

MEMORIES AT AN ANNIVERSARY MOMENT

The Department of Natural Sciences from the Oltenia Museum celebrates 90 years of existence in this period. As it depends on the historical time and country, the figure itself may seem large or small. Reported to a human life, under normal conditions of existence, this figure seems normal. During this period, the museum, founded by Professor Marin Demetrescu in Craiova in 1923, confronted with a bloody world war, recorded several social movements that took place in Romania, faced many natural disasters (two devastating earthquakes, a period of drought followed by famine, another period of great drifts of snow that paralyzed everyday life of the country for a while, floods, etc.).

In its 90 years of existence, the Museum of Natural Sciences from Craiova went through ordeals, but now, it successfully participates in cultural activities in the locality of residence, Craiova. This phenomenon was and is possible, as the administrative bodies, regardless of the political regime, nature and social hardships, has always supported this elite culture establishment from Romania.

*Being born in Craiova before mid-century, and my parents and relatives paying attention to the activity of the cultural institutions of the city, I have known several aspects in the development and evolution of this place of culture over the years. In the first half of the century (1923-1973), the existence and activities of the Museum of Natural Sciences from Craiova are related to the work of three people who collaborated: **Marin Demetrescu, Constantin S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor and Ion Firu.***

***Marin Demetrescu** (1881-1936) graduated the Faculty of Pharmacy in Bucharest and was a teacher at the College Carol I from Craiova. In 1923, he founded the **Natural History Museum of Craiova** (1923). He was the director of the Museum of Natural Sciences from Craiova (1923-1928) and of the Oltenia Museum (1928-1936), along with C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor.*

***C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor** (1900-1968), archaeologist, ethnographer and folklorist, was the director of the Oltenia Museum (1946-1952), correspondent member of the Romanian Academy (1963). Together with Ion Firu, he conducted anthropological excavations at Tetoiu (Bugiulești, Grăunceanu Valley, Vâlcea, 1960-1967), where there was discovered evidence of the conscious activity of the human ancestors dating back two million years ago, during the period called "pebble culture". Dependent on the knowledge accumulated during his paleontological and anthropological research, C.S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor oscillated in the determination of the historical timing of these relics, which were accepted by some scholars (the famous South African anthropologist, of Australian origin, Raymond Arthur Dart came especially in Romania, in 1965, to study them) or were challenged by others. At present, in the context of the new discoveries in anthropogenesis, these findings regain in importance.*

***Ion Firu** (1926-1984), born in Craiova, graduated the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Cluj (1950); he was initially teaching assistant at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechnics of Arad (1950), after which, he worked for the rest of his life at the Oltenia Museum, Craiova, where he was assistant (1950), lecturer (1951), director of the Oltenia Museum Craiova (1952-1973) and secretary of the Commission of Natural Monuments, Craiova. He had multiple activities and achievements in the field of natural monuments in Oltenia. He reshaped the space of the Oltenia Museum, where he organized the permanent exhibition of Natural Sciences (1963), where there were 12 dioramas, attraction of European fame, the achievement of which belongs to him. His fields of interest were varied: palaeontology, botany, entomology, museology. Being extremely meticulous, he finished his doctoral thesis (**Entomofauna of sandy lands around Craiova, 1982**) after a long reviewing process.*

After graduating the Faculty of Biology of the University of Bucharest and a stage of almost two years at the Biological, Geological and Geographical Research Station Stejarul - Pangarati, A. I. Cuza University from Iași, I was employed at the University of Craiova (May 1, 1966) until 2011, when I retired. During this time, I participated in many scientific and cultural activities of the city and its neighbourhoods ("neighbourhoods" that reached... Japan!). I had the opportunity to know him, to listen to his conferences and talk to the eminent historian, archaeologist and palaeontologist (among other areas of reference), who was Constantin S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor, one of the mentors of this place of culture from Craiova.

