

1923-2023. FROM THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY CRAIOVA TO THE SECTION OF NATURAL SCIENCES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM CRAIOVA (ROMANIA)

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Abstract. The work presents, chronologically, the stages of the evolution of the Museum of Natural History of Craiova, starting from 1923, respectively of the Section of Natural Sciences of the Oltenia Museum, starting from 1928 until nowadays. In the first part, we provide the arguments and objectives that lied at the basis of the establishment and operation of the Museum of Natural History Craiova, under the patronage of Craiova Scientific Circle, and then the basis of the Regional Museum of Oltenia, with three sections, including the Section of Natural Sciences. Then, we emphasize the efforts of the founders and of their successors to establish the most diverse scientific collections and to capitalize the heritage of the museum through exhibitions and science, so that it would become accessible and as well-known as possible to the general public. The museum followed a winding and difficult path (especially in certain periods). In the first two decades of its existence (from 1923 to 1934), the museum functioned in the premises of Dolj Prefecture (the Administrative Palace), then, it was moved and reorganized in the premises of the Casa Băniei / Băniei House (the oldest building in Craiova) between 1934 and 1948, and, in 1948, it was transferred and reorganized in the 3rd premises (the Primary School “Madona Dudu”), where the museum functioned with all its sections, until 1974. Starting with 1975, the Section of Natural Sciences would function in inappropriate locations until 1984, when the building known as “Ramuri Palace” was allocated to it, and has hosted it ever since. Among the first personalities who organized and maintained the specific activities of the museum, we mention the founder of the Museum, Marin Demetrescu (the president of the Craiova Scientific Circle and the director of the museum, between 1923 and 1939) and Constantin Nicolăescu-Plopșor (the director of the museum during 1939-1946-1952).

Keywords: The Museum of Natural History Craiova, Section of Natural Sciences, the Oltenia Museum.

Rezumat. 1923-2023. De la Muzeul de Istorie Naturală al Craiovei la Secția de Științele Naturii a Muzeului Olteniei Craiova (România). Lucrarea prezintă, cronologic, etapele evoluției Muzeului de Istorie Naturală al Craiovei, începând cu anul 1923, respectiv a Secției de Științele Naturii a Muzeului Olteniei, începând cu anul 1928 până în prezent. În prima parte sunt detaliate argumentele și obiectivele ce au constituit baza înființării și funcționării Muzeului de Istorie Naturală al Craiovei, sub patronajul Cercului Științific Craiovean și, mai apoi, baza Muzeului Regional al Olteniei cu trei secții componente, implicit Secția de Științele Naturii. Se fac mai apoi cunoscute, eforturile fondatorilor și urmașilor lor de a constitui colecții științifice cât mai diverse și de a valorifica expozițional și științific patrimoniul muzeal, astfel încât să fie accesibil și cât mai cunoscut de către publicul larg. Parcursul muzeului a fost unul sinuos și dificil (mai ales în anumite perioade). În primele două decenii de existență (respectiv între anii 1923-1934), muzeul a funcționat în sediul Prefecturii Dolj (Palatul Administrativ), între anii 1934-1948 a fost mutat și reorganizat în sediul Casei Băniei (cea mai veche clădire din Craiova), iar în anul 1948 a avut loc mutarea și reorganizarea în al 3-lea sediu (Școla primară „Madona Dudu”) unde muzeul a funcționat cu toate Secțiile componente, până în 1974. Începând din anul 1975, Secția de Științele Naturii va funcționa în locații improprii până în anul 1984, când i-a fost alocat edificiul „Palatul Ramuri” în care funcționează și în prezent. Dintre primele personalități care au organizat și întreținut activitățile specifice muzeului se remarcă cea a fondatorului Muzeului - Marin Demetrescu (președinte al Cercului Științific Craiovean și director al muzeului, în perioada 1923-1939) și Constantin Nicolăescu-Plopșor (director al muzeului în perioada 1939-1946-1952).

Cuvinte cheie: Muzeul de Istorie Naturală al Craiovei, Secția de Științele Naturii, Muzeul Olteniei.

The Section of Natural Sciences of the Oltenia Museum of Craiova carries out its activity in Popa Șapcă Street, no. 8, in the building known as the “Ramuri” Palace, a historical monument, public property of Dolj County Council, assigned to its use and administration since 1984. The building was raised between 1920 and 1921 by the Italian constructors Dalla Barba and Peressutti, according to the plans of the architect Constantin Iotzu. The building is one of the most beautiful in the centre of Craiova, being classified as an Architectural Monument, category B. Initially, it housed the “Ramuri” publishing and printing house (<https://www.monumenteoltenia.ro/editura-si-tipografia-ramuri-craiova/>). On the facade of the building there is a plaque with the text: “In this building, the “Ramuri” Palace, the premises of the Magazine “Ramuri - Drum Drept”, Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), a historian, writer, publicist, and politician, the director of the magazine, carried out his work”.

The history of the Section of Natural Sciences has its beginnings in the first part of the 20th century, when, throughout the country, there was a great creative effervescence in all fields. Administrative palaces, banks, courts of law, tribunals, schools, etc. were built. Consequently, culture also reached new dimensions. In Craiova, the “Alexandru and Aristia Aman” Foundation was established with a library and art gallery therein (1908), and then the Regional Museum of Antiquities and Ethnography of Dolj County (1915) – FIRU, 1969.

