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## WILD AND CULTIVATED PLANTS FROM TRANSYLVANIA BASED ON *TRANSSILVANIA GENERALIS* BY JOSEPH BENKŐ

In memoriam György Szabó

### Introduction

Joseph Benkő in the first part (*Transsilvania Generalis*, 1778) of his famous work (*Transsilvania sive Transsilvaniae principatus*) in addition to the presentation of cultural history, ethnography, administrative and legal relations of Transylvania giving informations regarding cultivated and wild plants growing in Transylvania. The Hungarian translation by György Szabó (1999, 2014), offer insight into the botanical exploration work carried out by Benkő and gives insight how many kind of cultivated plants grow towards the end of the eighteenth century in Transylvania and floristic composition of natural vegetation. In addition to the floristic data Benkő also collected folk knowledge of plants among the people living together in Transylvania. ÉDER, Z. 1978 listed nearly sixty local plant name, which names such as „őszirózsa (aster), „árvalányhaj” (feather grass) first it was mentioned in the work of Benkő. He enriched Hungarian botanical literature with new plant names and first applied in Transylvania the Linnaean binomial nomenclature for naming organisms.

### History

During the 1770 Benkő began systematically deal with cultivated and wild plants growing in Transylvania. He was greatly impressed by the work of Adam Chenot (1721–1798) first Transylvanian protomedicus (SECHEL, T., D. 2007), who has recognized and supported botanical research. Most of botanical works was written between 1773 and 1783. The important milestone in botanical commitment was the work „Téli bokréta (Winter bouquet)” published in 1781, in which he presented the scientific names of plants according to Linnaeus’s binomial system. In this work he presented the nature of plant and beginnings of botanical philosophy in Hungarian (SZABÓ, Gy. – TARNAI, A. 1988). In

the publication of scientific results received great help from János Molnár, a polyglot scholar priest. As a continuation of *Transsilvania Generalis* (1778) of completed *Transsilvania specialis* volumes only (5 sheets) is printed, and most remained unpublished. In 1767 he began writing „*Flora Transsilvanica*” in Hungarian language, which work planned to printed out about 50 sheets, but the majority of manuscripts were lost in a fire. His first manuscript in Latin language about the flora of Transylvania (BENKŐ, J. 1778) has disappeared while he has sent it to print in Göttingen (ERNYEY, J. 1932). Another work written in 1778, contains a list of Miklósvárszék and Erdővidék plants remained in manuscript. This manuscript was elaborated by Gábor and Erzsébet Rácz (1972) and later appeared in Hungarian. About the botanical writings of Benkő only the two publications that appeared in Magyar Könyvtár (Hungarian Book House) series edited and published in Bratislava by János Molnár. In the first volume of this series (*Nomenclatura Botanica*, 1783) he published in Latin-Hungarian-German-French languages the name of plants and in the second volume (*Nomina Vegetabilium*, 1783) appeared in Latin-Hungarian-Romanian languages informations from the cultivated and wild plants of Transylvania.

### Cultivated and spontaneous flora of Transylvania

The plants enumerated in this work (10 subsections, LXV–LXXIV §.) Benkő used the binominal system of Linnaeus. Unlike the classification of plants used by botanists, the plants listed (more than 600 genus and species) are divided into two main groups: woody and herbaceous plants. In the first group are listed the backyard trees and bushes (Table 1.), furthermore the natural forest trees and shrubs (Table 2.), while the second group contains cultivated and wild herbaceous plants from different zones of Transylvania. Among the wild plants we find many naturalized species that previously were not present in the flora of Transylvania. (Graph. 1.)

## §. LXV.

Backyard trees and bushes (A.)

Trees and bushes growing in the home gardens

(a. *Arbores & Frutices*).

