early field botanical research territories situated in the Maros-valley, Olt-valley, Békás-key, Sikasszó-, Bucsin-, Tolvajos-pass, Mohos, Poiana, Küküllő-valley etc. For the night time we used sometimes motels, but more frequently we enjoy the hospitality and amiability old friends and acquaintances. We visited the Soó's natal house in Székelyudvarhely (Bethlen street), we put a wreath to the Family-grave situated in the catholic cemetery, we presented our honour at the grave of the writer ÁRON TAMÁSI in Farkaslaka (Lupeni), we presented our greetings and respect at the tree of Sándor Petőfi, the grammar-school ORBÁN BALÁZS in Székelykeresztúr and we tasted my mother's neuburger wine.

In our travelling alongside the rivers, climbing mountains, crossing valleys in the Carpathian Mountain, the zone and belt of the beech and spruce forests vegetation, mountain grasslands, it was wonderful to see again, to discovering again plants and coenoses, fragments from the specific Transylvanian botanical thesaurus like: Teleki-flower (*Telekia speciosa*), Transylvanian liverleaf (*Hepatica transsilvanica*), Globe-flower (*Trollius europaeus*), Red hellebore (*Helleborus purpurascens*), Marsh cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*), Tufted Loosestrife (*Lysimachia thyrsiflora*), Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Rannoch-rush (*Scheuchzeria palustris*), Ostrich Fern (*Matteucia struthiopteris*), Medicinal Angelica (*Angelica arhangelica*), Thistle (*Carduus personata*), Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*), Bellflower (*Campanula abietina*), Red Lungwort (*Pulmonaria rubra*), Tansy (*Chrysanthemum rotundifolium*), Blue Moor Grass (*Sesleria heuffleriana*), Iris (*Iris ruthenica*), Cephalaria (*Cephalaria radiata*), Pink (*Dianthus spiculifolius*), Veilflower (*Gypsophila petraea*) etc.

Our journey was more than a pleasant participation in the Transylvanian nature, in local cultural centres, natal places. During the visit of various objects I was able to attend to the professor Soó's lectures on the recent history of European botany, like in a really "postgraduate training courses". He presented his personal contacts and knowledge about a large group of scientists like: E. AICHINGER, AL. BORZA, C. BURDUJA, J. BRAUN-BLANQUET, Á. DEGEN, F. EHRENDORFER, H. ELLENBERG, C. C. GEORGESCU, S. JÁVORKA, F. MARGRAF, E. I. NYÁRÁDY, B. PAWLOWSKI, E. POP, E. RÜBEL, M. RAVARUT, T. SAVULESCU, F. STAFLEAU, H. WALTER, R. WETTSTEIN, B. ZÓLYOMI, and Hungarian writers: M. BÁNFFY, GY. ILLYÉS, ZS. MÓRICZ, L. NÉMETH, Á. TAMÁSI etc. He talking and give about this personalities not only a general report, but an inspection to their habitude, personal identity, human values, private matters, features what completed the image of scientist, their moti-

vation and long term activities. The "lectures" and the discussions call my attention to the origin and the real spring of science history, the needs of the personal acquaintance, relationships and co-operations.

On the basis of all these, the life and trade activity of REZSŐ SOÓ is a well known "novel" for me, a milestone, a basic reference and example for creation, development and survive. In fact his trade activity it was appraised and presented in several cases by different writers, sometimes with a great subjectivity, reviewed by himself also (1978). As we departing in fact from his living time, so can be understand more and more, can be better recognised his monumental work, the scientific legacy, the motivation of life and behaviour, his remembrance in the Carpathian Basin small centres, from the East Carpathian to the Alps area, his place in the Central European scientific world and in the universal science and culture. The following consideration try to refer only to some general sequences from his career and particular contribution and distinguish aspects of the "Transylvanian period" as a special regard of his life and activity.

