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**Museums and Archaeological Collections in Banat
(18th–20th Centuries)**

Summary

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Keywords: Banat, museums, collections, Zsigmond Ormós, archaeology.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the development of culture in Banat during the Habsburg Empire and, subsequently, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through the prism of the establishment and evolution of archaeological collections and the process of institutionalizing material heritage through the founding of museums. The study follows how the interest in the vestiges of the past led, initially, to the formation of private collections, and later to their organization within museum institutions, which played an essential role in the conservation and valorization of the regional archaeological heritage.

A central objective of the paper is the analysis of private archaeological collecting, a widespread phenomenon in Banat in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Private collections, established by imperial officials, local intellectuals or enthusiasts of antiquities, represented the first forms of accumulation and preservation of archaeological materials. Although often lacking systematic documentation, these collections have played a decisive role in saving particularly valuable pieces, which, in their absence, would have been lost or destroyed. The paper aims to highlight both the importance and the limits of this type of practice, analyzing its impact on archaeological knowledge.

Closely related to the existence of private collections is the process of founding museums in Banat, which marks the transition from individual initiative to institutional responsibility in heritage management. The emergence of museums was determined by the need to protect, inventory and exhibit collections, but also by the desire to integrate archaeological heritage into a scientific and educational framework. Through donations, acquisitions or transfers, a large part of private collections constituted the core of museum funds, contributing decisively to their structuring.

The paper also aims to analyze the role of people of culture and of historical and archaeological societies in supporting the founding of museums and in promoting the importance of archaeological heritage. Through their research, publishing and organizing activities, they facilitated the dialogue between private collectors and museum institutions, contributing to the

professionalization of archaeological research. In this context, museums become not just storage spaces, but active centers of cultural research and dissemination.

Finally, the paper aims to highlight how the relationship between private archaeological collections and museums founded in the Habsburg and, later, in the Austro-Hungarian periods, influenced the culture of Banat through the prism of archaeological research, the founding of museums and the way in which archaeological collections were perceived. The analysis of this dynamic allows for a better understanding of the process by which the movable heritage was saved, organized and integrated into the scientific and museum circuit, constituting the basis of modern archaeological research in the region.

In relation to the subject of this thesis, the main working method was determined by reviewing and studying specialized works from the 18th-20th centuries. These were corroborated with contemporary specialized articles that dealt with this subject.

The first chapter, entitled History of Research, reviewed the archaeological research undertaken in the Banat area, marked, in the 18th century, by chance discoveries related to the municipal works carried out by the Habsburg administration. For this period, the bibliographic basis was the works of Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, Pascalis Caryophilus or Francesco Grisellini, as well as reports of imperial engineers.

The second part of the chapter deals with the evolution of archaeological research during the dualist period, being marked by its institutionalization, as a result of the founding of historical and archaeological societies or museums. The information extracted for the preparation of this subchapter was based on the study of specialized works, published in the yearbooks of the time, namely *Történelmi és Régészeti Értesítő* from Timișoara or *Archeologiai Értesítő* from Budapest. The final goal of this chapter being to follow the evolution of archaeological research and the perception of the idea of the past, marked by the research trends on some preferred historical periods.

The second chapter, entitled Marking Personalities of Banat museography, presents the activity of the personalities who influenced the cultural life of Banat. The reason for choosing the names presented was based on the importance of the contribution made to museography in this area, since the beginning of the 19th century, through the personality of the priest Nicolae Stoica

de Hațeg and until the unification of Banat with the Kingdom of Romania, through the division general, Nicolae Cena. Among the two personalities related to the Mehadia and Băile Herculane areas were Ormós Zsigmond, Milleker Felix, Böhm Lénárt, Bishop Victor Mihaly of Apșa and Berkeszi István, whose cultural activity either led to the founding of museum institutions or contributed to their functioning in a more professional manner. In the case of this chapter, the bibliographical sources were represented by the biographies of these personalities, both in works of their contemporary period and in those of our time. The final goal of this chapter is to make a transition from archaeological research to its institutionalization, through people of culture.

The third chapter, entitled Museums in Banat, presents the history of museum institutions, from their founding until the end of the First World War, through the prism of their administrative and cultural activity of promoting national history. Through the bibliography reviewed, the chapter begins with the first initiatives in this direction, materialized by the existence of a museum nucleus of the priest Nicolae Stoica de Hațeg in Mehadia. After this, the rest of the chapter presents the situation of the other museums existing in Banat, namely those in Timișoara (mag. Temeswar), Lugoj (mag. Lugos), Bela Crkva (mag. Fehértemplom), Vršac (mag. Versecz) and Zrenjanin (mag. Nagy Becskerek), to which are added the failed attempts to found new museums and the continuation of this trends in this area, after the end of the war. The purpose of this chapter is to connect the archaeological and cultural activity of the intellectuals of the time with the finite and tangible purpose given by the existence of museums.

The fourth chapter, entitled Archaeological Collections, also the largest in terms of the size of the text, deals with the existence of archaeological collections present in the Banat area and the way in which they were formed. The first subchapter presents the situation of private collections, with several such collections being exposed in detail, chosen as examples due to the number of pieces owned or their importance in relation to museum institutions. Thus, the archaeological collections of Ormós, Pongrácz, Böhm, Rittinger and Kislégghi were presented, other private collections of smaller size or about which very few details are known are presented in Annex 1. The second subchapter presents, in more detail, the evolution of museum archaeological collections, being extracted only the collections chronologically between the Paleolithic period and the Migration Period, respectively the 8th-9th centuries AD. For each museum institution, the same format of the collections held was kept: the prehistoric one, that of

the two Iron Ages, the Roman era, the Migration Period and the numismatic collection. In some cases, where they existed, the Egyptian or Cypriot collections were also introduced.

To complete this chapter, the archaeological yearbooks of the time were used, especially the monthly or annual reports, in which the newly recorded pieces were mentioned, as well as the method of obtaining them. Although museums such as those in Timișoara or Vrșac had such important bibliographic sources, in the case of other institutions the primary sources were quite precarious and incomplete. In these situations, based on the archaeological repertoires drawn up, together with the archaeology articles of that time and, especially, from today, it was possible to create, in broad outline, the evolution of museum collections. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the situation of archaeological collections, both private and museum, as well as their evolution or destiny.

Chapter five, entitled History in the school environment. The existence of school archaeological collections, deals with a subject that has been touched on far too little in today's specialized bibliography. Thus, this chapter presents the situation of thirteen such collections discovered in schools throughout the Banat area, as well as their evolution until the end of the First World War. The basis for this chapter were the school yearbooks produced at that time, in which the collections of antiquities owned and used as teaching material were presented.

Thus, this work deals with the cultural life in Banat between the 18th and 20th centuries, through the prism of archaeological research undertaken by personalities who marked the local museography, materialized by the establishment of museums, owners of archaeological collections, an idea also extended to the school environment.