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**CENTENNIAL OF „GRIGORE ANTIPA” NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY OF BUCUREȘTI
IN THE PRESENT BUILDING**

DUMITRU MURARIU

Abstract. After a 74 years of “traveling from shelter to shelter”, on the 24th of May 1908 the Museum of Natural History got its own building. Dr. Grigore Antipa opened the new building, “...worthy of the capital of the country” in the presence of the King Carol Ist, the Prince Ferdinand and his wife Princess Maria, ministers Ion Brătianu and Dimitrie Carp, Anghel Saligny - President of the Romanian Academy and Ermil Pangrati, the dean of the Faculty of Sciences.

Résumé. Après 74 ans de „voyage“ d’un endroit à l’autre, le Musée d’Histoire Naturelle reçu son propre édifice le 24 Mai 1908. Dr. Grigore Antipa a inauguré le nouveau bâtiment, «... digne de la capitale du pays», en présence du roi Charles I^{er}, Prince Ferdinand et son épouse la Princesse Maria, les ministres Ion Brătianu et Dimitrie Carp, Anghel Saligny - président de l’Académie Roumaine et Ermil Pangrati, le doyen de la Faculté des Sciences.

Key words: “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, București (Bucharest), centennial, present building.

The ideas on collections materialized in the Romanian provinces since the 16th century (e.g. Iohan Mezerzius had a valuable collection of inscriptions in 1516 – real Christian monuments), and as museum institutions, organized within schools, since 1772, in Odorhei, and since 1776 in Aiud.

But the main museums of natural history were organized in Romania in 1834, in Iași (Iassy) (in March), București (Bucharest) (in November) and then in Sibiu (in May 1895), the last one being the result of the long and hard activity of the Transylvanian Society for Natural Sciences which began its activity in 1848.

In his enthusiasm in demonstrating his national spirit (founding „Saint Sava” College, the National Theatre, organizing the army and releasing the peasants) the first prince of Wallachia who reigned at the time of „The Organic Regulations”, Alexandru D. Ghica, signed the foundation document (No 143/the 3rd of November 1834) of the Museum of Antiquities, Collections, Paintings and Natural Curiosities, sheltered by „Saint Sava” College of Bucharest, in his very first year of reign. The nucleus of this museum was represented by his brother’s collections, Mihail D. Ghica, president of the reigning council. After some written sources the respective foundation document referred to the National Museum of Natural History and Antiquities, and in some publications it was named National Museum of Antiquities, or more correct and simple, National Museum from the “Saint Sava” National School.

The fact that in the National Museum, founded in November 1834, there also were collections of natural history is proved by the reports of the Ministry of Schools where the rocks and mineral collections and those of shells, snails, birds and mammals were mentioned.

As a matter of fact, Carol Walenstein, the first curator of the collections of natural history, initiated the exchange between the museums of natural history from

abroad, first of all with the Imperial Zoological Cabinet of Vienna. This institution donated molluscs and numerous birds. Although he was a drawing teacher, Walenstein himself collected enough data for being published in the first Romanian paper specialized in birds, „*Elemente de ornitologie după observații proprii, locale chiar în Țara Românească*” [“Elements of ornithology after personal local observations”], in 1954. Carlo Ferrerati’s name is mentioned in a paper on the history of museums, as the person who had the initiative of systematizing and making the inventory of collections. I mention him here for his relations in making exchanging, for collecting, getting donations with numerous invertebrates, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, 500 well naturalized birds, and 600 samples of rocks and minerals.

On the 7th of December 1864, Prince Alexandru I. Cuza approved the Administration and Organization Rules of the Museum of Natural History of Bucharest, in which it was specified that the director of the museum had to be university professor.

This explains why the collections of natural history were moved in the building of the newly founded University and then the appointment of the first Romanian professor of geology, Gregoriu Ștefănescu, in the position of director of the museum. He was that one who discovered and described the giant fossil elephant (*Deinotherium gigantissimum*) whose complete skeleton (unique all over the world) remained in the building of the University of Bucharest till 1918.

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After he graduated the University of Jena under the guidance of the great morphologist, evolutionist and father of ecology, Ernst Haeckel, Dr. Grigore Antipa came back home, in 1893.