In Transylvania there has been a long tradition of fruit growing in the home gardens. The well-know fruits such as apple, pear, plum, cherry, apricot, quince, walnut occur outside the villages of Ciuc (Csík), Gheorgheni (Gyergyó) and Câmpia Transilvaniei (Mezőség) regions, but in Mediaş (Medgyesszék), Sighişoara (Segesvárszék) and Mureş (Marosszék) regions and especially in Odorhei (Udvarhelyszék) region gardens full planted with apples, pears, nuts (less chesnut), cherries (*Prunus avium*), sour cherries (*Prunus cerasus*). For people of Transylvania different apple varieties such as „*Párisi alma*” with many types (SZANI, Zs. 2011) were able to be cultivated cheaply. The most widespread varieties of plums belonged to group Zamenhof, but among these best known the damson (plum of Damascus). Among the cherries *Brassói* (Braşov) és *Nagydisznódi* (Cisnădie) varieties are most common. In the manor gardens and greenhouses grown mediterranean woody plants such as lemon, orange, pomegranate, laurel, clematis. In the vineyards outside the apricot, peach and quince rarely almond and true service tree (*Sorbus domestica*), while in the home gardens the common lilac, evergreen boxwood and many variety of roses are the most popular plants. Special attention was surrounded the occurrence of skumpia at that time. Benkő received informations about the skumpia (*Rhus coriaria*) from Fridvaldszky, who found this plant near Hunedoara (Vajdahunyad) in Haţeg Mountains. Fridvaldszky published a work (1773) in which he reported that this plant could be used for skin tanning and the popular name probably is assumed to be Romanian origin. The scump word means in Romanian language expensive, because at this time skumpia was imported too expensive from the Balkans.

Backyard trees and bushes	Number of genus and species
Common plants	12
Selected plants	8
Manor gardens and greenhouses plants	7
Vineyards plants	2
Garden plants	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>33</b>

## §. LXVI.

Forests trees and shrubs

(b. *Silvestrium Arborum*).

The boundaries of mountain ranges in Transylvania mainly covered with pine (*Picea*) forests. In the lower-lying areas there are mixed forests of oak, beech, birch, alder, willow, hazel, dogwood, hornbeam with a large number of additional trees (*Fraxinus*, *Ulmus*, *Acer*, *Tilia*) and shrubs (*Sorbus*, *Viburnum*, *Lonicera*, *Berberis*, *Euonymus*, *Ligustrum*, *Rhamnus*, *Rosa*) can be found. The most famous forests are: Meseş, Rika (Perşani-mountains), Şercaia - Codlea (Sárkányi-Feketehalom) Mikó, Pisztrángos, Vadas between Aita Medie (Közéapajta) and Valea Crişului (Sepsikőröspatak). Forests are rich in dwarf shrubs such as blueberries, lesser periwinkle, clematis, burning bush, wintergreen, raspberries, blackberries, blue ice, scentless feverfew, nightshade. He notes in particular that, the oak and beech forests provided abundant food for forest animals, especially for wild boar and valuable oil pressed out from its acorns.

Forest trees and shrubs	Number of genus and species
Mixed woodland plants	55
Rare mixed woodland plants	2
Forest and groves shrubs	17
Mountain tops plants	6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>80</b>

## §. LXVII.

Herbaceous plants (B. *Herbae*).Cultivated plants (a. *Cultae*) Garden plants(1. *Hortenses*)

Garden plants are grouped according to their use in four groups: edible, medicinal, aromatic and rare plants. Among the vegetables cabbages (*Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata* f. *alba*, rare f. *rubra*, *viridis*, *caulorapa*, *cauliflora*), beets (*Beta* spp.), root vegetables (*Daucus*, *Petroselinum*, *Pastinaca*, *Apium*), onions (*Allium* spp.), lettuce (*Lactuca* spp.), pumpkins (*Cucurbita*, *Cucumis*, *Citrullus*), pepper (*Capsicum annuum*), potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) and jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) are mentioned in the list. The pumpkin and pig melon (*Citrullus lanatus*) almost all farmers sown among the maize or „indiai gabona” (local name of maize). Musk melon and water melon cultivation especially in Agârbiciu (Egerbegy), Ghirişiu (Gyéres) and Grind (Gerend) locations has become famous, where the irrigation is done with water from the river Arieş (Aranyos). The potato, in local name „pityóka” or „krumper” grown not only in gardens, but also in some places in

the field. The use of medicinal plants was widespread among the population of Transylvania. Many plants known as a spice such as borage (*Borago officinalis*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), black cumin (*Nigella sativa*), fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*), rue (*Ruta graveolens*) are used for therapeutic purposes.

