

LIVING HUMAN TREASURES THE ASTRA MUSEUM PROGRAMME FOR THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

Dr. Corneliu BUCUR

Being almost at the moment of the centenary anniversary (1905-2005) and capitalising the total amount of the collections and ethno-documentary values constituted to Sibiu, since the second half of 19th c., into some museums with discrete profile for universal representation (The "Franz Binder" World Ethnography Museum), national (The ASTRA Traditional Folk Civilization Museum), regional (The ASTRA Transylvanian Civilization Museum) and ethnic (The "Emil Sigerus" Saxon Ethnography Museum and The Romanian Culture and Civilisation Museum— that is in project phase, but having already collections and a photographical and cinematographic documentation very precious), The "ASTRA" National Complex became and is unanimous considered as:

- a spearhead museum, promoter of a new museological conception of the nineteenth century, forsaking to the object fetishism, changing the paradigm of "ethnographic museum" with that of "museum of culture and civilization history", having meaning of movement from factualism towards cultural-traditional phenomenology and from ethnographic presentation ("how the thing are") toward the illustration of cultural and historical phenomenon evolution ("how things became what they are") and finally, from the exclusive attitude of the physical and material heritage toward the harmonious and organic integration of the intangible, culture in the expository and spectacular ensemble of all museum events;

- a national centre having academic level devoted to the modern and interdisciplinary scientific research of the history of folk civilisation from Romania, under direct patronage of Romanian Academy, aiming to discover

and define the Romanian folk technical civilization as fundamental area of cultural history that conceives, principally, by impressive typological thoroughly and general taxonomy of tools and installations, of technical and complex systems from all areas of traditional physically creation that illustrates the technical genius of Romanian people;

- a national centre of reviving the traditional artistic handicrafts, the folk costume and literary, choreographically, musically and culinary folklore from Romania, the observances connected with traditional festivities that are related to the life and work cycle. This centre is concerned – by means of the whole system of organised events and of structures created at national level – to contribute to the perpetuation of cultural traditions, in authentic forms, to the new generations, to recover the awareness and the feeling of national cultural identity after communist age, emancipate in European comparative spirit ("you will never know what is yours if you don't compare yourself with others");

- a national centre for the production and archiving documentary anthropological film especially regarding the culture and traditional civilisation, named ASTRA-Film Studio, that is also the organizer, at every two years, of the International Festival of documentary film and visual anthropology with worldwide reconnaissance that led to the creation of an archive having more than 2500 of anthropologic movies that are representative for the whole universal culture;

- A national centre for improving the knowledge of restorers and conservatoires from the country museums, regardless of type.

The international prestige of "ASTRA" Museum grew especially in the last decade, being universally recognized by means of:

- EMYA award in honour of the museum director, Corneliu Bucur Ph. D., by the EMYA Commission, in 1993;
- The "ASTRA" Museum director was elected in the Board of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography (ICME);
- The "ASTRA" Museum director was elected as president of the International Commission of Ethnography Museums, in the IOV system, in 2001.

For notably results acquired in 2001, the "ASTRA" Museum was awarded with three national awards with the occasion of setting-up, for the first time in Romania, of the national award for the national cultural heritage. The award "Al. Tzigara Samurcaş" was given for the amplitude and the message of organized manifestations in the "Living Human Treasures" Program.

In 2004, for the results obtained in 2003, for the *Living Human Treasures* Programme, the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs, together with the National Commission for UNESCO, awarded the "ASTRA" National Museum Complex a *special award* of the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs and one of the national awards.

Due to its heritage of world-wide importance, a real "National Pantheon of folk culture", the "ASTRA" Museum have strategic cultural programmes for keeping and protection in the universal conscience of the cultural identity of Romanians, being, before any other cultural or heritage institution in Romania, a national school for education in the spirit of fundamental, ethno-identity values and a convincing demonstration of the European-communitarian essence and of the universal values of our historical culture.