#### **Life and professional activity**

REZSŐ SOÓ was born on 1st August, 1903 at Székelyudvarhely (Odorheui Secuiesc) a little town of Eastern Transylvania, a centre of the "Terra Siculorum", or "Székely Land" (Székelyföld, Secuimea) situated today in Romania. After his own description, his family origin belong three part to the Hungarian-Székely nobleman (primipillus family) and one part to the Armenian-Transylvanian descendant. He was born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, attended secondary school in Kolozsvár in the Romanian Regat, subsequently the university studies in Budapest (Eötvös College) in Hungary, continued as postgraduate student in Berlin (Collegium Hungaricum). His work are related to the research and teaching, started as research worker in Tihany (1927-1929) continued as professor of botany in Debrecen (1929-1940), Kolozsvár (1940-1944), again Debrecen (1945-1954) and later in Budapest (1952 (1955)-1969). These are the most important centres and stations of his life, determined by the eveniments of the 20th century, the general history what he not only supported but tried to influenced in his trade regards also. His fundamental contribution to the Hungarian and Central European botany is a milestone, equalling the ever-precious botanical works of PÁL KITABEL (1799) and SÁNDOR JÁVORKA (1924, 1929).

Regarding to his long trade activity, SOÓ is a follower of BORBÁS and RAPAICS, the national wing of phytogeography in the 20th century. With his friends he belong to the group of young to whom the trade starting are coincided with Trianon, the generation who wanted to certify their presence in science and culture, to demonstrate their solidarity, preserving and surviving the language and culture. For this reason this young generation was under a permanently pressure of certifying and accomplishment. This was discovered and sustained with generosity by the count KUNÓ KLEBELSBERG the cultural Minister in that time.

REZSŐ SOÓ was proud of his Hungarian-Székely family and his origin, his father named DR. REZSŐ SOÓ also, was a lawyer, descendent from a Székely noblemen family

with farmers grandfathers, but who died as young (34 years age) in tbc; his mother named MARADÁSZ IRÉN originated partly from a Székely family, her father being a military surgeon and her mother IRMA AFFIUMI were an Armenian-Transylvanian originated from Erzsébetváros (Dumbraveni). After the Soó's own affirmation (1978) a series of personal features inherited from this family: creativeness, assiduity, full of temperament, passion of collection, respect of the beauty, versatility etc. With her mother as widow they remove from Székelyudvarhely to Kolozsvár (1909) where Soó started his studies, first in the lutheranian school and, after than in the famous catholic school from the Farkas street. In all time of his studies, he was an eminent schoolboy, famous for his latin knowledge and for his memory. His interest to the nature and plants was started by János Karí his secondary schoolteacher. After the second world war, in Cluj was university only in Romanian language, so in 1921 Soó started his university studies (in natural history and chemistry) on the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, get in to the Eötvös Collegium, graduated in 1925. He realised his doctoral thesis in botany (The monograph of *Melampyrum* 1926) and was promoted sub auspiciis.

His professional grounding in botany was accomplished in Berlin at the Botanical Institute and Garden of Berlin-Dahlem where he studied as a member of Collegium Hungaricum between 1925-1927. In this period he visited several Central-and West European universities and research laboratories, several natural regions in Middle Asia, Egypt, Anatolia etc. Important scientific influences and example of activity he received in this period from the following scientists: R. Wettstein in Wien, E. Rübel in Switzerland and J. Braun-Blanquet in Switzerland-France, who determined his early scientific thinking and view.

In the following years, was coming back in Hungary Soó realised a splendid scientific career: first as research worker in the Biological Research Institute-Tihany (1927-1929), later as extraordinary professor of botany (1929-1935) and ordinary professor in botany at the University of Debrecen (1936-1940). Between 1940 - 1944 he was professor in plant systematics at the University of Kolozsvár, Director of the Botanical Garden and of the Transylvanian Botanical Museum. In the next period between 1945 - 1955 he arrived again professor to the University of Debrecen and, after 1953 was promoted as Director of the Institute for Phytotaxonomy and Geobotany of the Eötvös Lóránd University- Budapest and Director of the Botanical Garden. He retired in 1969. In his private life, long time he was strong related to the natal places, he visited and organised annually research studies in Transylvania even after her mother's died (1924), with his aunt removing in Tihany in 1927 where he married with Ilona Gallé, a physician (1906-1970) who accompanied many research and collecting trips, who was his excellent photographer of landscapes and plants.