By the end of 1922 (on December 12), the idea of the foundation of a natural history museum also emerged. At the desire and urge of several intellectuals from the city – teachers, soldiers, lawyers, doctors, etc., the “Craiova Scientific Circle” Society was founded, whose purpose was “to endow the capital of Oltenia with a Museum of Natural History, resembling the Museum created by Gr. Antipa in the Capital of the country” (“THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM, 1932-1934”). The Statute of the Society includes all the pursued objectives: “a. To create a

Museum of Natural History in the City of Craiova, primarily regional, with the following sections: physics, chemistry, mineralogy, geography, palaeontology, regional history, botany, zoology, medicine, and pedagogy. The pedagogical section will include all kinds of tools that can serve as teaching material in schools; b. To edit scientific publications; c. To collect, prepare, study, classify, preserve, and exhibit all the necessary collections for scientific studies and research needed in education; d. A collection of photographic views, a projection room, and a library will be annexed to the Museum” ^(xxx), 1911-1920, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

With regard to the organization of the collections, it was specified that they would be “*prepared, classified, preserved, and exhibited in such a way as to keep them in the best possible condition and to be able to serve their purposes as well as possible... They must highlight the natural beauties and riches of the Country and, especially, of Oltenia*”, this being the practice even today. The constitutive act and the Statute of the “Craiova Scientific Circle” Society (drafted by the lawyer Dem. Stoenu) were registered in the register of legal entities under no. 1/929 and authenticated by the Dolj Regional Court on June 7, 1927 (Minute no. 2300).

The collections of the new museum were to be housed in the same rooms where the collections of the Museum of Antiquities and Ethnography of Dolj County (led by Prof. Ștefan Ciuceanu) were located, respectively in the premises of Dolj Prefecture (the Administrative Palace) – Fig. 1. This is how the president of the Craiova Scientific Circle, Marin Demetrescu (teacher of nature sciences at “Carol I” High School in Craiova), argued the necessity and importance of the creation of the Museum of Natural History, also known at that time as the Scientific Museum of Craiova “*In a Scientific Museum, there are gathered the unparalleled splendours of nature, this unbeatable master; as direct contact with the entire nature is almost impossible, we can read clearly the works of nature and acquire the true knowledge of the world only by walking through the halls with scientific collections*” – November 15, 1922 – December 31, 1923 Report of Craiova Scientific Circle, “Ramuri” printing house (GHERGHE, 2015).



Figure 1. Prefecture Palace – the first premises of the Museum (1915-1934).
Sources: the Archives of the Oltenia Museum.

Almost a year after the establishment of the Craiova Scientific Circle, on **December 2, 1923**, the members of the Circle would inaugurate **the Museum of Natural History of Craiova**, also led by Prof. Marin Demetrescu. The first collections were established “*through the contribution of the founding members*” (Vincenz, 1928a in CHIMIȘLIU, 2003). In the first five years, the collections and furniture necessary for the preservation and display of the museum objects diversified and enriched at a rapid pace, based on the revenues collected mainly from the Prefecture, the City Hall, the House of Schools (Ministry of Public Education), Sf. Treime Trusteeship, the Bank of Commerce, the Discount Bank, but also from the contributions and donations of the members of the Scientific Circle, various donations (money or objects) from private persons, and taxes paid for the entrance to the museum, celebrations or other public events (conferences held by the intellectuals from Craiova and from the country, matinees, etc.) ^(xxx), 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

According to the Statute of the Scientific Circle (under whose patronage the museum operated), the members of the Administrative Committee did not receive any remuneration for their services, and a good part of the responsibilities fell to the director of the museum who “*will take care of the scientific collections*” and will also “*label, keep an inventory register of the museum items, ensure that everything is kept in the best condition possible, buy, with the approval of the Committee, any kind of material considered to be adequate to appear in the collections of the museum... Once a year, on the occasion of the General Assembly, he will make a report on the state of the collections...*” ^(xxx), 1911-1920, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

C. D. Fortunescu, one of the founding members of the Magazine “The Archives of Oltenia”, also recorded some remarks about the early activity of the museum: “*The Scientific Museum, whose good management is especially ensured by Prof. Marin Demetrescu, is growing richer through the goodwill and generosity of a few kind-hearted people. On April 4 (1925), the Committee organized an Artistic Festival at the National Theatre and the “Armonia” school competition for*

secondary schools in Craiova and the income was used to order display cases necessary for the museum" (FORTUNESCU, 1925).

The passionate diligence of Professor Demetrescu and of the other members involved in the operation of the museum also emerges from the correspondence of the first years, from which we find out that there was an effervescent and vigorous activity in the development of the collections, but also a special concern for the preservation of the pieces. Notable in this regard is the letter sent by Grigore Antipa (the director of the Zoological Museum in Bucharest), dated October 1926, in which he offered indications for the use of preservative substances and, at the same time, useful advice for keeping stuffed pieces in cabinets (^{xxx}, 1920-1923, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

From the documents of the time we find out that, during the years 1925-1927, the museum was enriched with artefacts of special scientific and museological value, such as: birds from the Dionisie Linția collection (purchase and/or donation) (^{xxx}, 1920-1923, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM), the aerolite from Sopot - the "stone that fell from the sky" in April 1927 (donation) (^{xxx}, 1911-1920, the Archives of the Oltenia Museum; DEMETRESCU, 1928a); the mastodon from Stoina – Gorj County (skeleton fragments, almost complete dentition, and about 3m long ivories/tusks) of "major importance" for science, discovered by chance by local children in 1925 and unearthed by C. S. Nicolăescu Ploșor and M. Demetrescu in 1927 (GHERGHE, 2015; DEMETRESCU M. 1928b; NICOLĂESCU- PLOȘOR & DEMETRESCU, 1929); anatomical and zoological specimens (mostly invertebrates) preserved in spirit – purchased from the Industrial Enterprise "Cultura" from Arad and from Schluter & Mass House, Halle – Germany; stuffed animals procured from I. Petrescu from Craiova (birds: a bald eagle, white-tailed eagles holding rabbit prey, wild ducks, and mammals – a wild sow) (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM); naturalized/stuffed animals purchased from the Dermoplastic-Museological Institute in Bucharest (mammals: wolf, wild cat, ferret, weasel, ermine, lesser blind mole-rat, deer, sow with boarlets, etc. and birds: coot with nest and eggs, black bald eagle, black stork, great pelican, common spoonbill with nest and eggs, etc.); biological materials/didactic supplies (molds of mushrooms and fruits, bird skeletons, preparations with the development of the grass snake and of the common frog, stuffed mammals) – provided by the National Museum of Natural Sciences of Chișinău; intuitive paintings with botanical materials procured from the "Ramuri" Institute of Graphic Arts in Craiova and a collection of ores from Săcărâmb exploitation, sent by the Baia Mare Directorate of Mines and Metallurgical Plants under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Ministerial Order no. 58286 of August 26, 1925) (^{xxx}, 1920-1923, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