Garden plants	Number of genus and species
Edible plants	45
Medicinal plants	19
Aromatic and wreath making plants	44
Rare plants	18
<b>Total:</b>	<b>126</b>

The tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) in local name as „tubák” is grown in many places, most in Mureş (Marosszék) region, but in larger quantities near Târgu Mureş. It is also grown the Turkish tobacco (*Nicotiana rustica*) in Transylvania, but to a limited extent. Saffron (*Crocus austriacus*), which is a very desirable root of the Germans, not just known to the Transylvanians. In case of common madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) he refer to FRÖLICH, D. 1644, who mentioned that in Transylvania (Oberland) everywhere was planted in the gardens, which has brought great benefits, because roots are the source of red dyes. It was used to color yarns. He refers to Kreckwitz (1688), who has a similar opinion with Frölich regarded to the benefits of madder. Cultivated as ornamentals there are plenty of curative ones such as rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*), basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), sticky goosefoot (*Chenopodium botrys*), marjoram (*Majorana hortensis*). Among the colorful and varied ornamental plants (heart's ease, four o'clock flower, garland chrysanthemum, marigold, garden nasturtium) sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) at this time was still a rarity.

#### §. LXVIII.

Arable plants (2. *Campestres*).

The arable plants are discussed in three (cereals, vegetables and fiber plants) groups.

Field plants	Number of genus and species
Cereals	17
Vegetables	7
Fiber plants	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>26</b>

#### - Cereals (*Cereales*)

In Benkő's time among the wheat varieties the autumn and winter types were common, but also grown other cereals such as einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*), spelt (*Triticum spelta*) and rye (*Secale cereale*). The most widely used cereal grains in animal feed were barley, oat (white and black types) and maize.

The grain of barley is commonly called „Siligo”, but in classical antiquity called „fine wheat” (Arber, 1934). The barley the most commonly grown at Sekler people, not so much for the bread, rather for obtaining alcohol or „pálinka” (alcoholic beverage), which helped to alleviate the lack of wine. Maize known as „turkish wheat” quickly spread among the Romanian people almost replaced the bread wheat. The popularity of buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), called grano saraceno or Saracen grain in Italian (SLICHER VAN BATH, B. H. 1963) very quickly spread in different region of Transylvania (Sepsi, Kézdi, Orbai seats), but it was especially popular in Micloşoara (Miklósvár), Odorhei (Udvarhely) seats and Țara Bârsei (Barcaság). The dishes prepared from buckwheat, called boiled buckwheat meal („haricskapuliszka”) in these area of Transylvania can be found as a sixth part of food source. Among the Sekler people very popular was pickled, gelatinous oat flour paste (local name „kisziş”), which is often consumed with milk and dried prune juice. It also prepared oat malt (local name „szalad”) from pure oat or mixed with barley and millet and mostly used for making beer. Millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) cultivation was also widespread, especially the *Brassai* hulled millet from Țara Bârsei sold throughout Transylvania.

#### - Leguminous plants (*Phaseolorum*)

Among the familiar pulse plants are beans (*Phaseolus*), pea (*Pisum*), faba bean (*Vicia faba*) and vetches (*Vicia*). The beans (fuszulyka) with several types (more than twenty varieties grown in their own garden) have been grown in many home gardens and arable lands, which was the main food in Lent time among the Transylvanians. Pea growing in many places, but all of them due to the favorable soil conditions in Țara Călatei (Kalotaszeg) region was the most preferable for growing. The lentil cultivation was common everywhere. Black pod vetch (*Vicia sativa* var. *nigra*) it was once the favorite horse feed, but the white type (*Vicia sativa* var. *alba*) was also known.