During his acting professorship for four decades R. Soó educated several generation of botanists and occupied various universities and academic function. Between 1936-1939 and as well as 1951 - 1952 he was Dean of the Science Faculty in Debrecen. He was elected corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1947 and full member in 1951, President of the Biological Section (1952-1953), of the



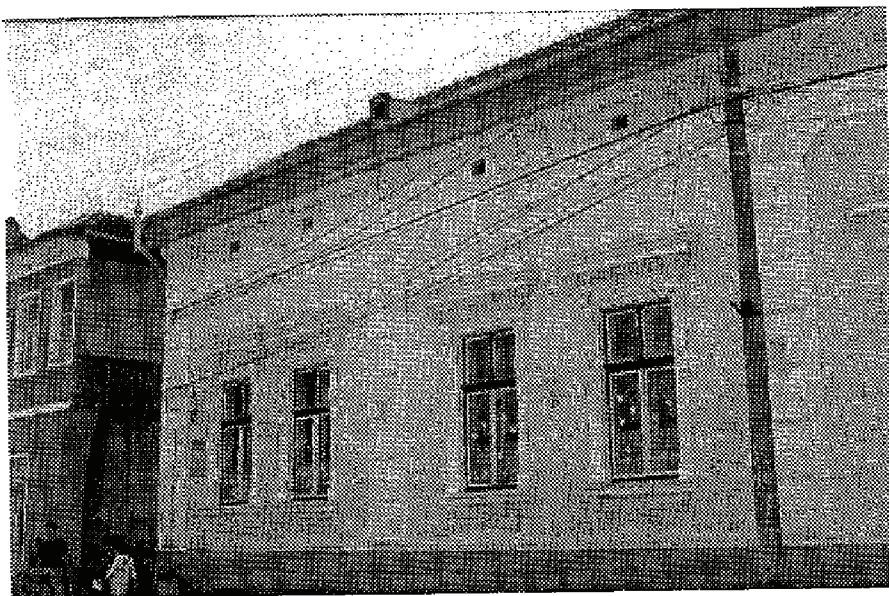


Fig. 1. Rezső Soó natal house in Székelyudvarhely (Odorhieu-Secuiesc)

Fig. 2. The grave of Soó-family in the Catholic cemetery (Székelyudvarhely)

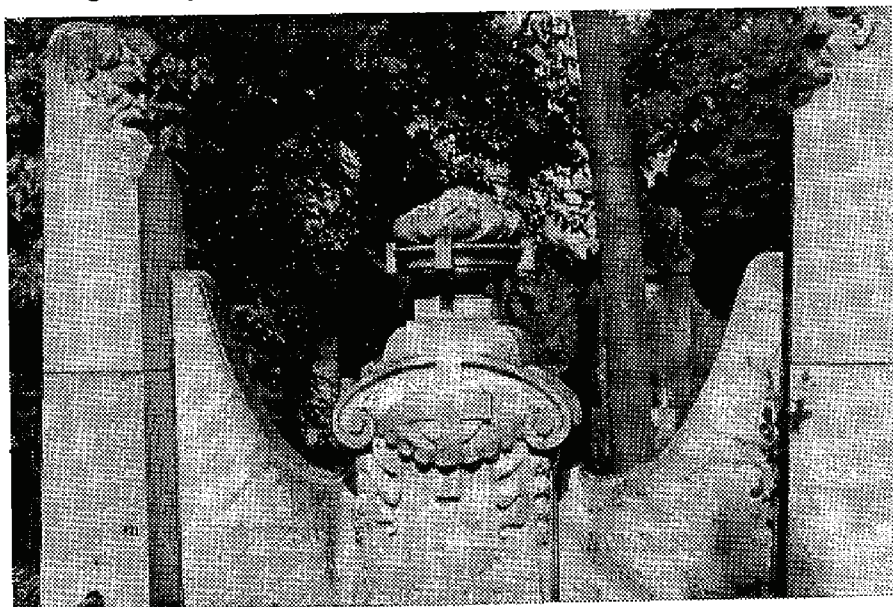




Fig. 3. Rezső Soó visiting the grave of Tamási Áron (Farkaslaka, 1977)

