



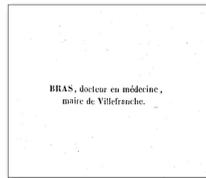
The Herbarium of Antoine Bras (1803-1883)

WERNER GREUTER & FRANCESCO MARIA RAIMONDO Herbarium Mediterraneum Panormitanum

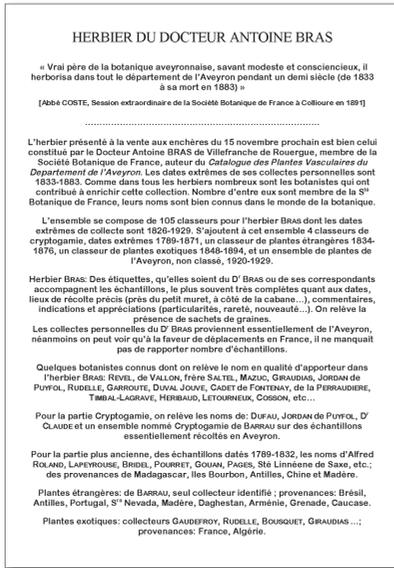
Antoine Bras, MD, distinguished French amateur botanist, was a prominent citizen of his home town, Villefranche de Rouergue (Aveyron), of which he was Lord Mayor for many years and which, for a period, he represented in the Conseil Général of the Aveyron Department.

Antoine Bras built a considerable **personal herbarium**, the fate of which was long unknown. It was rediscovered in 2007, auctioned on 15 November 2008 in Rodez (Aveyron), and adjudicated for 15 200 € to the first author.

Antoine Bras collected for 50 years (1833-1882) not only in Aveyron but also, extensively, in the surrounding departments, in the French and Spanish Pyrenees and as far as the Alps, Jura mountains, and Corsica.



Herbarium labels of reused paper, with Bras' imprint on the back, documenting his function of lord mayor (label dated 1840) and retirement from the Conseil Général (label dated 1860).



The bidding in the auction hall in Rodez (Aveyron). – Photo DDM.

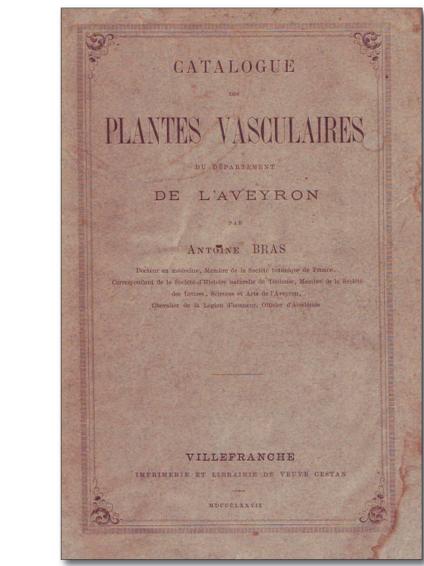
The Garriguet domain where, according to members of the Amis de Villefranche, it is thought the herbarium was stored. – Photo DDM



The sale to "abroad" caused quite a stir in the media, partly parochial and nationalistic. A comment on the internet, by the renowned author of a regional flora, may serve as example: "Pour quelques centaines d'euros manquants ... ce patrimoine historico-botanique de l'Aveyron et de la France partira à l'étranger. ... Ce soir, je suis amer, très amer! et si je reste fier d'être botaniste, je ne suis plus très fier d'être français!" Other comments expressed the reasonable but unjustified concern that the Bras Herbarium, just rediscovered, might again be lost for botanical science

The discovery of this 19th Century herbarium in its original state offers excellent opportunities to study in context, and reconstruct, the world of contemporary French botany. It would be ideal if corollary archival documents could be traced, such as his field inventories and accession books, and his botanical correspondence. **Help in tracing any of these would be greatly appreciated.**

The Bras Herbarium was donated to the Herbarium Mediterraneo, Palermo University, in 2009, together with the Greuter collections. It is presently kept as a separate unit within PAL-Gr. It consists of a main portion of 84 numbered parcels, arranged in the order of Bras' "Catalogue" and Grenier & Godron's "Flore"; 2 of mosses and lichens; 2 of "exotic" plants; 9 of mixed material, including duplicate sets; and 37 convolutes of various formats not directly associated with Bras. The total number of specimens can be roughly estimated at 25,000 (certainly not 100,000, as the auctioneers had claimed).



