

<i>Travaux du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle</i> «Grigore Antipa»	Vol. XLVIII	pp. 547–554	© 30 Dec. 2005
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**“GRIGORE ANTIPA” NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL
HISTORY (BUCHAREST) – CONTINUER OF 170 YEARS OLD
TRADITIONS AND A SPACE OF KNOWLEDGE,
RESEARCH AND HOARDING OF NATURAL DOCUMENTS**

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Abstract. In November 2004, we celebrated 170 years since the Museum of Antiquities, Collections, Paintings and Natural Curiosities, sheltered by Sfântu Sava College, was officialized. It was the foundation stone for what “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History from Bucharest became later. To all those who contributed to this museum, reference mark for the Romanian culture and science, to reach its present position, we express our entire and deep gratitude.

Résumé. En novembre 2004, nous avons célébré 170 ans depuis que le Muséum des Antiquités, Collections, Peintures et des Curiosités Naturelles abrité par le Collège Sfântu Sava a été reconnu officiellement. C’est le même muséum qui deviendra plus tard le Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle „Grigore Antipa“ de Bucarest. À tous ceux qui ont contribué au développement de ce muséum, point de référence pour la culture et la science roumaine, nous exprimons notre entière et profonde gratitude.

Key words: history, collections, exhibitions, research, „Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, Bucharest.

Without intending to make a history of the museums of Romania, in this respect an excellent book being already published (Oprîș, 1994), I do my duty of reminding that the idea of creating collections materialized since the 16th century (e.g. Iohan Mezerzius had a valuable collection of inscriptions in 1516 – real Christian monuments), and the museums, organised as institutions in schools, were represented by those from Odorhei (1772) and Aiud (1796).

The main museums of natural history were organized beginning with 1834 in Iași (in March), in Bucharest (in November) and then in Sibiu (in May 1895, on the basis of the old activity of the Tansylvanian School for Natural Sciences).

Having a high enthusiasm in showing his national spirit (creating Sfântu Sava College, the National Theatre, organizing the army and determining the emancipation of the country men) the first Prince-organizer of Wallachia, Alexandru D. Ghica, signed the document of organization (No 143/3rd of November 1834) of the “Museum of Antiquities, Collections, Paintings and Natural Curiosities” from Sfântu Sava College of Bucharest, just in his first year of reigning. His brother’s collections, Mihail D. Ghica – Minister of Internal Affairs (1834–1842) and president of the princely council, created the bases of this museum. According to some written sources, this document of organization referred to the “National Museum of Natural History and Antiquities”, but in some publications I found only the name “National Museum of Antiquities”, or more simple and seemingly more correct, National Museum of National School from Sfântu Sava.

English translation by Mihaela Barcan Achim.

The fact that in the National Museum, founded in November 1834, there were also collections of natural history is proved by the reports of the „Eforia Școalelor” (Ministry of Education) where the collections of rocks, minerals, shells and snails, birds and mammals are mentioned.

As a matter of fact, Carol Walenstein, the first curator of the natural history collections began, among others, the exchanges with foreign museums of natural history, mainly with the Imperial Zoological Cabinet of Vienna. In its donation some molluscs and numerous birds were identified. Walenstein himself (although he was drawing teacher) collected many data, enough for publishing the first Romanian paper, “Elements of ornithology after personal local observations, even in Wallachia”, in 1854. Carlo Ferrerati’s name is also mentioned in the book on the history of museum (Opriș, op. cit.), making references on his initiatives in systematization and inventorying the collections, and I mention him for his relations made for material exchanges, collecting, receiving numerous donations of invertebrates, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, 500 very well naturalized birds and 600 samples of rocks and minerals.

On December 1864, Prince Al. I. Cuza approved the Administration and Organization Statute of the Museum of Natural History of Bucharest which established that the director of the institution had to be an university professor.

That explains that the collections of natural history were moved in the building of the recently opened University and then, the first Romanian professor of geology, Gregoriu Ștefănescu, was appointed director of the museum. It is to him that we own the discovering and description of the huge fossil elephant (*Deinotherium gigantissimum*), whose complete skeleton (unique all over the world) had to remain in the University building till 1918.