In 1927, at the request of the Friends of Science Society, the Museum of Natural History also receives for administration the collections of the Regional Museum of Antiquities and Ethnography of the Dolj County (the Archives of the Oltenia Museum, 1920-1923), and, at the wish of the Craiova prefect at the time – C. Negrescu (a fervent supporter of the Craiova museum movement), the efforts to unify the two museums began. Starting with **May 13, 1928**, they would function together under the name of **the Regional Museum of Oltenia** and under the leadership of the same devoted teacher – Marin Demetrescu. In the founding act, it was specified: "*As a regional museum, this institution becomes a more active element of the cultural movement and, at the same time, more interesting for the Romanian and foreign visitors. However, in order to give the museum this regional character, we need to join the work of exploring Oltenia land and intensify the inventory of everything that is characteristic to this part of the country*" (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

In its organizational chart, the unified museum had a conservator (coordinator) of the Ethnography Section (the architect and engineer Alfred Vincenz) and a conservator (coordinator) of the History Section – professor C. S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). Along with the change in the museum status, the required actions to print a *Scientific Bulletin* were made; this was meant to popularize the results obtained from the scientific research of the Oltenia region and "*in time, [would] represent a corpus of studies, based on the evidence exhibited in the museum*" (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). From a letter dated October 9, 1933, sent to Craiova Scientific Circle by the Library of the famous British Museum (Natural History), we learn that the *Scientific Bulletin* of the Oltenia Regional Museum was a publication appreciated by the prestigious British institution, which was willing to send some of its publications in exchange for the Bulletin (^{xxx}, 1932-1934, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). A possibility was also considered to distribute the Bulletin in the secondary schools / high schools in Craiova, especially and free of charge to deserving students (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

The three personalities of the museum (M. Demetrescu, C. S. Nicolaescu-Ploșor, and A. Vincenz) maintained and animated the activity of the museum both by organizing, conserving, and exhibiting the heritage, and by diversifying and enriching the collections with cultural assets. Substantial efforts were made to obtain donations and the foundations were laid for systematic scientific research through which goods of great documentary and scientific value were collected, such as: the (almost complete) skeleton of a cave bear – *Ursus spelaeus*, discovered by Nicolaescu-Ploșor in Muierii Cave – Gorj County (1929); plant species from Dolj County (358 species belonging to 203 genera and 53 families – collected in the summer of 1929, between May 31 and June 8) – Herbarium made by E. I. Nyarady. A. Vincenz was the one that invited Nyarady, the conservator of the Botanical Institute in Cluj, at that time, to "a botanical trip in Dolj County, for the preparation of an herbarium" and C. S. Nicolaescu-Ploșor accompanied him during this fieldtrip (^{xxx}, 1929-1931, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). The acquisition of museum goods also continued. Various stuffed mammals were ordered: a group of wild boars (sow and boar), a group of bears, a

group of fallow deer (1 male/bull specimen, 1 female specimen, and 1 “calf” specimen), a group of Alpine chamois (1 male specimen and 1 female specimen, including a rock), 1 male of Carpathian deer, with extremely strong horns, a jackal, and a mouflon (the payment was made to the preserver of the Zoological Museum in Bucharest – J. Hoenicke, in 1929 and 1931) (^{xxx}, 1927-1928, 1929-1931, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). Then, from the correspondence with R. Hoenicke, we find out that the cave bear skeleton was also restored at the Zoological Museum in the Capital and other stuffed animals were ordered here (a wolf, a badger, a group of owls), which were paid in 1932 (^{xxx}, 1932-1934, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

Simultaneously with the development of the collections, objects were purchased for storage and display (cabinets, showcases, frames, windows), especially from local workshops.

Between 1928 and 1930 (an intense period for the museum), the collections were accessible to the public in several rooms on the 1st floor of Dolj Administrative Palace; then, by the mid-1930s, according to the prefect's order, they were moved to the basement of the building where they remained until the middle of 1934.

In 1933, the first guide of the museum was published (DEMETRESCU & NICOLĂESCU-PLOPȘOR, 1933); it was well printed and richly illustrated, of interest both to the general public and to specialists. It “*is more than a popularization publication and more than a guide book through the Oltenia museum collections. In short, but eloquently, it is an image of the remarkable progress made by this institution in the few years since its existence...*” (GHERGHE, 2015). From this promotional brochure, we learn that the exhibits of the Natural Sciences were displayed in the following sections: *geology* and *mineralogy* – where one could admire the gold-bearing stone from Brezoi, mica from the Lotru Mountains and salt from Ocele Mari (Vâlcea County), copper ore from Baia de Aramă (Mehedinți County), graphite from Novaci, iron ore from Baia de Fier and anthracite from Schela (Gorj County), granite, marble, and other mineral treasures from the Oltenia region; *palaontology* – where the visitor was impressed by the Stoina mastodon, the cave bear, bones of *Bos primigenius*, etc.; *zoology* – representing Oltenia's fauna: mammals (a mother bear with two cubs, Alpine chamois, deer, wild boar, lynx, jackal, etc.) and birds (eagles, falcons, hawks, owls, waterfowl); it was also mentioned that the museum had a valuable herbarium, but, due to lack of space, it could not be exhibited.