- Fiber plants (*Linum, Cannabis*)

Flax (*Linum*) grown in all regions of Transylvania, but it was the most prolific in Țara Bârsei region. Extracted flax seed oil from this region becomes much slower rancid than other regions, so often people also consumed it as a dietary supplement to relieve fasting during the Lent time. Hemp were sown for fiber in many places, but rather at Sekler people wives weaved hemp lines day and night (because men with few exceptions were considered „lily fibers”), if they were not called to field works. The hemp (*Cannabis*) is considered a drug by people, but it was used almost every day. The people from this region sprinkled buckwheat porridge with crushed hemp seeds, and was baked into the millet porridge. Among the people from these areas the poppy was not really considered as a drug and in the Țara Bârsei villages hardly to find people whose teeth is not blackened by the porridge, pies, pasta and poppy and the food is sprinkled with poppy seeds.

## §. LXXIX.

Spontaneous plants (b. *Spontaneas*)

The spontaneous plants can be divided in forest (*Silvestres*), mountain (*Montanas*), meadow (*Pratenses*), field (*Arvenses*), and marsh (*Palustres*) plants

Wild plants	Number of genus and species
Forest plants	78
Mountain plants	48
Meadow plants	116
Field plants	88
Marsh plants	42
<b>Total:</b>	<b>372</b>

## §. LXX.

Forest plants (1. *Silvestres*)

Plants from this group generally occur in woodlands, shrubs, groves (78 genera and species). Most of taxons belongs to the family of Apiaceae (*Actaea, Aegopodium, Angelica, Heracleum, Sanicula, Selinum*), Ranunculaceae (*Aconitum, Anemone, Helleborus, Ranunculus, Thalictrum*), Scrophulariaceae (*Digitalis, Melampyrum, Scrophularia, Veronica*), Asparagaceae (*Convallaria, Gagea, Maianthemum, Polygonatum*) and Asteraceae (*Anthemis, Doronicum, Mycelis, Solidago*). Benkő recorded a number of local usages form many species. Among them it is worth mentioning some interesting uses: the lamb (*Ranunculus ficaria*) like lettuce in early spring was prepared

and consumed everywhere, dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) is harmful for both humans and sheep replace the annual mercury (*Mercurialis annua*) available in pharmacy. This plant Sibiu's pharmacists legally imported from Vienna, because this time it was not found in Transylvania. Presumably the leaves of touch-me-not balsam (*Impatiens noli-tangere*) peasants used to heal wounds. Commonly called „grass stemmed glass”. Bastard balm (*Melittis melissophyllum*) known locally as „dobronika” can be used as enlivening bath. The roots of Benedict's herb (*Geum urbanum*) collected in March can be found in abundance in Braşov mead and gives a pleasant clove scent. The oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) used in painting and often flavoring beer. The ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria*) collected in large quantities and sprinkled with bran can be used as feed for pigs. When Sekler soldiers performed guard service during the meals often ate ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), which replaced the garden onion. The root of deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) and northern firmoss (*Huperzia selago*) are separately boiled and due to its strong cleaning power cured people suffering from illnesses, although notes that it was often very dangerous.

## §. LXXI.

Mountain plants (2. *Montanas*)

The mountain plants (48 genera and species) from the dry and sunny habitats of mountain and alpine places were found. The main vegetation in mountain and alpine regions consists species of Asteraceae (*Carlina, Filago, Arnica, Artemisia, Aster*), Lamiaceae (*Clinopodium, Thymus, Teucrium*) and Crassulaceae (*Sempervivum, Sedum*) families, but mentioned several taxa from the Boraginaceae (*Lithospermum, Lycopsis*), Ranunculaceae (*Pulsatilla, Aconitum*) and Leguminosae (*Anthyllis, Trifolium*) families. It draws attention to a number of species, which are rare such as adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) or not found everywhere (*Aconitum anthora, Absinthium ponticum* currently *Artemisia pontica*).