In 1893, Dr. Grigore Antipa came back to Romania, after he graduated the University of Jena, under the guidance of the great morphologist, evolutionist and founder of ecology, Ernst Haeckel.

After he was appointed director of the zoological collections by the Ministry of Culture and Public Education, Antipa moved the damaged patrimony, after the fire from 24th of March 1884, in 19 Polonă Street. There, he reorganized the collections, especially basing on the materials sent by Dr. Hilarie Mitrea of Rășinari-Sibiu from the Indonesian Archipelago.

But soon, the building from Polonă Street became small, taking into consideration that Emil Holub brought some materials from, South Africa, Theodor Adensamer from Vienna donated three boxes with most of the representatives of the animals from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Java, from Maluku Archipelago and Japan. Also, on 6th of September 1895 a collection of about 115,000 specimens of snails and shells, offered by Albert Bielz from Sibiu was received in the patrimony of the museum, as well as 10 hunting trophies from Somalia, very well naturalized by Rowald Ward House from London, which were donated by the Romanian explorer Dimitrie and his son, Nicolae Ghika-Comănești. In 1897, Haeckel sent to his ex-student a collection of 114 radiolarians, collected during the English “Challenger” R/V.

Therefore, on 25th of February 1903, Grigore Antipa submitted to the Prime Minister Dimitrie Sturdza a statement in which he demonstrated the necessity of the construction of a new building, made especially for the Zoological Museum, “worthy of the capital of Romania”. Within the same year, the Ministries’ Council

approved the necessary money (350,000 lei, divided into three parts) and gave the land, of 45,000 sq m, placed at the entrance of Kiseleff Avenue.

„The country was in one of its hardest periods, during Sturza’s high avarice, 1901–1904, in Haret’s curve, when any kind of expense for constructions was ceased”, the zoologist and publicist C. K. Kirişescu wrote.

In the building finished in 1906, Dr. Antipa organized the exhibition in 16 halls and the first 7 dioramas, which he presented to the King Carol I, to the Prim-Minister (for the second time) Dimitrie Sturdza and to Spiru Haret, re-elected Minister of Education. Prince Ferdinand and his wife Maria, minister Ion Brătianu and Dimitrie Carp, Anghel Saligny, engineer, the president of the Romanian Academy, Ermil Pangratti, the dean of the Faculty of Sciences, etc., participated to the opening day. Other 11 halls were opened on 18th of June 1914, when there were already 15 dioramas. Then, the inscription “National Museum of Natural History” was written.

World War I put Grigore Antipa to the test. Practically he saved the collection for being confiscated as spoils of war and sent to Sofia, after the armies of the Central Powers occupied Bucharest, on 6th of December 1916.

On the occasion of the Jubilee Session from the Romanian Academy for celebrating 100 years since the organization of the first collections and 40 years since the building “from the avenue” was finished, on 23rd of May 1933 King Carol the 2nd decided that the Museum had to get the name „Grigore Antipa”.

On 9th of March 1944, Grigore Antipa passed away and he couldn’t see the building and exhibits destroyed by the air raids of the allied army and German one from April and August of the same year: the 19 halls from the first floor, 15 from the ground floor, 14 dioramas, fish, birds and mammal collections and partially the library.

Dr. Mircea Paucă was appointed temporary director, and on 3rd of March 1945, Prof. C. Motaş was appointed titular, and, together with Dr. Mihai Băcescu, organized the rehabilitation of the museum till 1948. Then the public exhibition of the Romanian fauna was separated by that of the general fauna. Also in 1948 the first visitors’ guide, entitled “The Popular Guide Book”, was printed.

The period 1951–1964 was another difficult stage in the evolution of the Museum. Then, 5 directors (with the base activity at the Faculty) succeeded, till Dr. Mihai Băcescu, continuer of Grigore Antipa’s work, was appointed general director.