From the lists of receipts recorded and archived at the museum, we learn that all the expenses for the proper functioning of the Regional Museum of Oltenia were ensured from the funds of Craiova Scientific Circle, coming from approximately the same sources as before the unification, namely subsidies granted by local authorities, subsidies requested and received from the Committees of the “Frații Buzești” and “Carol I” High Schools, private donations, the Circle membership fees, ticket sales for events organized by the museum, etc. (^{xxx}, 1929-1931, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

The first operational difficulties appeared “when the collections were moved and crammed into two rooms in the basement of the Prefecture, too small for so much collected material, dark, and difficult to be accessed by visitors”, and the activity of the museum, respectively of the Scientific Circle, was “paralyzed”. Under the respective circumstances, on May 25, 1934, the director of the museum, Marin Demetrescu, was forced to request the City Hall to move the museum assets to a suitable space, targeting, in this sense, the Casa Băniei, a historical building owned by the Municipality of Craiova. The imperious request was solved at the meeting from May 29, 1934, when the Mayor of Craiova, Constantin Negrescu, together with the Interim Commission, approved the transfer of “the Bănești Houses, property of the Municipality, to the Oltenia Regional Museum, only for use”. After the completion of the transfer formalities, the Committee of the Scientific Circle expressed its gratitude and decided to record in the minutes the special contribution of Mayor C. Negrescu to the progress of the museum, thanks to his help, encouragement, and financial support, both as Mayor and former Prefect (^{xxx}, 1932-1934, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

In the new premises, the museum and all its sections would function for fifteen years, respectively between 1934 and 1948. Casa Băniei, founded by the ruler C. Brâncoveanu in 1699, is the oldest building in Craiova, currently hosting the Ethnography Section of the Oltenia Museum (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Casa Băniei – the second premises of the Museum (1934-1948).

Sources: the Archives of the Oltenia Museum.

The reorganization of the Regional Museum of Oltenia in Casa Băniei began with restoration works (according to the plans of the architect A. Vincenz), which were financed by the Craiova Scientific Circle (from membership fees, donations/subsidies of the School Committees, etc.) and subsidies received from the City Hall (^{xxx}, 1932-1934, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM). The exhibitions and furniture used in the Prefecture were dismantled and then adapted to the new premises. The inauguration of the new premises and of the exhibitions took place on September 28, 1934, in the presence of the Minister of Public Instruction, Dr. C-tin Angelescu (who “only had appreciative words” for the collections and the way the museum was organized) and a sobor of priests. At the same time, numerous positive impressions about the exhibitions and the activity of the museum's specialists were also written in the press of the time or in the Museum Book of Honor (GHERGHE, 2015). They are living testimonies of the enthusiasm, perseverance, and professionalism of our predecessors from the first quarter of a century of the existence of the museum institution.

At the beginning of 1939, Prof. Marin Demetrescu retired from the function of director and he proposed Dr. Constantin S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor for this position to the Craiova Scientific Circle, as his contribution to the development of the museum heritage and scientific research was much appreciated by the first director of the museum.

Dr. Nicolăescu-Ploșor would lead the destiny of the museum until 1952, but only in 1946 he was officially appointed Director of the Museum (by High Royal Decree no. 98/1946). Between 1940 and 1945, the museum, like all the institutions in the country, operated under difficult conditions and with many shortages because of the outbreak of the Second World War. The museum staff (4 people, including the director) focused their attention especially on the inventory and conservation of the museum assets, but the scientific activity was not neglected either. In 1940, C. S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor would resume printing the magazine *Oltenia. Documents. Research. Collections*, which he had founded in 1923 to promote the history and life in Oltenia. In November 1940, the difficulties generated by the beginning of the war were amplified by an earthquake that produced significant damage to the structure and safety of the building. In the absence of subsidies, there was no solid material base and not enough specialists to participate in the reconsolidation of the building and in the improvement of the museum activity. This is why Nicolăescu-Ploșor approached the Dolj Prefecture to obtain funds and to employ specialized personnel, who would properly capitalize on both the old and the new collections, obtained from acquisitions and discoveries (GHERGHE, 2015). The situation of the museum did not improve following this request, and on May 10, 1944, due to the threats of the war, the director of the museum ordered to pack and evacuate the museum assets to his native commune, Ploșor, to shelter them from the destructive events of the conflagration.

In December 1944 (about 3 months after the liberation of the city and of the country from the Nazi occupation), C. S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor submitted a memorandum to the relevant ministry requesting funds to repair the damages caused by the war, to reorganize the museum sections, to resume and to develop the scientific activity, including field research and the publication of the results in the Museum Bulletin.

After the end of the war (May 9, 1945), changes took place in the political regime (the newly established regime was imposed by the Soviet forces), and the former order of the Romanian institutions and society was overturned and radically changed, the “purification of the public administration” being legalized and the interference of the politicians in the activity of all institutions becoming a rule.

In 1945, the museum was transferred to the administration of the Ministry of National Education, then to the Ministry of Arts and Information (1948), and “by Law 803 (published in O.G. no. 238 of October 14, 1946), the Oltenia Regional Museum was classified as a Scientific Research Institute” (GHERGHE, 2015). At the end of 1946, the museum staff consisted of the director (C. S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor), a preparer named Dăscălescu M. Gheorghe – graduate of Letters and Philosophy (transferred from the State Archives of Constanța), and a guard – Țițirigă Gheorghe. Consequently, many of the activities specific to the museum could not be carried out and this is why Ploșor requested the Ministry of Arts and Information, the establishment of new positions (1 preserver, 1 librarian with higher studies, and 3 guards) (^{xxx}, 1946, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

After his official appointment as director, in 1946, Nicolăescu-Ploșor approached the Ministry of National Education to obtain a new space for the reorganization of the museum, as the existing one in Casa Băniei no longer was sufficient for the storage and capitalization of the heritage of the three sections. His request was solved with the support of the competent minister, Ștefan Voitec, who, by Decree 238.214/1947 of June 19, assigned to the Regional Museum of Oltenia a part (the large hall on the ground floor and the entire first floor) of the premises of the former “Madona Dudu” Primary School in Craiova. At the beginning of 1948, the entire building together with the garden and the inner courtyards were assigned to the museum – Fig. 3.

