

*AD MULTOS ANNOS
TO MUSEUM OF OLTENIA CRAIOVA*

The Museum of Oltenia has a similar history as many other museums, which were emerging in Central and Eastern European provincial towns from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century. They were invariably founded by circles of local intelligentsia, the priests, secondary school professors, physicians, pharmacists and jurists, who occupied in their free time with active research in nature, history or ethnography of their town or region. They worked with minimal financial means and equipment, but with a great enthusiasm, admirable self-sacrificing and often also remarkable effectiveness. They built up collections and libraries, discussed their results, popularized them and, finally, initiated founding of municipal museums or small local learned societies issuing annuals or journals of their own.

*Perhaps from the present-day view of the formalized and somewhat dehumanized science, deeply infected by the simplicistic economism and scurrilous scientometric criteria alien to the science's nature (cf. *Theory of Miseducation* by K. P. Liessmann, the Austrian philosopher), their activity could be seen, with contempt, as some kind of erratic naïveté. But just the opposite is true. They formed a multilateral solid background, on which the science could be developed on the nation-wide or even international level. Let us considerate just Gregor Mendel, the founder of the modern genetics. He was the typical representative of the free-time researchers of those times. He published all his results – inclusively of the greatest conceptual discovery of biology – in one of such local journals, *Verhandlungen des Naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn*, issued in a town of about 60,000 inhabitants. But not only it. Just this journal published, for example, several identification keys of European or even Palaearctical beetles elaborated by other representative of this type of scientists, Edmund Reitter. Ulterior his keys become a basis for large modern monographs, in which his original keys are always cited. In Romania, in Sibiu, a similar example is the Museum Bruckenthal and the journal *Verhandlungen und Mitteilungen des Siebenbürgischen Vereins für Naturwissenschaften zu Hermannstadt*. Such museums and the associations working around them also created conditions for searching for young talented people, attracting them by the mystery of collections and offering them help at their first steps in research and scientific activity. They also played a significant role of centers of education, social life and national cohesion.*

The Museum of Oltenia is a younger brother of such museums being founded as late as at the very end of this "Gründner" period. But, in spite of this, it became without any doubt a very dignified representative of them. Its life was not easy. It was forced to overcome very hard periods, in which it could not open its door to the public and had to execute its activities almost in internal immigration. It had to move several times from one building to other. However, like the mythic bird Phoenix, it always found a way to a revival and to a higher level.

About the last decade I had personally honor and pleasure to observe the remarkably dynamic and progressive development of the Museum. There has been completely rebuilt the permanent exposition of natural sciences. It unifies the verified traditional modes of collection presentation with the modern information technologies. The wonderful dioramas display the plants and animals in their environment and mutual interaction. This approach is particularly significant in the present day, when children loss contact with nature thinking that milk is produced by a factory or some "science coryphées or managers" declare ecology to be outmoded. The exposition rooms also offer a beautiful place with unrepeatably genius loci for the conferences.

Also other two sections of the Museum, of Ethnography and History and Archaeology, progressed considerably, in particular the former one built up a reputed center of conservatory works. Quality of the journal "Oltenia. Studii și comunicări. Științele Naturii." and its extent increased incomparably. From a regional journal publishing papers presenting the museum collections or texts helping the teachers of primary or secondary schools it

was transformed, into an international journal, with international editorial board, exceeding the Romanian borders, with increasing citation rate and attracting authors from abroad to publish results of experimental and long-termed field studies or synthetic essays.

A great, unappreciable personal merit for the recent progress of the Museum of Oltenia, in particular for the Department of Natural Sciences, and of the "Oltenia. Studii și comunicări. Științele Naturii." belongs to PhD. Cornelia Chimișliu. Her strategy of systematic, patient work, progressing by small, but effective steps, has brought admirable fruits. Thanks to her gentle, demanding but tolerant and empathic approach to people, she succeeded to create a wide collective of contributors, lecturers and reviewers from almost all fields of biology, geology and environmental sciences. It includes, as a kind of advisers, the outstanding representatives of other institutions from Romania. To name only some of them, I mention academician Murariu and professors Varvara, Pisiță, Andreiescu or Brezeanu. This collective consists not only from the reputed researchers, whose names appear in the international journals, but also of the beginning authors offered by the editorial board by sufficient space and help in perfecting their papers. In the present day it is unusual, but just in this direction, the museum continues, in the best sense of word, the tradition and mission of the older museums mentioned above. Every participant of the conferences organized by the Museum of Oltenia sees that all this functions in full harmony like a large symphonic orchestra conducted by Mrs. PhD. Chimișliu. Perhaps it sounds too metaphorically, but it is so.

Of course, nothing of this could not be achieved without the enormous effort of the whole museum staff; without help of its direction, and in the last, but not last place, without the permanent institutional and financial support and a rare understanding from the part of municipal and county administration.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, distinguished three kinds of scientific institutions, academies and universities as the "living" institutions and the museums and archives as the "dead" ones. But the Museum of Oltenia belongs to the "living" ones. Long life - *La mulți ani* - to the Natural Sciences Department of Museum Oltenia Craiova!

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