Dr. Antipa considered his museum an Institute of Zoology, organizing here the first Romanian studies on hydrobiology. In 1957 the first volume of the journal *Travaux du Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle „Grigore Antipa”* was published, today it reaching the 48th volume. It is asked for exchange by universities, museums, institutes and specialized stations all over the world. In this journal, the specialists of the museum but also from abroad (e.g. the collaborators who give donations) publish the results of their studies on the fauna/biodiversity of Romania and of the world.

The celebration of 170 years since the organization of the first collections of natural sciences and of the first institutions which were the base of the further developing of the “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, in November 2004 was a good opportunity in realising that we live in a society in continuous transformation, in a world of a huge technological progress, with too

many conflicts and with the risk of self destruction. Without making any exaggeration, the alarming rhythm of the habitat destroying, the disappearing of the plant and animal species, the complex pollution (the radioactive one being the most insidious) presume the intervention of the cultural actions immediately, the presence of the museologists, who has to contribute to the progress of the human society.

Today the specialists of this institution understood the necessity of continuing Dr. Grigore Antipa's and Dr. Mihai Băcescu's ideas. We are doing our pleasant duty of paying respect to all our predecessors, in the same time thinking of the development of the museum. If we accepted that we were not allowed to forget our predecessors, their experience being essential in our activity, that meant that we assumed the responsibility of keeping and even of increasing the quality of the complex activities of the museum, at the beginning of the 21st century.

Never this institution was present in the cultural life of Bucharest and of Romania as during the last four years. The permanent exhibition was remade gradually, according to the finishing of the rehabilitation works. During its reorganization the specialists tried to impose their knowledge in biology and museology, implying themselves in creating the technical means for presenting the exhibits.

Although Dr. Grigore Antipa pleaded for the separation of the scientific collections from the public ones, paradoxically his institution has no deposit. The present scientific deposits are "taken" from the public exhibition halls, which became extremely crowded. The fish deposit is the only one made during the rehabilitation works. The Museum had to be prepared to receive also other collections, of some well known Romanian specialists, who want to preserve their "whole life work" in the most competent institution of preservation the natural documents. It is useless to mention the competition between the museums of the world regarding the preservation of the most rich and valuable patrimony. As a matter of fact, from our point of view the richness and the value of the patrimony induce the dimensions of the institution.

The temporary exhibitions (6 - 8 per year) used our visitors to find something new every time and so we can explain that they come back the 2nd, the 3rd, and even the 4th time (according to the results of a sounding). Many times, some temporary exhibitions were organized after our visitors' suggestions. Even now, we are in the middle of an interpretation conflict on the idea that an institution which promotes the principles of the biodiversity conservation can lodge an exhibition with captive animals, without taking into consideration that those animals are not brought from the Amazonian, African or Indonesian jungle, and their owners are authorized. From the perspective of such relations we should organize neither botanical gardens, not Zoos, nor aquaria. It is true that in England there is „Born free” Association which is against the killing of the chickens. This is an aspect of the total sum of the complexes of the Freudian man, pointed out in the Romania after 1989, when the man is no longer master of all things around him.

„The tenants of my house”, „Nests and eggs”, „Victims of civilization” „The bats between legend and truth”, „Rocks and minerals”, „Morpho” (with several editions), „The world seen by us”, „Fish Festival”, „My dumb friend” are only some of the titles of the temporary exhibitions with a large success along the last years in “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History.

Also among the offers for the visitors, there are the annual conference cycles. The guides, the coloured post cards and other publications are made to fill our visitors' spare time with different data on the institution, patrimony and the activities where they are waited for.

As regards the direction of the scientific research, I have underlined Dr. Grigore Antipa's ideal, but the support of this research within "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of Natural History was given by the Academician Mihai Băcescu, both as director of the museum and co-ordinator of the Fauna team of the Romanian Academy Publishing House. In addition to idea of supporting the scientific research I have to mention that Acad. Mihai Băcescu's "students" are specialists known all over the world being appreciated and asked for participating in different studies in research institutes, universities and museums of natural history of the world, as those from USA, Germany, France, Australia, England, Thailand, etc.