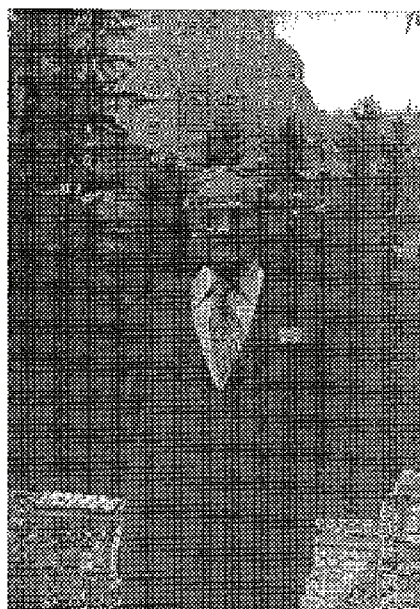


Fig. 4. Rezső Soó during the last botanical excursion in Bicz-key (Békás-szoros, 1977)

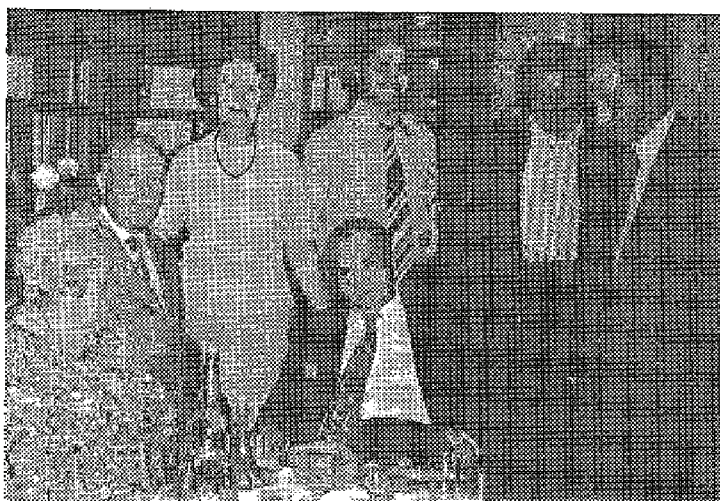


Fig. 5. Rezső Soó and his wife (Aranka) with a group of Transylvanian-Hungarian botanists: Csűrös István, Csűrös-Káptalan Margit, Kovács J. Attila, Gergely János and Váczy Kálmán (Kolozsvár, Cluj-Napoca, 1977)



Principal Committee of Botany (1950-1958). He received twice the Kossuth-Price (1951, 1954), the Order of Labour (1963), was the full member of the Academia Leopoldino-Caroliniana of Halle (1940), honorary member of several European Academies and Botanical Societies (ex. Bulgaria, Finland Sweden), was member in the Editorial Boards of various journals (*Vegetatio*, *Feddes Repertorium*, *Excerpta Botanica*) and regional advisor of *Flora Europea* (Reading). He was awarded to the Dr. Honoris Causa at the University of Debrecen in 1973 and the Honorary Freeman of the town Debrecen in 1979. He died on 10th February 1980 at Budapest. In his prodigious life he published 26 books (monographs, floristic works, manuals, handbooks etc), and more than 400 scientific papers and about 3000 short reports. About fifty plant names and hundred of plant communities and coenological categories perpetuate his name.

