THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF IASI – TRADITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. The Natural History Museum of Iași is one of the most ancient museums in the country, being established in 1834. It comprises a wide scientific collection organized according to the taxonomic and diorama criteria. At present, the main goals of the scientific activity of the museum are the modernization of the permanent exhibition, the attraction of a public as numerous and diverse as possible and the intensification of the educative role, besides the role of the school. It organizes temporary exhibitions on different topics, special training programs, in collaboration with education institutions of different degrees, scientific conferences. In recent years, the topics of the exhibition were enriched with fresh paleoфаunistic reconstructions having an impact both for specialists and for the general public, interested in the history of life.

Keywords: The Natural History Museum of Iași, Romania.

Rezumat. Muzeul de Istorie Naturală din Iași – tradiții și perspective. Muzeul de Istorie Naturală din Iași este unul dintre cele mai vechi muzei din țară, fiind fondat în anul 1834. El deține o vastă colecție științifică organizată pe criteriul taxonomic și al dioramelor. În prezent, activitatea științifică a muzeului are ca obiectiv principal modernizarea expoziției permanente, atragerea unui public mai numeros și divers, și intensificarea rolului educativ, pe lângă cel al școlii. Sunt organizate expoziții temporare cu tematică diversă, programe speciale de instruire, în colaborare cu instituții de învățământ de diferite grade, conferințe științifice. În ultimii ani, tematica expozițională a fost îmbogățită cu reconstituiri paleoфаunistice de actualitate și impact atât pentru specialiști cât și pentru publicul larg, interesat de istoria vieții.

Cuvinte cheie: Muzeul de Istorie Naturală din Iași, România.

The museum is a cultural-scientific institution which aims at gathering and preserving the cultural assets and valorising them mainly by exhibition, for the purpose of training, educating and recreating the most general public. The patrimony of the museum is a representative sample of the cultural patrimony. The contemporary museums are considered as important culture and communication centres, by means of which the society, the general public can develop a “scientific culture” – in order to acquire a range of knowledge regarding the continuous evolution of science.

The Natural History Museum of Iași, established on February 4, 1834, occupies an important place among the museums in the country, being the first museum in the Romanian Principalities devoted to the promotion of the values of the living and extinct world. In time, the museum gathered a wide collection, in proportion to the area held by it – more than 300,000 species of preserved animal or vegetal organisms, but also reliquiae, rocks, minerals and assets belonging to the historical patrimony. The wide collection of exponents of the museum was gathered in time, by the contribution of several specialists, but we can identify the three most important development periods: the early period (1834-1850), during the period of the founder members, Iacob Cihac and Mihail Zotta, the period of professor Ion Borcea, a century ago, and the period of the Prof. Dr. N. Macarovici (1949-
1969) and Dr. Constantin Mândru (1969-1990), when the collection of the museum is reconditioned after the destructions of the war and the exchanges with other museums and scientific institutions intensify (Macarovici, 1960, 1968; Mândru, 1984, 1985).

In this context, we would like to celebrate this year a century since the management of the museum was taken over by one of the greatest artisans of the permanent exhibition – the professor of zoology Ion Borcea (1879-1936). Over the long period in which he managed the museum (1912-1936), Ion Borcea had an activity of renovator, after a long period of relative stagnation. He raised the museum to the standards of that time and adapted it to the cultural requirements of Iași City: he brought high value exponents (the cassowary, the ostrich, the tiger, the chimpanzee, the ourang-outang, the gibbon, the animals in the Black Sea, etc.), he fought for the procurement of funds from the Inspectorate of Public Instruction for the modernization of the exhibition rooms, he organized a workshop of taxidermy and naturalization (Constantineanu & Cărăuşu, 1960).

At present, the permanent exhibition of animal species is ranked according to the criterion of the zoological and diorama systematics, in the spirit of the classical museum method and tradition. Therefore, the museum proves to be a good means of profile academic education and offers to the general public a rich image regarding the diversity of the living world. The scientific collections are permanently enriched by adding new exponents obtained by acquisition, exchanges and donations.

Since its foundation, the museum has played an important educative role, its collections being used as didactic material in the courses of natural history of Academia Mihăileană. Starting with 1834, Dr. Iacob Cihac held public conferences of natural history within the museum, printed in 1837, in the first Textbook of Natural History appeared in Romanian, edited at Albinei Institute of Iași. This textbook, together with other subsequent printed works, contributed to the formation of the specialty terminology in the Romanian language and foreshadowed the destiny of academic citadel that Iasi city was about to acquire in three decades.

At present, the museum has an active cultural role in the cultural, urban and academic environment of Iași City, permanently adapting to the changing requirements of the public benefiting from culture. In this respect, the Natural History Museum of Iași organizes each year temporary exhibitions on different topics, offers special training programs, in collaboration with education institutions of different degrees and organizes scientific conferences.

A recent and fresh concern in museum field is the reconstruction of certain elements of the prehistoric faunae (Tyrannosaurus, Kelenken). The enrichment of the museum collection with this type of exponents is based on criteria specific to the museum activity: actuality and impact, museum specific and the relationship between school and museum.

1. *Actuality and impact.* It represents an approach based on the enforcement of certain principles specific to museology: of uniqueness, of rarity, of representativeness and of the visual impact. The reconstructed prehistoric animals are spectacular, emblematic for the past of life and very attractive in exhibitions. Some of them, such as the dinosaurs, are widely publicized today, becoming “popular”. As a consequence, the written local press and television popularized these achievements more than once. Attracting the public with these key exponents also leads to the more careful and frequent visit by the public of the entire permanent exhibition, increasing therefore the educative role of the museum.
2. *Specificity of the museum.* The specificity of the “natural history” museum includes the presentation of fauna elements belonging to the geologic past, to the “history” of life, in order to suggest the continuous and long succession of the forms of life, in close connection to the changes at the surface of the Earth. The idea of (current) biodiversity is complemented by the biodiversity on the temporal scale (of the disappeared forms).

3. *Relationship between school and museum.* The museum must have an educative function consistent and complementary with the one of the public school, it must be a place where the theoretical notions provided by the school can concretize in the materiality of the exhibited objects. The natural history museum is in fact a museum of the *evolution* and as a result it must adapt its message and exhibition topics in order to suggest as forcefully as possible the basic scientific idea of biology – the *reality and the objective nature of the evolution of the living world*, the fact that the species appeared and disappeared by natural causes. Within the permanent exhibition of the museum, the new reconstructions of certain elements of fauna belonging to the geologic past aim at raising to the visitors new types of questions and problems, an aspect which is already noticed: the idea of huge geologic time; the idea of extinction; the idea of relative adaptation; the idea of intermediary form, the idea of evolution. Moreover, the museographers, in their explanations shall make reference more often to the evolution issue. Where the school does not communicate enough or properly by words, the museum can persuade by its own specific means – the naturalized or scientifically reconstructed exponents into our view, indisputable proof of the permanence and change in the living world.

At present, the Natural History Museum of Iași is an important scientific institution of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, an area of academic education and scientific research, of scientific education and recreation of the general public, interested in nature.

**References**