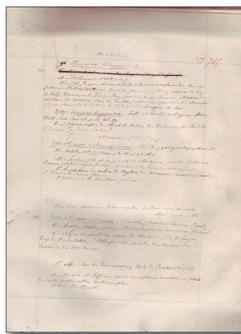
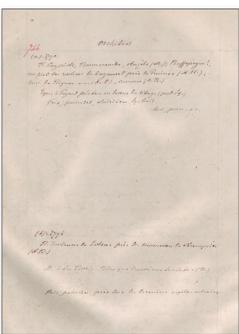
As a botanist, Bras' name remains attached to his single major work, "Catalogue des plantes vasculaires du Département de l'Aveyron", published in 1877. It follows the sequence of Grenier & Godron's "Flore de France" (3 volumes, 1848-1856).



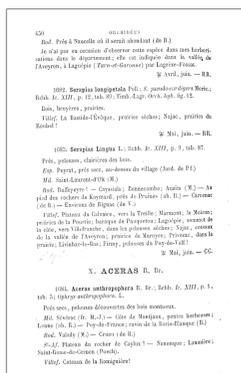
The herbarium is reasonably well preserved but very dirty, not mouldy but with some label foxing, with limited insect damage and, in some parts, gnawed by rats.



The declared purpose of the purchase was to keep the herbarium in public property and make it generally accessible for research purposes. To that effect, the plants are being cleaned and remounted. Duplicates, of which there are many, are being offered for exchange to interested French and other Mediterranean institutions.



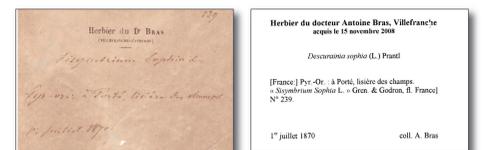
The only extant archival material from Bras is a portion of the draft manuscript for the "Catalogue". As shown in the sample (above), left-hand pages are used for insertions to the main text on the right-hand pages. To the right, a page with the corresponding text in the printed volume.



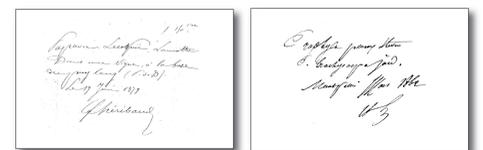
High-resolution digital images are made of the specimens, once remounted and bar-coded. The images and label data will be made accessible for online consultation via the Internet.



Bras used various label types, first plain (1833-1845), then with printed headers (3 types, 1846-1880), then again plain. He used a consecutive numbering in a "catalogue herborisations" [not traced] which later became an accession book, and until 1848 he faithfully (or after 1845, at least erratically) transcribed these "collector numbers" on his labels, to reach over 10,000.

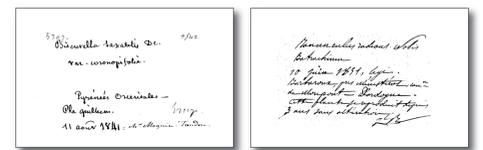


The original, handwritten labels (left) are often difficult to read as to locality information, numerals, and collector names. Therefore additional explanatory labels (right) are produced, with updated nomenclature and with misidentifications corrected as far as possible. The label information is then databased and made accessible.



Frère Heribaud

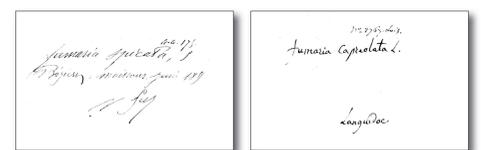
H. Lezat



Moquin-Tandon

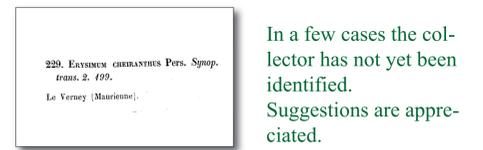
Abbé J.-L. Revel

Bras also received specimens, as gifts or in exchange, from many contemporary botanists. So far, 63 collectors have been identified, not counting those of two series of exsiccata with printed labels. A comparative study of labels and handwritings is in progress.



Coll. N.N.

Coll. N.N.



Coll. N.N.

In a few cases the collector has not yet been identified. Suggestions are appreciated.