

# IN MEMORIAM MARGIT BUSA

(1914-2009)



Margitka, as they mostly called her in the National Széchényi Library, was a veritable research bibliographer. As a university student she was already a bibliographer librarian and naturally stayed one all through her many different jobs in the national library and even in her years of retirement, both as a professional and as a private person. Even in the final months of her life she was editing a bibliography with her last breath.

Her skills of synthesis and analysis transpired as early as her university years. When she graduated majoring in History and Hungarian and Latin literature and linguistics, she was given charge of the department's library. Within the national library she started in the Management Department, proceeding to the Manuscript Collection and the Periodicals Collection, all through characterized by a love for the library and books. She worked for the National Széchényi Library for nearly thirty years, but even after that time she continued doing research in the reading rooms for over two more decades. When she was unable to visit the library any longer, she carried on at home, using her own rich collection and the thousand of cards she had compiled – keeping a clear mind to the end. In the same way as her great love, Francis Kazinczy, she regarded her life as service to a good cause – with all her might and out of her free will. She was already a pensioner when her major press bibliography comprising data and locations of newspapers and periodicals published from the age of Francis II. Rákóczi to the end of the 1848 War of Liberty could be published in 1986. This happened over twenty years ago! A very active and fruitful twenty years! Just like the young Margitka and later Auntie Margit, the retired librarian was an extremely active and passionate press bibliographer, giving her heart and mind to research. The termination of her official employment was no more than an administrative measure in her case, as to the last days of her life she was deeply involved in her profession. It was a voluntary undertaking that she took on with all its problems and difficulties, and perhaps with the knowledge that it was impossible to complete. The intellectual task requiring more and more of her time was a kind of sweet captivity, which she described as “ever more captivating and engulfing,” but a commitment that “we make out of our own free will, a dear passion and a beloved captivity.”

We are fortunate that never for a second did she wish to flee. She was serious about conducting until her death the work she once started, even when she realized that continuous deskwork would require a lot of sacrifices. She was always happy and patient enough to explore and do the highly professional bibliographical description of stacks of periodicals, frequently smelling of print or, in worse cases, of strong mold and often falling apart in her hands. She did the work because she was aware of the burning need to fill the gaps, not only because of the pathetic condition of stocks, but also because she knew that her own time was running out, or in her words: “so that the realization of our beautiful plans should fit into our life.”

Therefore, her life was a true service! Margit Busa conducted her gigantic data collection in 71 libraries inside and 22 others outside the national borders. Just like József Szinnyei and other great bibliographers, Margit Busa has become a household name for researchers in the field. Her three-volume bibliography of periodicals contains the sites and literature of Hungary-related periodicals published inside and outside Hungary in Hungarian and other languages. The National Széchényi Library gave Margit Busa the Szinnyei Award in 1998 and the *Bibliothecarius Emeritus* Award in 2006 in acknowledgement of her fifty years of service to librarianship. “Honouring librarianship as a career” was more than a simple gesture of respect and recognition. Margit Busa's experience, knowledge of the collection and personal example contributed to boosting her colleagues' and followers' expertise. I do trust that her lifework and stamina will strengthen future generations' professional commitment.

At one point, she made this confession about her sweet captivity and years of retirement: “Don't rush, as I would very much like to be captive for some more years to come.” The age that she lived witnesses not only that her wish was heard but also that she managed the time at her hands in a useful manner. To our greatest fortune, she multiplied the gifts she had received. Thank you, Margitka...

László Boka  
[boka@oszk.hu](mailto:boka@oszk.hu)