

=== BOOK REVIEW ===

NYÁRÁDY Erazmus Iulius (Gyula): Geografia, flora și vegetația Băilor Sărate Sovata din perioada 1940-1945 (Geography, Flora and Vegetation of Sovata Baths between 1940-1945), Edited by Roman Anamaria & Bartók Katalin, Kriterion Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, 267 pp. (5 chapters, 37 photographs, 21 plant drawings, 113 bibliographical sources, 3 appendices)

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Botanical literature was significantly enriched by an outstanding volume printed in 2021. We welcomed the publication of the nearly 8-decade-old manuscript of the famous botanist Erazmus Iulius Nyárády (original title in Hungarian: *Szovátafürdő és környékének monográfiája*), which deals with the geography, flora and vegetation of Sovata Baths, based on field surveys in the period 1943-44. Nyárády was asked to do this scientific work by Sovata Baths Council.

Erazmus I. Nyárády (1881-1966) is perhaps the most prominent figure of flora research in the 20th century Romania, also recognized at European level. He is the author of several monographs, especially known as a coeditor-in-chief of the Romanian Flora in 13 volumes (original title in Romanian: *Flora Republicii Populare Romîne - Flora Republicii Socialiste România*, 1952-1976, Editura Academiei R.P.R.-R.S.R.) and as a specialist in several critical plant genera (e.g. *Hieracium*, *Allysum*, *Rubus*). In recognition of his work, he was elected in the Romanian Academy of Sciences in 1948.

The current monograph was published posthumously. During his lifetime, Nyárády unsuccessfully tried several times to publish his work in Sovata’s flora.

His plans were changed by World War II, when the manuscript submitted to the Capuchin Press in Budapest was destroyed in 1944, during the siege of the Hungarian capital. Based on his detailed field notes, he reconstructed the manuscript in both Hungarian and Romanian. The flora of Sovata and the development of wooden vegetation on the salt belt was also the subject of his acceptance speech for academic chair, but despite his constant efforts, he failed to publish his study eventually.

This unique volume offers an accurate image of the geographical and vegetation conditions in Sovata in the early 1940s. The editors redrew some lost maps of the original manuscript, added recent photographs and put this manuscript in today's context.

One novelty of this volume is Chapter 2, dealing with the history of Lake Ursu and Sovata Baths. This chapter was included in the first version of Nyárády's manuscript, but he gave up publishing it later on. The editors agreed to publish it in its original form, thus increasing the value of the book. From this chapter, the reader finds out that the lake was formed in 1875 during a heavy rain. A local landowner, *sófalvi Illyés Lajos* (1839-1926), visited Sovata in 1893 and "discovered" Lake Ursu. Later, he bought the land nearby, built bath cabins and opened the lake for public bathing. The author describes in an easy-to-read way how the spa town grew until the First World War. There are also statistics on the number of guests: while in 1902 the number of tourists was 311, in 1911 it increased to 4,000 and continued to increase until the First World War. It reveals how the forests around the lake were declared protected areas by a ministerial decree in 1902 and logging was banned. These historical data come from the former archives of Sovata Baths, whose documents were partially destroyed during the nationalization of the building. That is why this historical chapter is so valuable.

The 3rd chapter discusses the area around the spa and salt lakes from geographical and geological perspectives. Nyárády had also a degree in geography, therefore such detailed descriptions were an important part of his monographs. He did the field mapping work himself and after that he drew the maps. It is interesting that many of them, such as the map made in Sovata, were used by the Romanian army for further development of the military maps between 1959-1961. Unfortunately, the original 1:2,000 high-resolution map of Sovata was lost, but the editors redrew it. Nyárády also collected the toponyms of the area and, where they did not exist, as he himself noted, he was forced to adopt new toponyms in Hungarian, which he later translated into Romanian. This chapter contains several original black and white images of the landscape and coloured map sketches from 1943-1944 (Fig. 1). It also contains detailed geographical descriptions of the lakes and climatic data from 1905-1913 and 1923-1926, respectively.

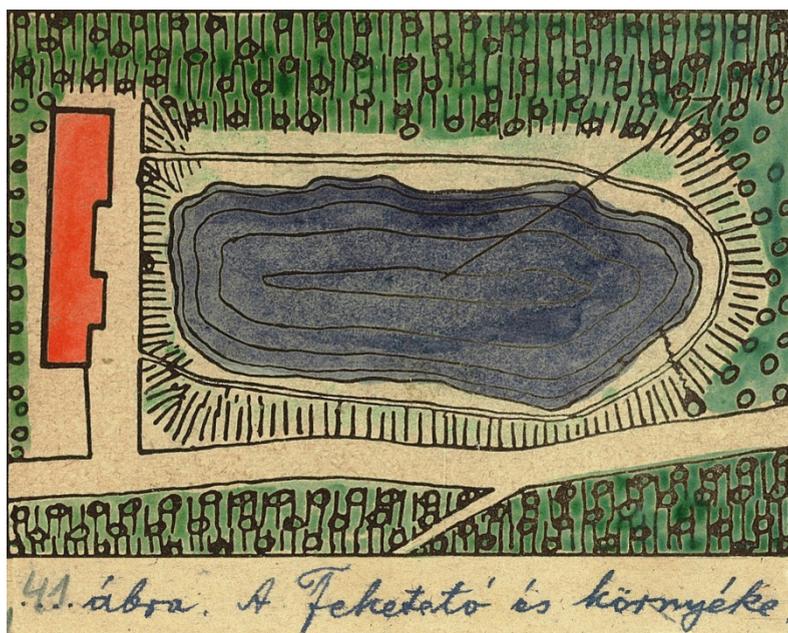


Figure 1. Map sketch with Nyárády's handwriting (with the permission of the Editors).