The building (the current premises of the History-Archaeology Section) had been raised between 1905 and 1907 from the Town Hall funds and it had functioned as a primary school for the students of the orphanage patronized by the Church and “Madona Dudu” Foundation; starting with 1948, it came under the tutelage of the Ministry of National Education. The inauguration of this edifice as the premises of the Regional Museum of Oltenia took place on June 13, 1948, when, after numerous interior modifications aimed at creating a “logical circuit for visitors”, the first exhibition dedicated to the centenary of the revolution of 1848 was opened. Exceptional pieces from the heritage of the Section of Natural Sciences were also exhibited (e.g. the skeleton and ivories of the Stoina mastodon, the skeleton of the cave bear) on the 1st floor of the building. The exhibition was particularly appreciated, and the director of the museum and his collaborators were honoured with many appreciative words (GHERGHE, 2015).

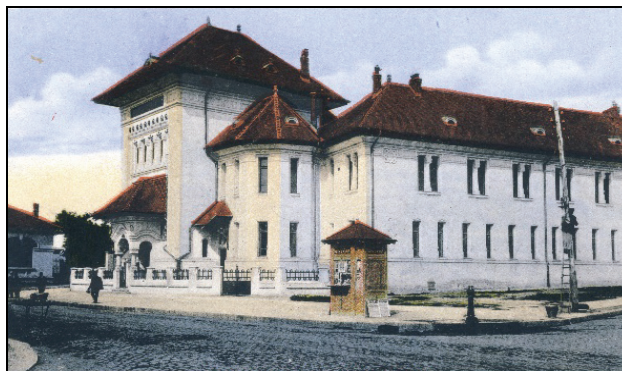


Figure 3. Madona Dudu School – the third premises of the Museum (1948-1974).
Sources: the Archives of the Oltenia Museum.

Starting with January 1, 1951, the Regional Museum of Oltenia passes from the administration of the People's Council of the Craiova City to the administration of the People's Council of the Dolj Region. The museum had 4 sections: Archaeology-History-Numismatics; Ethnography; Natural Sciences; Art (The Art Section was added in 1950, after the abolition of the “Aman” Foundation Museum and the transfer of the collections managed by the foundation to the heritage of the Oltenia Museum; it would function as such until 1954, when Craiova Art Museum was founded).

In 1951, the foundations of the preparation-restoration laboratory (which was organized and equipped with the necessary devices and substances) were laid at the Section of Natural Sciences, and the activities of enrichment, diversification, inventory, conservation, scientific and exhibition valorization of the heritage continued.

In 1952, the director and researcher C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, feeling threatened by the Security of the communist regime, retired from the management of the Regional Museum of Oltenia and left for the Capital, where he would continue his activity as a researcher in institutions subordinated to the Academy. The management of the museum was then assigned to Ion Firu, a graduate of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Cluj-Napoca in 1950, employed in the museum in 1951 on a position of assistant – lecturer.

Ion Firu reorganized the exhibition space of the museum, so that the entire ground floor of the building in the Madona Dudu Street would include the exhibitions of Natural Sciences, which he reopened for the public in 1955, with the following sections: *cosmography, the origin of life, transformism, riches* (plants, birds, and mammals), *the transformation of nature by people in Craiova region*. He would also carry out the scientific project of the basic exhibitions of the Section of Natural Sciences and coordinate its construction with the contribution of the “Decorativa” Enterprise from Bucharest and the section staff (FIRU, 1969). The great attraction within the basic exhibitions was represented by the 12 dioramas representing ecosystems from Oltenia, with a panoramic photography background; this technique was considered a premiere in the Romanian museography, and the visual impact impressed and delighted the visiting public at that time. The other sections of the basic exhibition circuit (cosmography, evolutionism, knowledge of nature in Oltenia, protection of natural monuments, etc.) were also organized according to high scientific standards and were attractive to the public. The inauguration of the permanent exhibitions of the Natural Sciences, in the premises in the Madona Dudu street, took place on May 5, 1963, in the presence of many personalities of the time and a large audience (GHERGHE, 2015).

We find numerous admirable impressions regarding these exhibitions in the Museum’s Book of Honour. “The museum is very well organized, elegant and poses all the issues necessary for the public to know nature (the origin of the earth, the origin of life and its evolution in different geological eras, the fauna, the current flora of various areas). The great problems of biology and nature protection, etc. happily complete the exhibition of the museum. The dioramas are admirable. We truly and warmly congratulate the management and staff of the Regional Museum of Oltenia for the beautiful achievements and the high-quality problem solving...” noted the researcher A. Papadopol together with several specialists from the National Museum of Natural History “Gr. Antipa”, on December 18, 1963. At the time this remarkable exhibition of natural sciences opened, the staff of the Section included, in addition to the supervisory staff, a single museographer (Elena Bazilescu) and a specialist guide (Galina Păduraru). It was only in 1966 that three more specialists (museographers Diaconu Irina and Mircea Popescu and restorer Paul Zaharia) joined the staff of the Section (xxx, 1963-1995, THE ARCHIVES OF THE OLTENIA MUSEUM).

Other great achievements of the Section were also recorded under the leadership of I. Firu (1952-1973): the Section heritage was enriched with goods of great scientific and museological value – the “I. P. Licherdopol” Collection of eggs (312 pieces) and shells (2,969 pieces) was obtained by transfer from the Corabia Museum, 400-500 zoological specimens, especially rarities from the country's fauna (naturalized animals, skeletons, skulls, and specimens preserved in alcohol) were offered by I. Biru, mammoth fossil fragments found in Irimești, Olteț district were purchased, the mineralogical collection was enriched with pieces collected from Parâng massif, bird naturalizations were made in the Section’s laboratory, plants and insects were collected from several areas of the county and Oltenia; excavations were organized and carried out (together with Dr. C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor) in the Vâlcea County, at Bugiulești, Padea, and Dealul Sarului and about 500 pieces belonging to more than 30 species of fossil mammals were collected (GHERGHE, 2015) etc.