#### **Works related to the Transylvanian botany**

R. Soó's creativity and originality is demonstrated especially in the domain of science related to the "field botany". Without to present a general characterisation of his all scientific publication (this was made in several time by him and different writers, or even in the previous paper), we shall try to give only some example from his work related to the Transylvanian botany. He started to study botany from his childhood, when he was a schoolboy (in 1917 at Kolozsvár) and in his early youth was in preparation to elaborate special and synthetically works related to the whole Carpathian Basin. As he own remember "My earlier fancy was to write the coenological flora of the Carpathian Basin (cf. *Acta Geobot. Hung.* 6) but with the change of the political situation this dream was gradually obliterated. In fact, I collected material to this project ever since my schoolboy years, abstracting the floristic works, taxonomic and phytogeographical literature of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, these notes came extremely useful in the compilation of the present work. Consequently, the activities of mine and my students were concentrated in these directions" (Synopsis, 1973).

R. Soó founded the Hungarian school of phytosociology, with prominent disciples also in Transylvania, as ISTVÁN CSÜRÖS, ERASMUS I. NYÁRÁDY, ANTAL NYÁRÁDY, collaborators and student disciples of them. He elaborated a series of basic works in Transylvania or related to the this region, he edited important journals with respect also to the botanical researches in Transylvania. His main contribution appear especially in the following domain: taxonomy, floristics, vegetation science, botanical synthesis.

To the **taxonomy** he was related from his youth. The monographs of the genus *Melampyrum*, *Rhinanthus*, *Salicornia*, *Consolida* etc. also contain populations from Transylvania. He was one of the best specialist of European orchids and with G. KELLER he prepared the orchids of SE Europe and the Mediterranean area (1930-1940). The work Keller-Soó "Kritische Monography" required long time and arrived to be so important that it was reedited in Germany (1972). In the sixties and seventies, he published generic reviews (*Ophrys*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Epipactis*, *Orchis*, *Pulsatilla*, *Fraxinus*, *Dianthus*, *Erophila*, *Thymus* etc.) where he treated also the Carpatho-Pannonian critical taxa. The first book of R. Soó (*Növénytan. Botanica. - Cluj - Kolozsvár, Minerva Rt., 1926*) was

# **SCRIPTA BOTANICA MUSEI TRANSSILVANICI**

**AZ ERDÉLYI  
NEMZETI MUZEUM NÖVÉNYTÁRÁNAK KÖZLEMÉNYEI**

**I. (1942)**

**REDIGIT:  
Prof. Dr. B. SOÓ REZSŐ**

**EDITIO  
SECTIONIS BOTANICAE MUSEI NATIONALIS TRANSSILVANICI**

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**KOLOZSVÁR, 1942**



FLORAE PANNONICO-CARPATICAE (OLIM HUNGARICAE) CRITICAE VII.

**AZ ERDÉLYI MEZŐSÉG FLÓRÁJA**  
**PRODROMUS FLORAE REGIONIS MEZŐSÉG**  
**(TRANSSILVANIAE CENTRALIS)**

AUCTORE

Prof. Dr. R. de SOÓ

EDITIO INSTITUTI BOTANICI  
UNIVERSITATIS DEBRECEN

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DEBRECEN, 1949

written also in Transylvania and designated to the Hungarian secondary schools after the first world war.