The main part of the volume is the 4th chapter, which contains a detailed description of the flora and vegetation of Sovata, based on Nyárády's original manuscript. The author describes in detail the vegetation in the vicinity of the lakes, saline ravines and sinkholes (dolinas) and analyzes the relationship between the salt bedrock and the vegetation formed on it. He identified 818 plant taxa belonging to 73 families from an area of 255 ha. In the next chapter, the editors assign the Latin names of taxa used by Nyárády to those in use today and indicate their distribution on the map they have redrawn, with appropriate coding. Topographical nomenclature has also been assigned to the codes in a table, so that the occurrence of a certain plant species can be easily identified both on the map and in the field. This can be very useful for those researchers who would like to study the changes of vegetation cover during the last century around salt lakes in Sovata.

The value of the publication is increased by the 21 art plates that contain drawings of plants (Fig. 2), made by Nyárády himself, as well as by the author's field diary, attached as a CD. This 100-page notebook is a real jewel, contains its own map sketches, accurate drawings and the work and results of each day spent in the field. Also, we are given personal information regarding the help received from his son, Tóni: "Thursday, July 15, 1943. Tóni and I continued the

survey from *Nagytó* until the *Keskenyút*." - page 29; or "I hired the salt guard Pál Márton, with whom we visited the surroundings and from whom we learnt the names of the places and noted them down." - page 39.

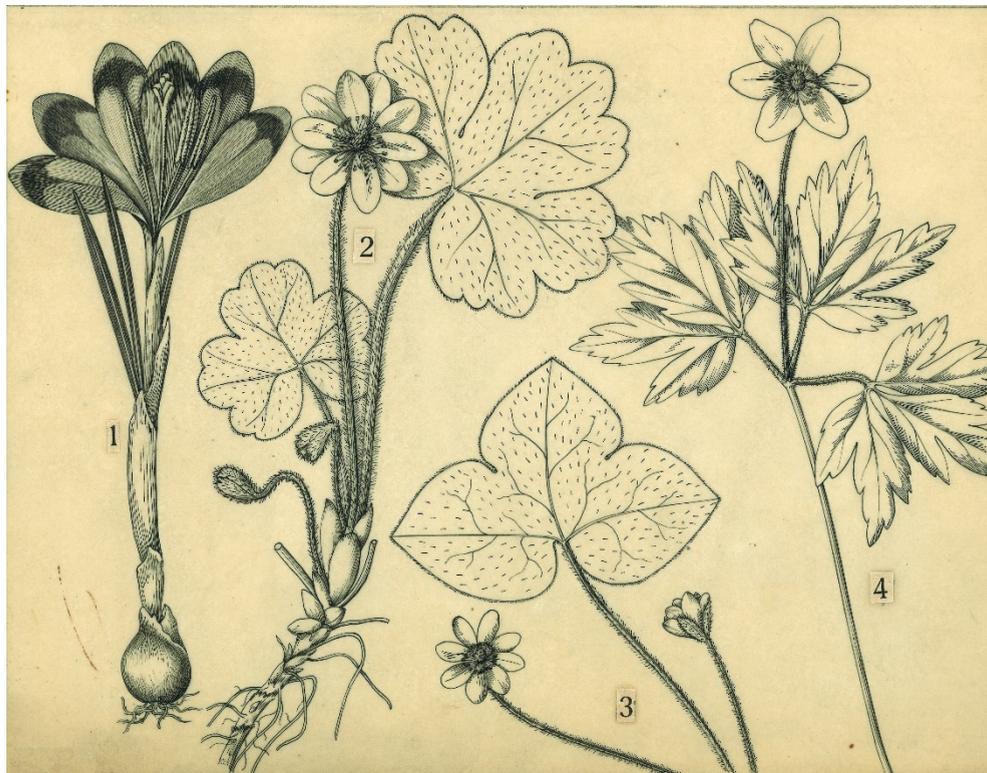


Figure 2. Plant drawings by E. I. Nyárády (with the permission of the Editors).

Undoubtedly, Erazmus I. Nyárády's scientific work and heritage in the field of flora research is remarkable. This valuable volume may serve as a very good example of what meticulous and hard work really means. To have this impressive study finally published, it took 77 years and the effort of a few dedicated editors who embraced the cause of this manuscript and passed it to the posterity. We hope to arouse the interest of the reader for this special volume.

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