

BOOK REVIEW

**SIMION FLOREA MARIAN, *BOTANICĂ POPORANĂ ROMÂNĂ*; VOL. I – 699 PP;
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INTRODUCTION

The first volume appeared in 2008 at Mușatinii Publishing House, the second and the third volumes appeared in 2010 at the Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, representing the work of almost four decades of gathering folkloric data by Academician Priest Simion Florea Marian. He is the best folklorist in Romania; his bibliography includes hundreds of book titles and the names of a few hundred trusted people who provided information from all provinces with Romanian population. There are 520 articles, each with its own bibliography and color photographs, revised by Aura Brădățan according to the current drafting rules. It appeared a century later, because the author died prematurely in 1907, at the age of 60. His descendants were aware of the value of documentary heritage, but they managed to put it at the disposal of researchers much later.

This work could be of interest to botanists, pharmacists, folklorists, linguists, priests, and parapsychologists and even to the general public because the texts contain empirical information collected from common people, passed down by word of mouth over the centuries; safe uses are being showcased, most of them verified based on the scientific literature of that time. In the case of well-known common plants, there are inserted folk poems and songs, tales and references to magic. The original manuscripts were collected and retranscribed by Ghe. Dumitriu in the years around 1980; he records in an article that there are over 4000 common names, but the bibliographical references are more numerous. We believe this number to have resulted by avoiding counting two or more times the same name used in several Romanian provinces.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Given the unfavorable historical context, the collaborators of botanist Alexandru Borza for the Ethnobotanical Dictionary did not have access to these manuscripts. We compared the common names of plants in *Botanica Poporană* with those in the Ethnobotanical Dictionary; we found an additional

1920 unwritten words until this date, many of which are from Bukovina and Moldavia. We bring them to attention this way in order to be helpful for a new edition of Ethnobotanical Dictionary. There are no common names from Bessarabia because he had probably included it in Moldavia. We know for sure that professor Mititelu had collected many names of plants from Bessarabia and he was planning to integrate them in a Moldavian Ethnobotanical Dictionary after the revolution, but this project has never been carried out. From the region across the Prut, only the names of plants found in Alexe A. Arvat's herbarium did reach us in 2011.

Each article contains the common names from the provinces inhabited by Romanians (in some cases by locality), the description of the plant of interest to the people, according to both botanical literature and the locals who provided the information, and also traditional plant uses at that time which are now considered original. In most articles, we find new common names. It was consulted the largest amount of folklore. There are bibliographic references to authors of that time. On this line, suffice it to say that *Etimologicum Magnum* by B. P. Hașdeu, articles of George Cosbuc, Papahagi, Artur Gorovei, etc are missing from the bibliographic references of the above mentioned Ethnobotanical Dictionary. In *Botanica Poporana*, there are written folk songs, sayings, riddles and plant uses according to the popular mentality along with necessary, additional explanations. That points to the fact that unwritten literature was in decline and had to be recorded within a source of information and indicate to us where certain popular uses had been identified.

The author's writing style is very elegant, he wrote extensively for that time, he knows how to introduce into his writing popular words that are not to be found written anywhere else, but he does it without prejudicing the reader, on the contrary, he makes them smile and, at the same time, makes them understand better the use of a certain plant. The editor wrote in bold all the common names and archaic terms, some of which are now rarely used, many seem to have disappeared from spoken

everyday language, only some wise man or some old man still uses them today.

Morphological terms are not being used, only relevant descriptions using everyday words. Nowadays, we will not hear anymore the term "tuleu" for herbaceous stems or "plantula", or "bulihău" for stems of robust herbaceous plants; one term definitely still used is "băle". Very few ethnobotanical terms have their veracity being questioned (the Aromanian Papahagi writes that they also named the oak "zada"; the uncertainty in article no. 70 related to *Boletus luridus*; in the third volume, at page 509, there is a mix-up between *Callitriche* si *Myriophyllum*; the name "bulbuc" assigned by the people of Bukovina to the species of the *Ranunculus* is confusing, as it is known for *Trollius europaeus*. These articles were dispersed in author's works, this is why there is little information available about some species. It took the editor a very long time to make this work known, not to mention that there are thousands of popular terms that have almost disappeared even though the provincial focus is still maintained at present, the process of naming plants continues.

BOOK CONTENT

Over the centuries, the words may undergo some changes through additions or omissions of letters, frequently vowels, or they may even disappear from everyday language. As for us, we can record that we went to look for *Myricaria germanica* in the Nemira Mountains and its only confirmed habitat was in Lemnia locality in Covasna County. It is only S. Fl. Marian who writes that the name "Lemnie" is used for this species. The name of Parincea village from Bacău County derives from "părin" about which S.Fl.Marian says that it is *Setaria italica* and I can now recall through correlation that, anciently, in these places, this plant had been either cultivated or it had grown wild. As for *Tilia* sp. the name "tulnic" is associated; we know that in Vrancea County there is Tulnici locality, etc. I have heard among people some of these plant names which we only find written in this encyclopedia.