In 1968, after the administrative reorganization, the Oltenia Regional Museum was renamed **the Oltenia Museum of Craiova**.

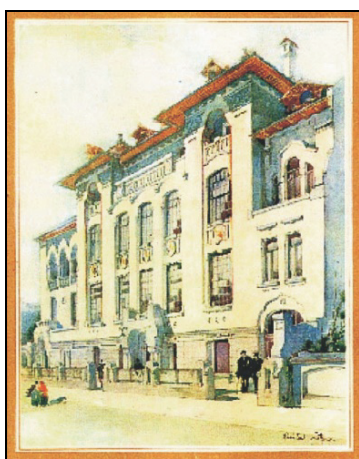
Under the auspices of the renamed museum, in 1969, the journal *Studies and Research. Natural Sciences. History. Ethnography* was published, mainly including works in the field of Natural Sciences. The journal appeared under the editorship of Mircea Popescu (head of the Section at the time) and Ion Fîru. In 1974, a new volume of the journal would appear, this time with the title *Oltenia. Studies and Communications. Natural Sciences* under the editorship of M. Popescu, but the publication of the journal was interrupted until 1980.

In 1974, Luchian Deaconu, a historian (1974-1988) was appointed director of the museum. In the same year (1974), the permanent exhibition of the Section of Natural Sciences was to be cancelled (according to the decision of the County Council) “in order to reorganize the space and the Archaeology and History exhibitions that were supposed to celebrate 1750 years of documentary attestation of Pelendava and 500 years of the city of Craiova”. The heritage of the Section was packed and stored in various buildings in the city (e.g. the former Notary, the Bowling alley from the Court of Law), in conditions unsuitable for the conservation and the organization of exhibitions” (GHERGHE, 2015).

In 1975, the museum received the Bengescu House from 26 Brestei street, for the organization of the Section of Natural Sciences and the Zonal Restoration Laboratory (it was to be led by Dr. Mircea Popescu). There were no suitable exhibition spaces and conditions in the new premises either, so the exhibition activity of the Section remained suspended, and the collections remained “packed”. The specialists of the Section (museographers: Elena Bazilescu, Irina Păunescu) continued the activities of collecting biological material (to enrich and diversify the collections), of recording, conservation and scientific valorization of the heritage. The cultural-educational activities were mainly carried out with and for the pupils, in schools and houses of culture. Together with the teaching staff, topics were addressed about the evolution of life, pollution, and nature protection, etc. Two future specialists (Gheorghîța Filcu and Aneta Vișan) were hired within the Zonal Restoration Laboratory to deal with the preparation and restoration of natural science specimens and, implicitly, with the preventive conservation of museum assets that were part of or were going to be part of the museum collections.

By the end of 1976, the Section of Natural Sciences reported a total number of 54,443 cultural assets, and, from an inventory carried out the following year (1977), we learn that the patrimony of the Section had grown considerably, totalling 62,136 museum pieces.

In 1979, two years after the devastating earthquake of 1977, at the request of the director Luchian Deaconu, the Executive Committee of the People's Council of Dolj County decided that the building of the former “Ramuri” printing and publishing house (also called “Ramuri” Palace) should be transferred from the Printing Company to the Oltenia Museum and function as the premises of the Section of Natural Sciences (Decision no. 191/1979) (GHERGHE, 2015). However, the necessary funds for the restoration of the building and the design of the interior spaces were not allocated, so that the building became the proper premises of the Section only after 1984 (Figs. 4a, b), following another decision given by the Council of Socialist Culture and Education (Decision no. 17 / 1984) - CHIMIȘLIU, 2003. Under those conditions, the specialists of the Section (Elena Bazilescu – head of the Section between March 1, 1979 and November 1, 1987, and Irina Păunescu, together with the new museographers hired in 1979, Adrian Năstase and Cornelia Chimișliu) continued to enrich the heritage through research and collections, donations and acquisitions, studies and specialized scientific works and to organize and support numerous cultural/educational-scientific activities (exhibitions, matinees or museum evenings, temporary mini-exhibitions or thematic photography exhibitions, etc.) at/for various schools or high schools.



Figures 4a, b. “Ramuri” Palace – the current premises of the Section of Natural Sciences (1984-present).

Sources: the Archives of the Oltenia Museum.

On July 16, 1985, by the decision of the Ministry of Culture, the two great museums of Craiova, the *Oltenia Museum* and the *Art Museum*, unite and form the **Dolj County Museum Complex**, with the following sections: History,

Ethnography, Natural Sciences, Art, the County Office of the National Cultural Heritage and the Zonal Restoration Laboratory (GHERGHE, 2015). Starting with 1986, the organization of the heritage in the warehouses of the Section of Natural Sciences began as well as the exhibition activity at the new and current location ("Ramuri" Palace). On March 13, 1986, two temporary exhibitions were introduced in the visiting circuit; they were organized on the ground floor of the premises: *Butterflies – flying petals* (scientific theme elaborated by Cornelia Chimişliu) and *From the world of animals* (scientific theme elaborated by Elena Bazilescu and Irina Păunescu). In 1990, the two exhibitions were replaced by new exhibitions (Protect nature! and Evolution of life), which were to have a permanent character, remaining in the public's attention until 2005. Their themes were created by the museographers Cornelia Chimişliu and Adrian Năstase (CHIMIŞLIU, 1999, 2003).

In the period 1988-2000, the management of the museum is changed at relatively short intervals, with the succession of the following directors: October 1988-April 1990 – Petre Gherghe, researcher-archaeologist; April-November 1990 – Corneliu Mărgărit Tătulea, historian; 1991-1997 – Adrian Năstase, biologist; July 15-October 31, 1997 – Cornelia Chimişliu, biologist (interim director); 1997-2004 – Mihai Duţescu, philologist.