To the floristic he was attracted by his passion of collecting. He began to collect plants very early (1917) and he established a famous personal herbarium, from what 50.000 sheets was donated to the Transylvanian Museum of Botany (1944) later ranged to the Herbarium of the Babes-Bolyai University in Kolozsvár (Cluj). Related to the floristics, he founded and edited the series publication „*Magyar Flóraművek*” (*Hungarian Floristic Works*) (1936-1947) from what the vol. III, VI. and VII. referring to different regional places in Transylvania: *Prodromus florae Terrae Siculorum* (1940), *Flora Terrae Siculorum* (1943), *Prodromus florae regionis Mezőség (Transylvania Centralis)* (1949). Many floristically short communication (ex. *Eurotia ceratoides*) was published also in his journal „*Scripta Botanica Musei Transsilvanici*” edited in Kolozsvár (1942-1945). Working to introduce the phytogeographical analysis of the floristic works, he personal elaborated valuable studies in this domain for Transylvania: *Endemismen und Relikarten des Siebenbürgischen Becken* (1942), *Boreale Reliktpflanzen in der flora des historischen Ungarn* (1939), *Distribution des especes sylvestres de la Mezőség Transylvanie* (1947), *Das Project einer Flora Carpato-Pannonica* (1948). R. Soó co-operated with E. I. Nyárády also in publication of the important regional flora „*Kolozsvár és környékének flórája*” (*The Flora of Kolozsvár and surroundings*) (1941-1944) what can be considered as one of the first critical regional flora realised in Central Europe last century.

In the domain of the **vegetation science** the former geobotany and special parts of that ( phytogeography, coenology, ecology) Soó's achievement are the best. Acquiring early (in the period of the Collegium Hungaricum Berlin) the view, ideas and the methodology of the phytosociological research he was first who described phytocoenoses from Transylvania, futhermore he elaborated the first Central European work in this domain: *Geobotanische Monographie von Kolozsvár (Klausenburg)* (1927). Later using new methods and research investigations he re-prepared, compiled and reedited this important work intitled *Conspectus associationum plantarum regionis vicinae Kolozsvár* (1947). To promote the regional vegetation research he edited the journal “*Acta Geobotanica Hungarica*” (1936-1949) and founded the phytosociological school with generation of disciples. In the forties when he was professor of botany in Kolozsvár the most frequent publication with the Transylvanian subjects are: *A Sebesvölgy növényzetéről*, *A Jádsvölgy növényzetéről*, *Adatok a Mezőség növényzetének ismeretéhez*, *A Székelyföld növényösszetételéről*, *A Radnai havasok növényvilága* (1944), *Közép-Erdély erdei növényösszetételei és azok jellemző (character) fajai* (1948). We find large Transylvanian references about the beech forest vegetation in the comprehensive work of the SE European Fagion: *Die regionale Fagion-Verbande und Gesellschaften Südosteuropas* (1964). Different aspects related to the Transylvanian vegetation, even the phytogeographical characteristics was treated in the first edition of his university textbook „*Növényföldrajz*” (*Phytogeography*) (1945) where he presented an overview of plant communities in the Carpathian Basin also.

MAGYAR FLÓRAMŰVEK VI. FLORAE REGIONUM HUNGARIAE CRITICAE VI.

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## A SZÉKELYFÖLD FLÓRÁJA.

FLORA TERRAE SICULORUM  
(TRANSSILYANIAE ORIENTALIS)

SUPPLEMENTUM I.

AUCTORE

Prof. Dr. R. SOÓ de Bere

EDITIO INSTITUTI SYST.-GEOBOTANICI MUSEIQUE  
BOTÁNICI UNIVERSITATIS KOLOZSVÁR

KOLOZSVÁR, 1913.

NYOMATOTT NAGY KÁROLY GRAFIKAI MŰINTÉZETÉBEN, DEBRECENBEN

DIE REGIONALEN  
FAGION-VERBÄNDE UND  
GESELLSCHAFTEN SÜDOSTEUROPAS

von

Prof. Dr. REZSŐ SÓÓ

Mitglied der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften und der  
Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher

Mit 1 Landkarte, 32 Abbildungen und 4 Tabellen



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

VERLAG DER UNGARISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN  
BUDAPEST