## §. LXXII.

Meadow plants (3. *Pratenses*)

The meadow plants (116 genera és species) can be found in deeper and higher meadows, pastures and closed valleys. Species from the Leguminosae (*Trifolium, Lotus, Medicago, Astragalus*), Asteraceae (*Achillea, Inula, Hieracium, Tragopogon*), Lamiaceae (*Ajuga, Marrubium, Scutellaria, Salvia*), Scrophulariaceae (*Rhinanthus, Euphrasia, Odontites, Verbascum*,

*Veronica*), Poaceae (*Anthoxanthum*, *Lolium*, *Phleum*, *Poa*), Gentianaceae (*Gentiana*, *Gentianella*, *Centaureium*), Caryophyllaceae (*Cucubalus*, *Silene*, *Saponaria*), Primulaceae (*Lysimachia*, *Primula*), Brassicaceae (*Alliaria*, *Rapistrum*, *Barbarea*, *Erysimum*) family are the most common. The clovers and grasses grows very thickly. Asparagus freely grown in the meadows, but cultivated in the manor gardens. Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) not only occur in the shrubs, but they are very common also along the fence of home gardens. The poisonous autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*) and white hellebore (*Veratrum album*) destroys many pastures. Horse-heal (*Inula helenium*) grown very richly in almost every meadow.

§. LXXIII.

Field plants (4. *Arvenses*)

Field plants are not only present on the meadows and arable places, but occur in abundance at garbage hills, ruined areas and cause many annoyance to farmers and gardeners. In this group (88 genera and species) most of taxa are weeds and belong to the Asteraceae (*Anthemis*, *Artemisia*, *Carduus*, *Centaurea*, *Cichorium*, *Cirsium*, *Lapsana*, *Senecia*, *Sonchus*, *Tussilago*, *Xanthium*), Brassicaceae (*Armoracia*, *Brassica*, *Erysimum*, *Sinapis*, *Thlaspi*), Leguminosae (*Ervum* now *Vicia*, *Lathyrus*, *Ononis*) and Apiaceae (*Aethusa*, *Cicuta*, *Chaerophyllum*, *Sium*) family. Tuberos pea (*Lathyrus tuberosus*) is very frequent in all parts. Among the well-know wild teasel (*Dipsacus ful-lonum*) the cutlef teasel (*Dipsacus laciniatus*) are very rare. Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*) due to the enormous spread is very harmful to home gardens. In the saline areas especially the opposite leaved saltwort (*Salsola soda*) is very common.

§. LXXIV.

Marsh plants (5. *Palustres*)

In this group primarily are listed species (42 genera and species) of marshes, puddles, lakes and riversides that can be found in wet habitats. In muddy wares

areas occur mainly pondweeds (*Potamogeton*), water lilies (*Nymphaea*, *Nuphar*), duckweeds (*Lemna*), water caltrop (*Trapa natans*), marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), common cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), but bog-bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*), water soldiers (*Stratiotes aloides*) marsh arrowgrass (*Trilochin palustris*) also occur.

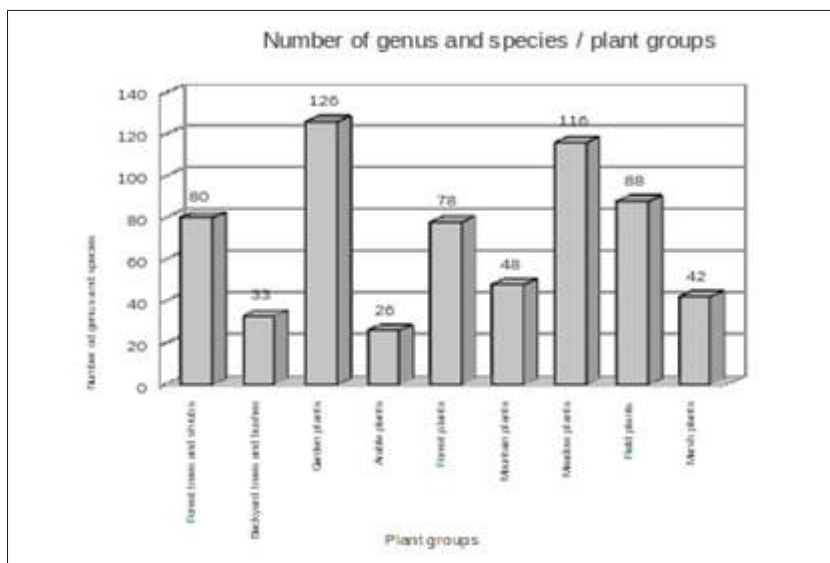
Following the enumerated plants 14 edible mushrooms species are mentioned, of which the most frequent are chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*), gilled mushroom (*Agaricus campestris*), violet webcap (*Cortinarius violaceus*), peppery milk-cap (*Lactarius piperatus*), and other species such as penny bun (*Boletus edulis*), common morel (*Morchella esculenta*) pistillate club coral (*Clavariadelphus pistillaris*), puffballs (*Bovista*). From the Ciuc Mountains (Csíki-havasok) mentioned tuffle (*Lycoperdon cervinum*), which are popular in this region, and considered one of the most delicious edible mushroom species.