After he was appointed director of the zoological collections by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, Antipa moved its patrimony, impoverished by the fire from the 24th of March 1886, at the University, in 19 Polonă Street, where the re-organization of the collections were made after the material sent by Dr. Hilarie Mitrea from the Indonesian Archipelago.

Obviously, the building from Polonă Street became insufficient quickly if we take into account that Emil Holub brought some material from South Africa; Theodor Adensamer, from Vienna, donated three boxes with representatives of the fauna from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Java; on the 6th of September 1895, Albert Bielz from Sibiu offered to the museum a collection of around 115,000 specimens of snails and shells from Maluku and Japan archipelagos; Dimitrie and his son Nicolae Ghika-Comănești donated 10 trophies from Somalia, very well prepared at Rowald Ward House from London; in 1897, Haeckel sent to his former student a collection of 114 slides with radiolarians collected during the expedition of the English vessel „Challenger”.

That is why, on the 25th of February 1903, Grigore Antipa presented a memorial to the Prime-Minister Dimitrie Sturdza in which he demonstrated the necessity of a new building, especially created for a Zoological Museum “worthy of the capital of the country”. In the same year, the Council of Ministers approved the requested fund (350,000 lei) and terrain (of 45,000 sqm), placed at the entrance in the Kiseleff Avenue.



Fig. 1 – Dr. Grigore Antipa’s bust at the entrance of the National Museum of Natural History which bears his name.

„Țara se afla într-una din epocile cele mai grele ale vieții noastre de stat, într-un timp de mare zgârcenie sub ministeriatul lui Sturdza din 1901 – 1904, în zona curbei lui Haret, când fusese oprită orice cheltuială pentru construcții” [“Our country stretches one of the hardest periods, of a great meanness, under Sturdza’s leadership of 1901 – 1904, in the area of Haret’s curve, when any expense on constructions was stopped”] wrote the zoologist and publicist C. K. Kirîțescu.

In the building finished in 1906, Dr. Antipa arranged the exhibition in 16 halls and the first seven dioramas which he presented to King Carol I, to the Prime Minister, Dimitrie Sturdza and to Spiru Haret, Minister of Education. In the opening day, on 24th of May 1908 the Prince Ferdinand and his wife Princess Maria, ministers Ion Brătianu and Dimitrie Carp, Anghel Saligny, the President of the Romanian Academy, Ermil Pangrati, the dean of the Faculty of Sciences, etc. were the main invited personalities. Another 11 halls were opened on 18th of June 1914, when the dioramas reached the number of 15. That time the museum was named “The National Museum of Natural History”.

The World War I put to a strength test Dr. Antipa’s institution. He practically saved the collections from their transferring to Sofia as spoils of war, after Bucharest was conquered by the Central Powers, on the 6th of December 1916.

On the occasion of the Jubilee Session of the Romanian Academy for celebrating 100 years since the organization of the first collections and 40 years of existence of the building “from the avenue”, which took place on the 23rd of May 1933, King Carol II decided that the museum had to bear the name “Grigore Antipa”(Fig. 1).

On the 9th of March 1944, Grigore Antipa passed away and he did not see the damages of the building and the exhibits caused by the allied’ air raids from April and August of the same year. Nineteen halls from the first floor, 15 from the ground floor, 14 dioramas, fish, bird, mammal collections and partially the library were seriously damaged.

Dr. Mircea Paucă was temporally appointed director of the museum, and on the 3rd of March 1945, Prof. C. Motaş was appointed full director, who, together with Dr. Mihai Băcescu, reorganized the museum till 1948. In the same year, the first guide for visitors, „*Călăuză populară*” [“Popular Guide”] was printed. In the public halls, the Romanian fauna was separated from the world fauna.

The period 1951 – 1964 was another difficult episode along the institution evolution. Then, five directors succeeded till Dr. Mihai Băcescu was appointed.

Dr. Antipa saw in his museum an Institute of Zoology, he himself organizing the first Romanian studies on hydrobiology. In 1957 the first volume of the journal *Travaux du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle „Grigore Antipa”*, today at the 51st volume, was published. In this journal, numerous scientists from Romania and of the world publish their results.