The most important and grandiose work of R. Soó, is his comprehensive botanical **synthesis**: *Synopsis sysrtematico-geobotanica florum-vegetationisque Hungariae I-VI* (1964-1980) what summarise all contributions and studies that he and the contemporary Hungarian botany created in the research of flora and vegetation of the Carpathian Basin. This new type of botanical book, in fact is a modern and biggest biological-coenological flora. Every taxa presented in the volumes of Synopsis are detailed characterised by microtaxonomic this unique, unequalable realisation to this time, the taxa and syntaxa treated in the series of Synopsis volumes are permanently and critically correlated with a general Carpatho-Pannonian overview (data and literature), so that we can find hundred and thousand special references to the actuality of the Transylvanian flora and vegetation. Critically data of generic taxa (*Dianthus*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Ophrys*, *Festuca*, *Thymus*, *Erophila*, *Sorbus*, *Rosa* etc.) and various coenological units (*Salicornion prostratae*, *Festucion pseudovinae*, *Beckmanniaon eruciformis*, *Festucion vaginatae*, *Festucion rupicola*, *Prunion spinosae*, *Salicion albae*, *Fagion dacicum* etc), are indispensable in the recent Transylvanian botanical studies also. Generations of researchers are used and cited this work in Central Europe.

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The presented considerations, materials and ideas tried to give a general view into the life, the controversial personality and to the extraordinary performance of a great Hungarian scientist, an illustrious botanist from the 20th century. The outlined career is a specific one for history of the Carpathian Basin in the last century, an own part of this history, revelation of the Hungarian national aspirations in science and culture. The monumental work and performance of Rezső Soó is a milestone in Hungarian botanical literature and in the Central European botanical researches, equalling the fundamental contributions of Pál Kitaibel (1799) and Sándor Jávorka (1924, 1929) a thesaurus and real worth for the new world of databases, continued and accomplished a great national task. His scientific accomplishment elevate the traditional part of Hungarian botany to the European level with a general radiation in the whole Carpathian Basin, in the whole Hungarian language territories. After all, the early dream of Soó has been realised. Disciples and student-disciples of him are present in whole Carpathian Basin, continuing the traditional botanical investigations in several new botanical centres.

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## SOÓ REZSŐ SZÜLETÉSÉNEK CENTENÁRIUMA (1903-1980)

(Összefoglalás)

Ebben az évben augusztus 1-én van SOÓ REZSŐ világhírű botanikus születésének századik évfordulója. A huszadik századi magyar és közép-európai botanika tudomány meghatározó, színes egyéniségének hatalmas tudományos teljesítménye az adatbázisok korában egyre jobban felértékelődik, élete és munkássága számos méltatás és mérlegelés tárgyát képezte és képezi szinte napjainkig. Egy évszázad áll mögötte, volt olyan időszak amikor szakmailag többen dicsérték, de olyan is amikor mondhatni divat volt őt szidni. A nem közvetlen munkatárs, a magyar nyelvterületen belül, de mégis környezetének távolabbi részvevője és szemlélője, az életpályából hajtamosabb látni a maradandót, a hasznosíthatót, az alkotókészséget, a tanítást és az iskolateremtő munka egyetemes értékét.

A tanulmány felidézi SOÓ REZSŐ utolsó látogatását Erdélyben, "az élet delelőjének négy legmunkásabb esztendejét", találkozását a "soó-iskola" erdélyi művelőivel, az ifjúkori botanizálások emlékeit, bemutatja a tudósi életpályát és kitér munkásságának erdélyi vonatkozásaira. Soó Rezső hatalmas életművének egyik legnagyobb értéke, az eredményeknek az egész Kárpát-medencére vonatkozó törekvése. Ezért vált nélkülözhetetlenné és oly fontossá a Délkelet-európai botanika-kutatás számára.

Soó REZSŐ életpályája sajátos, egy 20. századi kis Kárpát-medencei történelem, tudomány-történet, építőkőve a magyar tudomány és kultúra egységes tárának. Kiváló szakmai teljesítménye méltó folytatása KITAIBEL PÁL (1799) és JÁVORKA SÁNDOR (1924, 1929) munkásságának. Soó REZSŐ munkásságával az európai élvonalba juttatta a magyar botanika hagyományos területét, szakmai kisugárzása az egész magyar nyelvterületen máig érzékelhető, élő-működő tudományos műhelyek forrásában az egész Kárpát-medencében.