My choice for Biology, I owe to Mr. Ion Firu, who was the Director of the Oltenia Museum and a friend of my father. In the spring of 1960, the last class of high school, I did not know what studies to follow. My passion was aviation and philosophy. The first option was not accepted by the family (they called me "airplane driver"), while in case of the second

one, the excitement decreased when I saw that the main activity was to study the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin ... In these circumstances, resigned, I oriented toward medicine, due to a family friend, PhD. Emilian Culescu (he studied and specialized in France), a reputed ENT doctor in Craiova (returned home to perform military service). My father told me to go to consult with the director Firu Ion. The building of the Museum (Street Madona Dudu) and the exhibits were very familiar to me because, when my father was working at the Museum settings, together with Mr. Firu Ion and his collaborators, I was scouring the exhibition halls. In the director's office, we were exposed the fields a graduate of the Faculty of Biology may activate in. By the end of the meeting, the secretary handed the correspondence to the director and, among it, there was a package. With his proverbial tact, Mr. Firu unwrapped the package and took out a book, browsed it a little and handed it to me saying: "Here are described aspects regarding the fields a biologist may activate in, if he does not want to teach at a school or faculty". It was an album of monuments from an African country. From that moment, my choice for the Faculty of Biology was sure! The speeches delivered by Professor Alexandru Buia that, at his meetings with the students from the Carol I College (ex-Nicolae Bălcescu) of Craiova, presented issues from Russia, Kazakhstan and other countries, also contributed to my choice.

Another episode, sad this time. In 1975, it was to take place a double anniversary of historical nature: 1750 years from the first representation of the settlement Pelendava (current Craiova) on *Tabula Peutingeriana* (a copy from the 12th century of a map executed in 225, rendering the public roads from the Roman Empire) and 500 years from the first historical mention of the town Craiova (initially presented in the inscription on the tomb of Vladislav I, then in a charter issued by the ruler Basarab Laiotă on the 1st of June 1475). To mark this event, it was decided that the two departments of the Oltenia Museum that worked in the same building, located in Madona Dudu street, to function in separate buildings, each having at its disposal a double exhibition space: the Department of Archaeology and History to remain in the building in Madona Dudu street and the Department of Natural Sciences in a building in Brestei street. Personally, I did not and I do not think that this action represented an "abusive dissolution" of the Department of Natural Sciences! However, there occurred the earthquake of March 4, 1977 and both buildings were badly damaged. Obtaining funding for the restoration of the building of the History Museum located in Madona Dudu street was simpler as there had already functioned a museum. As for the space for the Museum of Natural Sciences, the situation was more difficult because the building in Brestei street, although grandiose, was not an architectural monument, being in the custody of the University of Craiova. At the request of my colleagues and friends from the Museum (PhD. Elena Bazilescu, PhD. Irina Păunescu and others), who stood cramped with inventory items in different locations (one being the current notary near Dolj County Court), we found an interesting aspect: in the building from Brestei street, there have functioned administrative units since the Austrian domination in Oltenia (1718-1739), and, according to some people, here was even the Austrian governor's residence!. This information, along with others, helped in raising money to save collections, as well as in obtaining the current building located in Popa Sapca street, which is the current premises of the Museum of Natural Sciences from Craiova.

An achievement of the present staff of the Museum of Natural Sciences, is the Scientific Communications Session, become the **International Conference entitled Museum and scientific research**. Annually, at the middle of September, eminent specialists from different areas of life sciences research, from the country and from abroad, gather at Craiova. It is a prestigious event, all participants enjoying and benefitting from the existence. Its organization is due both to the efforts of the entire staff of the museum and to the financial support provided by Dolj County Council (Mr. Ion Prioteasa, president of the council, being a permanent presence) and other sponsors. I remember that at the sessions of scientific communications organized during 1965-1980, there attended celebrities in the field of biology from Romania, the sessions being organized in co-operation with the University of Craiova, the Commission of Natural Monuments of the Romanian Academy (the late Prof. Bogdan Bobârnac being the co-ordinator of the sub-commission Oltenia of Natural Monuments), SIRAR organization, etc. The difference is made by the graphic quality of the published volume (coloured plates, coated paper, etc.), as well as by the presence of numerous foreign experts, which gives an authority in the field.

I wish the scientific and administrative staff of the museum a fruitful activity and long life to this valuable cultural unit.

Prof. PhD. CORNEANU C. Gabriel
University of Craiova