

Professor Alexandru POPOVICI (1866 – 1941)



The year 2021 marks 155 years since the birth of Alexandru Popovici and 80 years since his death. With this paper we want to commemorate the outstanding figure of Alexandru Popovici, professor and director of “Anastasiu Fătu” Botanical Garden of Iași.

He was born on October 30th 1866 in the village of Cărnicești (Țigănași commune, Iași county). He attended the primary school in his native village, the “Ștefan cel Mare” gymnasium in Iași and the National College of Iași, which he graduated in 1885 [MITITIUC & TONIUC, 2006].

After that he left for the capital and started his university studies, at the Faculty of Sciences from the University of Bucharest, which he graduated in 1888. To complete his professional training, his mentor, Dimitrie Brândză send him to Germany, to enroll at Bonn University, where, under the supervision of the renowned professor Eduard Strasburger, he completed and defended, in 1893, his PhD thesis entitled *Ueber Struktur und Entwicklung eigenartiger Wandverdickungen in Samen und Fruchtschalen* / The structure and development of some particular thickenings of cell membranes in the seeds and pericarp of some angiosperm species [TOMA, 2015]. He followed the courses held by great botanists such as Noll ad Schenk and continued his studies at the University of Leipzig [PAPP, 1942].

He returned to Romania and continued his work as custodian and further as assistant at the Botanical Institute of Bucharest. In 1895 he becomes a substitute professor at the University of Iași, in 1900 associate professor and starting with 1904 he becomes titular professor at the prestigious higher education institution.

He was a dedicated professor who actively participated at the development of the Botany Laboratory, with specific features that allowed 40 students to simultaneously study practical Botany, the Herbarium with personal or bought sheets and the Library, with valuable Botany and Mycology volumes, including his own written courses (*Botanică Sistematică. Cryptogamia. 2. Bryophyta, Pteridophyta* / *Systematic Botany. Cryptogamia. 2. Bryophyta, Pteridophyta, Curs de Phanerogame / Phanerogams course*), necessary to study the fields of anatomy, physiology and systematics [PAPP, 1942]. Moreover, his domains of interest also included the study of mushrooms – mycology, his reference contributions to this field - *Contributions à la flore mycologique de la Roumanie (Contributions to the study of Romanian mycoflora)*, being published between 1900 and 1910 in the Scientific Annals of the University of Iași, describing 29 species of myxomycetes and 204 genera with 440 species of ascomycetes and basidiomycetes.

His diligent and hard-working nature helped him in both his scientific and administrative activity, Alexandru Popovici being twice elected as Dean of the Faculty of Sciences [MITITELU & COSTICĂ, 1992].

He understood the fact that biology in general and botany in particular, must be learn in the middle of the nature, that plants aren't just a studying object, but a living organism, that have to be integrated in the environment [IFTIMOVICI, 1977] and it is necessary for the University of Iași to have a Botanical Garden similar with the one organized by *the great science loving professor dr. Fătu* [BURDUJA, 1979]. He strongly believed that ...*a botanical garden*

has both an internal and external function. Internally, it shows a scientific, cultural and social functions and externally it brings prestige and honor to the people.

Being driven by this creed, he was closely involved in the establishment and development of the Botanical Garden of Iași. Therefore, in 1906 he was given the assignment to put together a plan for organizing the Botanical Garden in the near vicinity of the Palace of Culture. The planting activities begun, but unfortunately, due to the lack of founding, the idea of developing a botanical garden in that location failed to be accomplished.

Even in this situation, with an incredible tenacity, Alexandru Popovici addressed on many occasions the management of the University and the Ministry of Public Education, regarding the importance of a university botanical garden and asked to lead the planting activities on a terrain *empty and full of weeds*, in the vicinity of the University Palace. In 1921, he was granted permission and started organizing, with very few funds, a small botanical garden, with a surface of approximately 1 ha, that served the its purpose for over 40 years [TÂNASE, 2016].

In order to diversify the plant collections, he contacted the botanical gardens in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest and Chernivtsi, requesting seeds, cuttings and plants from spontaneous or exotic species that he and his small team of collaborators and gardeners planted in the outdoor spaces and within the greenhouses [RESMERIȚĂ, 1982]. The plants were classified according to their ecology and geographical distribution in: flora of Iași county, flora of Ceahlău Massif, flora of Rarău Mountains, flora of Apuseni Mountains, collections with plant species from the steppe region, from maritime dunes, aquatic plants, halophytes and plant species that grow on rocky terrain, rare plants [BURDUJA, 1979].

Along with the development of the plant collections, in 1923 the first edition of the *Seed Catalogue* was published, as a mean to promote the botanical garden and to offer to other similar institutions plant material collected from the new botanical garden and from various location across Romania.

For all his merits, he was elected honorary member of the *Romanian Academy*, member of the *Physicians and naturalists Society of Iași* and member of the *Société Mycologique de France*. He dies on July 17th 1941, being buried at Eternitatea Cemetery in Iași.

The work Alexandru Popovici put into the development of the botanical garden never knew any limitations and overcame every obstacle (financial shortage, refusal from the authorities, fires), fact that underlines the devotion and desire to fulfill a lifetime dream.

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