Today, the scientific research within "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of Natural History is supported both by the continuous traditional research of systematics, morphology, faunistics, ecology, phylogeny and distribution of the animals in Romania and all over the world and by their modernization in order to answer to the global and national requests within this field. More than other times, present researches have to correspond to the requirement of the society; the study and research themes being elaborated in the respect of scientific documentation for declaring new protected areas, for the estimation and conservation of the biodiversity from different areas of Romania, for implying the specialists in the programmes of biological research with Romanian or foreign funds.

Thus, tradition is continued by classical research structured according to modern projects and themes, most of them with practical application. The capitalization of the whole work is concretized by the journal *Travaux du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle „Grigore Antipa”*.

The specialists of the museum were implied in over 80 studies/contracts whose results were concretized in papers (most of them published in „*Travaux*”), and the collected biological material was included in the patrimony of the institution. Such studies were made on the Danube Delta, the Romanian Plain, counties Vrancea, Buzău, Satu Mare, Sibiu, Olt, Argeş, then, the Iron Gates I and II, Dobrogea, Banat, the depression and mountain massifs from Maramureş, Piatra Craiului, etc.

Another type of studies approached by the specialists of the museum was the partnership in a series of projects with foreign funds: BioCASE Programme, co-ordinated by Freie Universität from Berlin, which creates the possibility of accessing the data base of the natural sciences collections from Europe, "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of Natural History being the national node for the collections from the other Romanian museums of natural sciences, from faculties and institutes of biology; Project LIFE, for the protection of the underground shelters from south-western Romania, for bats; Project LIFE for Piatra Craiului National Park; Project PHARE for the "Danube Green Corridor" (sector Gârla Mare Islet – Silistra-Călăraşi) and the necessary documentation for declaring new protected areas (e.g. Cama-Dinu Island).

The participation of the specialists to the sessions of scientific dissertations of the Romanian Academy and of its institutes of biology, of the faculties of biology from Bucharest, Cluj and Iaşi, of the "Danube Delta" National Institute of Research

and Development – Tulcea, of “Grigore Antipa” National Institute of Marine Research and Development – Constanța, of the museums of natural sciences of Romania, etc. imposes the Museum of Bucharest as an active presence within the scientific life of Romania. A scientific implication, with applicative importance, is its relations with agricultural, horti-viticultural, forest, plant protection, zootechnic, veterinary, public health institutes and stations, for the identification of biological materials, the knowledge of the complex biology of the pest, vectors and pathogenic agents.

The international congresses, conferences and symposia (in Poland, Switzerland, Lithuania, Greece, Sweden, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Italy, France, etc.) are also opportunities for presenting the specialists' results, for knowledge and communication with foreign specialists, for exchanging published papers, materials and even exchanges of experience between institutions from different countries. In this respect, several international collaborations were made with museums of natural history, with an old tradition in biological research and with large collections: Paris, London, Washington D.C., Sankt Petersburg, Vienna, Prague, Brno, Amsterdam, Brussels, Roma, Hamburg, Stockholm, Oceanographical Museum of Monaco, Buenos Aires, Oceanological Institute of Havana, the Station of Marine Research of Bermuda, the Laboratory of Marine Biology of the University of Texas, North Caroline University, etc.

Owing to these collaborations, in 1991, a scientific expedition (with 4 specialists from “Grigore Antipa” Museum) for 4 months in Indonesia became possible. We collaborated with the Museum of Zoology from Bogor, by the National Council of Indonesia of Scientific Research. Another collaboration finalized with an expedition of 6 specialists of the museum was with the University of Santa Ursula from Rio de Janeiro – Brazil, for the knowledge and protection of neotropical biodiversity.

Beside scientific papers the specialists of the museum published the catalogues of the main scientific collections as well as guide books of the collections (of entomology, amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals) and the general guide of the museum, albums and post cards. The first ones were published in order to reevaluate the collections with important patrimony pieces, as well for the knowledge of these values by the specialists all over the world. The next category of publications was created, for the knowledge of the patrimony and of the activities of the museum, and also for a large popularization.