After 1989, the specialists of this institution understood the necessity of continuing Dr. Grigore Antipa’s and Dr. Mihai Băcescu’s ideas. Today I have the pleasant duty of pay homage to my forefathers. We are not allowed to forget those who were before but to assume the responsibility of preserving and improving the quality of our activity.

More than ever, along the last four years, our institution is very present within the cultural life of Bucharest. The public exhibition was rehabilitated and any change on the old exhibition was hardly made, with long pro and con arguments.

Although Dr. Grigore Antipa pleaded for the separation of the scientific collections from the public ones, the building was made without deposit chambers. The present deposits are “cuts” made from the visiting space which is crowded and tiring for the visitors. And the Museum has to be prepared for receiving other collections. It is not necessary to remind the competition between the museums of the world regarding the preservation of a rich and valuable patrimony. The value of the patrimony determines the size of the institution.

Temporary exhibitions (6 – 8 per year) made the visitors to get used to find always something new in this institution (Fig. 2). This explains why they come back over and over. Usually, we made exhibitions at the visitors’ suggestion. “The tenants of my house”, “Nests and eggs”, “Victims of civilization”, “Bats between legend and truth”, “Rocks and minerals”, “Morpho” (the last two with several editions), “The world seen by us”, “Fish Festival”, “My Speechless Friend”, “Huge Dinosaurs of Patagonia”, etc. are only some of temporary exhibitions which draw much attention within the last years .

Among the offers to the general public there are the traditional annual cycles of conferences, publications in order to complete the spare time of the visitors with different information on the institution, patrimony and future activities prepared for them.

As regards the scientific side of the museum, I mentioned before Dr. Grigore Antipa’s ideal which was supported and developed later by Academician Mihai Băcescu.

Today, in “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, the scientific research is carried on both by traditional studies of systematics, morphology, faunology, ecology, phylogeny and distribution of animals through Romania and all over the world, and by the effort of modernizing them, in order to reply to all national and world requirements in these fields. More than ever, present studies have to correspond to the social requirements; research themes aimed at a scientific documentation for declaring new protected areas, for estimating and



Fig. 2 – Building of „Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History – București.

preserving the biodiversity of different areas of Romania, for implying the specialists in programmes of biologic research, with inner and outer funds.

Tradition is continued by classical studies adapted to modern project and themes, most of them with practical applications. The progress of the biological research, studied material, the collections resulted from the applicative studies is assured by additional efforts, and their evaluation is concretized in their publishing in the journal *Travaux du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle „Grigore Antipa”*.

The specialists of the museum implied in over 80 applicative studies/contracts, the results being materialized in papers (most of them published in „*Travaux*”), and the collected biological material was included in the museum’s patrimony. These studies aimed at the fauna of the Danube Delta, the Romanian Plain, counties of Vrancea, Buzău, Satu Mare, Sibiu, Olt, Argeş, Iron Gates I and II, Dobrogea, Banat, depressions and 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 financing: BioCASE Programme, co-ordinated by Freie Universität of Berlin, - for the access of the collections of natural sciences from Europe, “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History becoming the national knot for the other Romanian museums of natural history, for the collections of the faculties and institutes of biology; Project LIFE for the protection of the subterranean shelters from the South-western Romania, for bats; Project LIFE for “Piatra Craiului” National Park, Project PHARE for “Green Danube Corridor” (sector Ostrovul Gârla Mare – Șilistra-Călărași) and the necessary documentation on the declaration of new protected areas (e.g. Camadinu Island).

The participation of the museum specialists at the essay sessions of the Romanian Academy and its institutes with a biological profile, at the faculties of

biology from București, Cluj and Iași, at “Danube Delta” National Institute of Research and Development of Tulcea, at “Grigore Antipa” National Institute of Marine Research and Development of Constanța, at the museum of natural sciences of Romania imposed the museum of București as an active presence within the scientific life of Romania. It is also implied in applicative activities together with research institutes and stations of agriculture, horticulture, forest, plant protection, veterinary, of public health, etc. in order to identify biological materials.