The most numerous new common names belong to edible and medicinal plants. In this regard, we notice that the increased interest in a particular plant led to the emergence of a large number of common names. For example, recent names for onion are "rotilă" and "turtea", which refer to onion seeds planted in the ground; in Vâlcea County, they used to call them "dudă". There are also species that do not have any recorded common names in Botanical Literature and still they appear in this cyclopedia. Cultivated plant varieties, only included in this encyclopedia, are probably part of different collections in the country or at some villagers.

People have used plants based on both the knowledge of those qualified and the experience built up with time. It is possible that the current list of plants with common names to have raised from 11 000 to near 15 000, because, meanwhile, other works have also appeared. They should be all gathered in one. Some of these empirical information have been studied scientifically and progress has been made; the etymology of such plants leads to the rediscovery of uses and cultural aspects.

We live in a time when the word "ethnobotanics" worries us most. Were the information of this cyclopedia integrated within actual science, it would be of great help. Insights into some bioenergetics aspects were registered (for example in the article "brăileanca" and so on), along with ecological aspects and interesting uses. A century after this folkloric treasure has been collected, the reader may benefit by using the plants described, but they might as well exclaim: "what fables..."

Maybe the persons who seek deeper truths will be patient enough, among other things, to find themselves surprised by plants with positive and protective effect on the psyche, some comparable to sacred herbs. Along this line, they could study, using other sources of information, the following species: *Acanthus longifolius*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Aconitum napelus*, *Alliaria officinalis*, *Allium sativum*, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, *Arctium lappa*, *Asarum europaeum*, *Astrantia major*, *Bryonia dioica*, *Calamintha clinopodium*, *Callitriche verna*, *Cardamine pratensis*, *Carlina acaulis*, *Chelidonium majus*, *Cirsium oleraceum*, *Dictamnus albus*, *Dipsacus laciniatus*, *Doronicum austriacum*, *Euphorbia cyparissias*, *Galium verum*, *Geranium palustre*, *Ge. phaeum*, *Glechoma hederacea*, *Gratiola officinalis*, *Herniaria glabra*, *Inula helenium*, *Impatiens noli-tangere*, *Lamium album*, *Levisticum officinalis*, *Ligustrum vulgare*, *Linaria vulgaris*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Mentha aquatica*, *M. pulegium*, *M. piperita*, *M. longifolia*, *Ocimum basilicum*, *Papaver somniferum*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *P. major*, *Prunella vulgaris*, *Rhamnus cathartica*, *Potamogeton natans*, *Quercus ceris*, *Rhododendron kotschki*, *Rosa canina*, *Salix alba*, *Sambucus ebulus*, *Sedum acre*, *S. fabaria*, *Solanum dulcamara*, *Sisymbrium officinalis*, *Stachys officinalis*, *Symphytum officinale*, *Tagetes* sp., *Tanacetum vulgare*, *Thymus* sp., *Trifolium montanum*, *Trollius europaeus*, *Valeriana officinalis*, *Veratrum album*, *Veronica longifolia*, *Viburnum lantana*, *Vinca minor*, *Viscum album*, mushrooms such as *Ganoderma lucidum*, etc.

We quote below just the common names from *Botanica Poporana* which are not recorded in Al. Borza's dictionary.

ABOUT SIMION FLOREA MARIAN
(1847-1907)

He was born in Bukovina, at the time at which the province was under Austrian rule. Except for the first year, his classes were held in German. He had to go to schools in Ilișești (birth place), Suceava, Năsăud and Beiuș up to his 8th grade. He attended the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cernăuți.

He described Romanian culture for 43 years using B. P. Hașdeu's ethnographic research method. Following his contribution to Romanian lexicography, he had been elected Academician at the age of 34. He left the Academy and the generations to come a total of 25 000 A4 written pages. He is acknowledged as the best Romanian folklorist. He has a long list of books and published works. We should mention that after he released the book *Cromatică poporului român*, he received an

award from the Romanian Academy and bought himself a big house in Suceava where he lived, currently housing which is now the museum „The Memorial and Documentary Fund S.F. Marian”. Out of all 520 articles in *Botanica Poporana*, he published only 54 during his lifetime, each article with its own bibliography. He managed to save from irreversible oblivion aspects of the Romanian culture which have been passed down throughout ages since the creation of the Romanian language up to the dawn of modern history.

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