In 1991, the Dolj County Museum Complex was dissolved, and the old names and the separate administration of the two museums were reinstated: the Oltenia Museum of Craiova (with its three initial sections: Archaeology-history-numismatics; Ethnography; Natural Sciences) and the Craiova Art Museum (with the Regional Restoration and Conservation Laboratory and Dolj County Office of the National Cultural Heritage), both museums remaining under the administrative subordination of the Dolj County Council. In 2000, the Zonal Restoration Laboratory will return to the Oltenia Museum of Craiova (GHERGHE, 2015). At the beginning of the 1990s, the specialized staff of the Section consisted of two museographers (Adrian Năstase - head of the Section during 1988-1990 and Cornelia Chimişliu – head of the Section starting with January 1, 1991), two preservers (Nicoleta Vitan and Constantina Dodocioiu), two restorers (Georgeta Filcu and Aneta Vişan). Between 1993 and 1999 four new museographers were employed, respectively: a geologist (Aurelian Popescu - 1993) and three biologists (Mirela Sabina Ridiche - September 1, 1994; Olivia Cioboiu - October 1, 1995; Claudia Ionelia Goga - January 1, 1999) and a restorer (Lavinia Bălă - 1995). Starting with the 1990s, the auxiliary staff of the Section also diversified (supervisors/custodians, guards, a photographer, an unskilled worker).

In 1990, the publication of the journal *Oltenia. Studies and Communications. Natural Sciences* was resumed, and since 1993, the scientific event *Museum and Scientific Research* has been organized annually; both will gradually evolve through the complexity of the papers and the participants' diversification.

Gradually, the museographers of the Section started completing their doctoral programs, with topics specific to their profile within the Section, and established fruitful professional collaborations with various specialists from the country and abroad. Thus, the network of collaborators of the Section diversified and expanded a lot in the academic national and international plan.

With the financial support of the Dolj County Council, the decade **2003-2013** was one of the periods of maximum development of the Section.

In 2005, Dr. Mihai Viorel Fifer (philologist) was appointed to lead the museum and he was the director of the institution until May 2012, with a suspension of the position between February 1 and September 30, when Dr. Florin Ridiche, an archaeologist, was the interim director.

In 2005, the Dolj County Council entitled the Oltenia Museum of Craiova to administrate the buildings of the three sections and the afferent lands.

Between 2005 and 2012, extensive modernization works took place in the building that houses the Section of Natural Sciences, and at the same time, the entire exhibition and heritage storage space was reconfigured and modernized.

The first stage of the investments was completed in 2008, when, under the slogan "Where Nature is at home", the first of the basic exhibitions was opened, the one on the first floor of the Section, realized through PHARE financing and the implementation of the Project "Increasing the tourist attractiveness of Craiova and Dolj County, by setting up the basic exhibition on the first floor of the Section of Natural Sciences of the Oltenia Museum Craiova", coordinated by Dolj County Council (the assistant manager of the project was represented by the head of the Section of Natural Sciences at that time - Cornelia Chimişliu). In 2012, the other exhibition spaces were also opened to the public so that, from then until now, the following basic exhibitions can be viewed: *Oltenia – Terra fossilis* – on the ground floor, *Physical-geographical conditions, types of ecosystems - flora and fauna of Oltenia* and the *Collection of minerals and rocks*, on the first floor, *the Universe and our Solar System*, on the second floor. A Planetarium, which operates on the basis of modern technology and represents a point of great attractiveness of the museum, was also included here.

The warehouses were modernized by replacing the old furniture with modern, modular and easy-to-handle furniture. The offices were also equipped with furniture and devices adapted to modern working standards.

An intensive digitalization process of the museum heritage has also begun: the electronic record of the collections, the classification of the cultural assets in the categories Fund and Treasury of the national cultural heritage by using the DOCPAT computer program, made available by CIMEC – the National Institute of Heritage in Bucharest.

In 2004, the journal *Oltenia. Studies and Communications. Natural Sciences / Oltenia. Studii și Comunicări. Științele Naturii* was accredited by the National Council of Scientific Research in Higher Education, under position 40, with no. 1152 / 23.06.2004, C.N.C.S.I.S. Commission – *Life and Earth Sciences*. In 2008, the journal was included in

the *Zoological Record* platform (BIOSIS - by Institute for Scientific Information - Thomson (ISI) and in the C.N.C.S.I.S. records in category C, and from 2009 it would be listed in the C.N.C.S.I.S. records as an annual journal in the B+ category, being also present in the international database (BDI), *Zoological Record* – Thomson Reuters Master Journal List. The documentation and the accreditation procedures were made by the Head of the Section of Natural Sciences at that time, Dr. Cornelia Chimișliu.

From 2005, the scientific session *Museum and scientific research* will evolve to the status of a Conference with international participation and then to an International Scientific Conference (from 2008 to our days).

Starting with 2008, the *National Exhibition of Minerals, Fossils and Gems* would be organized annually (except for 2020); this is a cultural project currently at the 16th edition organized under the coordination of Dr. Aurelian Popescu.

From May 12, 2012, the management of the museum is ensured by the current director, Dr. Florin Ridiche, an archaeologist.

In the last decade (**2013-2023**), the museum undergoes a new stage of progress: after the opening of the basic exhibitions, the Section of Natural Sciences became one of the important tourist attractions of Craiova, with the number of visitors increasing significantly from one year to the next, up to 350% compared to the situation before the renovation and modernization works. More precisely, if between 2000 and 2005, there were 3200-7000 visitors per year, in 2022 the number of registered visitors reached 27,186.

New staff was hired, on the one hand, due to the retirement of the senior employees, on the other hand, due to the need to provide staff for the good functioning of the Section. Two museographers (Daniela Mihaela Măceșeanu and Anca Florentina Alexandru) and a restorer (Loredana Petronela Răducanu) became part of the specialized staff.