International congresses, conferences and symposia (in Poland, Switzerland, Latvia, Greece, Sweden, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Italy, etc.) represent the opportunities for the museum specialists to present the results of their work, to communicate with other specialists, to exchange papers, biological material and experience in different countries. This way numerous international collaborations took place as those with the institutions from Paris, London, Washington, D.C., Sankt Petersburg, Vienna, Prague, Brno, Amsterdam, Bruselles, Roma, Stockholm, Hamburg, Reykjavik, Buenos Aires, Oceanographic Museum of Monaco, Institute of Oceanology of Havana, Station of Marine Research of Bermuda, Laboratory of marine Biology of the University of Texas, North Caroline University, Sydney, Melbourne, etc.

From such kind of collaborations the museum succeeded in organizing scientific expeditions: in 1991, four specialists of “Grigore Antipa” Museum left for Indonesia, for 4 months in order to make scientific research and to improve the patrimony; the expedition was made in collaboration with the Museum of Zoology of Bogor, by the National Council of Indonesia of Scientific Research; another expedition was in Brazil, in collaboration with the Santa Ursula University of Rio de Janeiro in order to study and protect neotropical biodiversity. Recently specialists from museum were implied in scientific expeditions organized by “Oceanic Club” – Constanța in the Mediterranean area: Turkey, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco.

Beside the papers on biological studies the museum specialists published catalogues of the main scientific collections, and guides of the collections of entomology, of amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals as well as the general guide of the museum.

Laboratory of molecular biology is already organized and it is completely equipped, having good results, using new methods of modern systematic studies, complementary to those of morphology.

The library of the museum enriched its patrimony with the publications received in exchange with the journal of the museum; it was organized a special deposit for the old book and it exist the project to extend the library space, insufficient now.

National strategy of biodiversity conservation, the estimation of the state of the present ecosystems and the anthropic impact on the fauna from the cultivated ecosystems, the preserving of the landscape of the natural and cultural patrimony are the great themes in which “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History implied by its specialists.

The about 2 million items which form the collections of “Grigore Antipa” museum represent a large part of the Romanian and world biodiversity, almost 6,000 having the necessary criteria to be classified in the thesaurus category.

The transfer of the institution from the Ministry of Education and Research to Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs presumed a better communication, the possibility of a better supporting of the museum interests, and a closer professional

relationship. If the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs encouraged educational programmes and the evidence of patrimony, the scientific activities in Natural Sciences Museum should be better appreciated. Beginning with the 12th of July 2006, Prezidium of the Romanian Academy granted its aegis for research activities in București's M.N.H.

Without modesty I can assert that our forefathers are proud of the present state of the museum (after 174 years since the deed of the museum foundation was signed).

“Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History supports effectively all forms of education, including that within families. From the social point of view it has an important role it being a place of knowledge, inspiration, entertainment, education, keeping the rhythm of social changes.

We can assert that “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History is an institution of reference within scientific, cultural and patrimonial life of Romania, with a well defined role in society. It is a meeting place. A place of scientific research, of information, of the natural and cultural patrimony of national and international interest.

CENTENARUL MUZEULUI NAȚIONAL DE ISTORIE NATURALĂ „GRIGORE ANTIPA” DIN BUCUREȘTI, ÎN ACTUALA CLĂDIRE

REZUMAT

La 25 februarie 1903, Grigore Antipa prezenta primului ministru Dimitrie Sturdza un memoriu în care demonstra necesitatea construirii unei clădiri concepută anume pentru Muzeul Zoologic, „...demn de capitala țării”. În același an, Consiliul de Miniștri a aprobat fondul solicitat (350.000 lei, repartizat pe trei exerciții bugetare) și a atribuit terenul de 45.000 m², situat la intrarea în Șoseaua Kiseleff.

La 24 mai 1908, ziua deschiderii, Dr. Antipa avea deja pregătită expoziția publică în 16 săli și primele 7 diorame. La inaugurare au participat regele Carol I, Prințul Ferdinand cu soția sa, Prințesa Maria, miniștrii Ion Brătianu și Dimitrie Carp, ing. Anghel Saligny, președintele Academiei Române, Ermil Pangrati, decanul Facultății de Științe etc. Alte 11 săli au fost inaugurate la 18 iunie 1914, când numărul dioramelor ajunsese la 15. La acea dată s-a aplicat inscripția „Muzeul Național de Istorie Naturală”.

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Muzeul Național de Istorie Naturală “Grigore Antipa”

Șos. Kiseleff nr.1, 011321 București 2, România

e-mail: dmurariu@antipa.ro