### Summary

The purpose of this paper is to give a comprehensive picture from the botanical interest of Joseph Benkő. His botanical observations faithfully reflect the diversity and richness of Transylvanian flora. Informations and notes represent a milestone in the botanical exploration of the Carpathian Basin and professional guide for further floristic researches of Transylvania. Presentation the cultivated and wild plants from Transylvania at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century gained an international recognition for Benkő. Through the collection the plant names he revealed wonderful world of traditional plant knowledge and left to the next generations.

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Graph. 1. Number of genus and species / plant groups

### Erdély vad- és termesztett növényei Benkő József *Transsilvania Generalis* című műve alapján

(Kivonat)

Benkő József a *Transsilvania sive magnus Transsilvaniae principatus* című művének első részében, a *Transsilvania Generalis*-ban (1778) Erdélyben előforduló termesztett és vadon termő növényekkel (11 alfejezet) is foglalkozik. A botanikusoktól eltérően a növényeket két nagy csoportba sorolja: fásszárú és lágyszárú fajokra. Az első csoportban egyrészt a kertekben előforduló gyümölcs- és bokorfajokat említi, másrészt a természetes erdőkben honos fa- és cserjefajokat teszi közzé. A második csoportban a lágyszárúakat is két részre osztva mutatja be. Egyrészt a termesztett kerti- és szántóföldi növényeket ismerteti, másrészt a vadon termő növényeket élőhelyük szerint tárgyalja (erdei, hegyi, réti, mezei, mocsári). Rövid ismertetőt közöl néhány ehető gombafajról is. Benkő a növényfajok gyűjtése és összeírása (több mint 600 nemzetség és faj) mellett népi növényismereteket is gyűjtött az együtt élő népek körében. Új növényekkel gazdagította botanikai irodalmunkat, és ebben elsőként alkalmazta a Linné-féle kettős nevezéktant a növénynevek tudományos elnevezésénél. Munkája révén képet alkothatunk a 18. század végén Erdélyben honos haszonnövényekről és a természetes növénytakarót alkotó fajokról.

### Plante sălbatice și cultivate din Transilvania pe baza lucrării *Transsilvania Generalis* de către József Benkő

(Rezumat)

József Benkő în prima parte (*Transsilvania Generalis*) a lucrării intitulată *Transsilvania sive magnus Transsilvaniae principatus* (1778) prezintă informații utile referitoare la plantele cultivate și sălbatice din Transilvania. În opera elaborată (11 subcapitole) enumeră plantele (mai mult de 600 de genuri și specii) folosind nomenclatura binară introdusă de către Linnaeus. Spre deosebire de alte sisteme de clasificare folosite de botaniști, plantele prezentate sunt împărțite în două mari grupuri: lemnoase și ierboase. În prima grupă sunt înșirate pe de-o parte pomi și arbuști fructiferi din gospodăria casnică, iar pe de altă parte specii de arbori și tufe din pădurile spontane. În cea de-a doua grupă sunt prezentate specii ierboase cultivate (culturi de grădină și arabile) și sălbatice (forestiere, muntoase, luncoase, câmpoase, mlăștinoase) din diferite zone ale Transilvaniei. Prezintă însemnări legate și de câteva ciuperci comestibile. Pe lângă culegerea plantelor, a colectat denumirile populare ale plantelor de la locuitorii transilvăneni. Opera sa ne oferă o privire în ansamblu asupra plantelor de cultură și sălbatice pe la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea în Transilvania.