The museographers of the Section (Dr. Lila Gima, Dr. Mirela Sabina Ridiche, Dr. Olivia Cioboiu, Dr. Ionelia-Claudia Goga) initiated and ran successful educational programs and projects, such as: The workshops of plastic animal creation “Bios Art” (2009-present); “The museum - a different kind of school” (2013-present); Summer school - “Bios Art on vacation” (2013-present), “Little naturalists” (February 2014 – June 2014), “I like the museum” (June 2014 – present), “Weekend family” (2014-2018), “Environment and health” (2017-present), “Environment and Universe” (2022 - present).

The activities of enriching the heritage through collections and donations (especially for the botany, malacology, ichthyology, and ornithology collections) continued. Simultaneously with the development of the collections, a significant number of museum objects were prepared and/or restored (especially for the palaeontology, botany, ornithology, ichthyology collections, etc.).

The electronic record of the collections and the classification of cultural assets in the categories Fund and Treasury of the national cultural heritage continued, thus reaching a total number of 242 classified assets, distributed as follows: the palaeontology collection - 60 assets in the Fund category; the malacological collection - 6 items in the Treasury category and 21 items in the Fund category; the ichthyological collection - 13 items in the Fund category; the ornithology collection - 8 pieces in the Treasury category and 134 items in the Fund category; another 75 assets from the malacology, ichthyology, and ornithology collections are in classification process. In 2020, 558 items of documentary-scientific and museological value from the collections of the Section were introduced into the national database of the Ministry of Culture and National Identity, using the DOCPAT software, as part of the Project *E-culture: Digital Library of Romania*. At the end of 2020, the heritage of the Section of Natural Sciences totalled 114,539 cultural assets.

The scientific activity was maintained at an effervescent pace – the museographers were involved in scientific research in various natural or anthropogenic areas of Oltenia or Dolj County, participated in international conferences and congresses, and published scientific studies in different journals, as well as in the yearbook of the Section or individual volumes.

The scientific conference *The Museum and Scientific Research* organized annually by the Section of Natural Sciences (with the financial support of Dolj County Council) continues to bring together specialists from various fields of biology, from the country and from abroad, this year marking its 30th edition. Starting with 2019, the summaries of the communications submitted and accepted for presentation at the Conference are published in the *Book of Abstracts*, a team of coordinating editors (the museographers: Anca Florentina Alexandru, Daniela Mihaela Măceșeanu, and Mirela Sabina Ridiche) and assistant editors (the museographers: Olivia Cioboiu, Lila Gima, Claudia Ionelia Goga, and Aurelian Popescu) taking care of the process. The technical editing of the volume is provided by Eng. Daniela Popescu. Currently, the Conference program together with the book of abstracts can be accessed on the website <http://www.sesiuneinternationalamuzeuloltenei.ro/>.

The journal *Oltenia. Studii și Comunicări. Științele Naturii* (*Oltenia Journal for Studies in Natural Sciences*) continues to be published (starting with 2010, there are two annual issues) and appears on several international platforms such as: Publication Proceedings, Thomson ISI, Philadelphia, USA; Journal Review Accessions Unit CabiHead Office, Oxford, UK; EbscoPublishing, Editorial Department, Massachusetts, USA, and SCPIO Publishing Platform: http://www.Scipio.ro/web/Oltenia.-_Studii-și-Comunicări.-Științele_Naturii. The quality and the visibility of the journal have developed step by step, given the efforts of the editors (in the past: Adrian Năstase, Cornelia Chimișliu ș.a. and from the present: Aurelian Popescu, Mirela Sabina Ridiche, Olivia Cioboiu, Claudia Goga, Gima Lila, Daniela Măceșeanu, Anca Alexandru), specialists who were / are involved in the organization and operating of the yearly Scientific Conference of the department as well.

During March 2020 - February 2022, the activities with the public were suspended due to the Covid 19 pandemic; however, online presentations were made and online communications with articles, albums, and information related to the heritage and scientific activity of the Section intensified.

In 2021, the Section of Natural Sciences increased its degree of interactivity with the public, as it was equipped with three intelligent/innovative integrated systems, which have the ability to capture attention, define what is specific, and identify the uniqueness and particularities of the Section. Three systems were provided, *totem*, *virtual assistant*, and *hologram*, through the contribution of the museum management, implicitly of the head of the Section – Dr. Aurelian Popescu, in the framework of RO-BG cross-border Project “New destinations in cross-border tourism”, e-Ms code: RO-BG-471, the Oltenia Museum Craiova being a Partner – Beneficiary 2. The project was implemented in partnership with the Municipality of Varshets (Leader), within the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Program, *Priority Axis 2 – A green region, Specific objective: 2.1 Improving the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage*.

The general objective of the project was to promote cooperation between institutions and people, by using cultural and natural resources in a sustainable way.

In 2022, the management of the museum and of the County Council drew up and submitted a memorandum requesting the inclusion of the Oltenia Museum in the category of museums of national importance.

By **Government Decision no. 450/2023** published in the Official Monitor with a single article, following the Government meeting on May 17, 2023, **the Museum of Oltenia Craiova is granted the title of museum of national importance** (^{xxx}, Monitorul Oficial. no. 438/2023).

Currently, the Section of Natural Sciences owns a heritage made up of 114,679 cultural assets and operates with the following staff: the head of the Section – Dr. Aurelian Popescu; six museographers: Dr. Mirela Sabina Ridiche, Dr. Olivia Cioboiu, Dr. Ionelia Claudia Goga, Dr. Lila Gima, PhD students Daniela Mihaela Măceșeanu and Anca Florentina Alexandru; two restorers: Lavinia Bălă and Loredana Petronela Răducanu; two preservers: Daniela Stamatoiu and Marinela Boicea; a specialized referent – Alina Fota and four curators: Emilia Constantinescu, Mariana Răducanu, Mirela Raicea, and Marian Petrescu.

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