There are still numerous needs for creating the necessary conditions for research: laboratories modernized with up-to-date equipments, to draw the students' attention in order to consolidate the team of specialists of the museum, for covering the study of several animal groups and to reply to the potential beneficiaries' expectations by the activities carried on within the museum.

We are to create and equip a laboratory for modern systematical studies, complementary to those of morphology. The library improved its fund, mostly with publications got in exchange with the journal of the museum; beside a special deposit for the old books we want to extend the library capacity now totally insufficient.

Young colleagues are appointed in different positions of the museum, being implied in educational activities, then in a deep knowledge of all scientific collections. They are encouraged to present the results of their activity, of their study

on the animal groups they deal with, to the annual sessions of the museum in order to be published later. Also, they are encouraged to defend their thesis for the doctor's degree and to use the facilities given by our laboratories.

In conclusion, our institution has a long term strategy – the knowledge and conservation of the biodiversity from Romania and all over the world. The medium term strategy concretizes by themes of 3–5 years, for some certain areas of Romania. The next area is that from the Curved Carpathians. For the world fauna we take into consideration the oceanologists' contribution from our museum, but also the terrestrial studies are encouraged. On short term there are the fundamental and applicative studies and research, most of them included in theme-contract, with biannual or annual stages, for: Minister of Education and Research, Romanian Academy, National Council of Research, companies and administrations interested in receiving ecological and environmental decisions.

National strategy of biodiversity conservation, the state estimation of the natural ecosystems and the anthropic impact on the fauna from the cultivated ecosystems, the preserving of the landscapes of the natural and cultural patrimony are great themes in which “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History feels responsible and implies by its specialists. The leaders of this institution follow this way because they consider that this is the only one which generates credibility within the scientific community.

Although it is considered that it has a fundamental character, the scientific research from the museums of natural sciences also has some practical aspects, of a great importance for the applied biology, as for agriculture, sylviculture, zootechny, administration of the resources, biotechnologies, public health, etc. I think that it is not necessary to insist on the value of the scientific information from the data bases of the collections for the decisions made on the nature conservation and on the durable using of the natural resources.

Another practical aspect of research is pointed out by the organization of the collections – the base of the mobile patrimony within this field. Collections are a valuable data base on the geographical distribution, species migrations, offer material to the new techniques of research on the species characterization (e.g. cytogenetics, biochemistry), permit the establishing of the variability limits within the species, assure the educational aspect of the museums by temporary exhibitions, etc.

The almost 2 million pieces preserved in the collections of “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History represent a large part of the Romanian and world biodiversity, almost 6,000 having all data necessary to include them in the thesaurus category.

Without being deprived of false modesty, I can say that our forefathers can be proud of the present state (at the 170th anniversary), when “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, by its specialists, imposes itself in the cultural and scientific life of Romania.

“Grigore Antipa” Museum supports all educational forms, but also the familial education, playing a very important social part, making possible the communication between people. It is a place of recreation, knowledge, inspiration.

I can say that “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History is an institution of reference for the Romanian culture, science, patrimony, with an

important position in our society, offering a space of knowledge, scientific research on natural and cultural patrimony of international interest.

MUZEUL NAȚIONAL DE ISTORIE NATURALĂ „GRIGORE ANTIPA”
(BUCUREȘTI) – CONTINUATORUL TRADIȚIILOR DE 170 ANI ȘI SPAȚIU DE
CUNOAȘTERE, CERCETARE ȘI TEZAUORIZARE A DOCUMENTELOR NATURII

REZUMAT

În luna noiembrie 2004, am sărbătorit 170 de ani de când a fost oficializat Muzeul de Antichități, Colecții, Tablouri și Curiozități Naturale din București, adăpostit de Colegiul Sfântu Sava. Acesta a fost piatra de temelie pentru ceea ce, mai târziu, va deveni Muzeul Național de Istorie Naturală „Grigore Antipa”. Tuturor celor care au contribuit ca acest muzeu, punct de referință în cultura și știința românească, să ajungă unde este astăzi, le exprimăm întreaga noastră recunoștință.

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