The "ASTRA" National Museum Complex has started and put in practice, for years, based on modern theories having a large acceptance world-wide for integral description of traditional folk



culture, in its material and spiritual expressions, the modern concept of *museum vivum*, by developing a real national system for research, emphasising, consolidation, acceleration and purveyance to the new generations of the events connected with the intangible cultural heritage.

This programme was done entirely accordingly with the UNESCO project for encouragement and stimulation of active preservation of the national cultural values, representing the traditions of world-wide peoples, regarding folk artistic handicrafts, conceived by the UNESCO members, in 1989 (Paris) and 1999 (Venice), having as collocation *Living Human Treasures*.

The programme of public world-wide recognition of the exceptional values of spiritual intangible culture, alike of Romanians and minorities from Romania, of contemporary works of art and folk handicrafts, in an institutionalised system, was undertaken by "ASTRA" Museum since 1990/1991. The report, published by UNESCO in 2000, regarding to the world-wide results of applying its 1989 Recommendation, after the Training Workshop from Venice, in 1999, regarding the policy of safeguarding of cultural traditions and artistic artefacts from the countries affiliated to UNESCO, eulogies four Asian countries: Japan, Thailand, Philippine and Southern Korea and only two European countries – France and

Romania – for distinct merits in the process of the announced programme.

The system conceived and applied by “ASTRA” Museum at a national level, in cooperation with many ethnographic and folk arts museums from the whole country had included:

- founding of an *Association of Folk Artists from Romania* (1992), that is organised on arts specialities, system that is still open for updates;

- the annually celebration, around the 15th of August (St Mary), for the members of the association, of a *Fair for Folk Artisans of Romania* - (already, organised for its 21st edition);

- founding of the *Academy for the Traditional Arts in Romania* (organised on six sections: literary arts, musical arts, toy arts, plastic arts, mechanical arts and culinary arts), having, already, 49 editions. The Academy has more than 200 members;

- *the National Olympics Traditional Artistic Handicrafts*, organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research (achieved to the 9th edition), that represents a national competition for talented children from Romanian villages that has the purpose to promote the traditional artistic handicrafts (the competition finalists were appointed “Romanian Olympics”, for all types of handicrafts);

- establishing the Galleries of Folk Art (in historical centre of Sibiu and in

the open-air Museum) for selling contemporary works of traditional artisans;

- the *National Festival of Folk Traditions*, organised like a corollary of the whole system of events, since 2001 (following the model of “Smithsonian Folklife Festival”, Washington D.C.) based on the valuable experience gained by the Romanian participants to the 33rd edition in 1999;

- the *International Festival of documentary film and Visual Anthropology* organised since 1993 (achieved to the 7th edition), considered to be the most important festival of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe;

Since 2002, our institution has organised, for the first time in Europe, with the support of UNESCO and IOV, the *European International Market of Traditional Handicrafts* and the *International Symposium Culture – Tradition – Tolerance – Multicultural Dialogue by knowing the cultural traditions of world-wide people*.

This kind of cultural-scientific events has continued with the ICME conference *Cultural Traditions Threaten by Disappearing. The Role of Ethnographical Museums in Their Safeguarding* and with the Conference of ethnographic museums from Central and Eastern Europe, *The Folk Clothes – mark of ethno-cultural identity*.

The most important objectives of the ambitious programme of the “ASTRA” Museum regarding the protection of intangible cultural heritage are:

- Recovery of traditions, in the spirit and their modern form of expression, perfect suited to the demands and desires of the rural communities’ members, process that cannot be separated of the whole cultural system of conscience recovery for its own ethno-cultural identity, with all obvious meanings. It presumes a generous dialogue at a national level, for gaining a permanent status and for achieving the connection between tradition and modernity;

- Promoting at national as well as international levels, at their real value, the folk artisans - true milestones of tradition continuity;



- Raising the awareness of the school age pupils regarding the values of the traditional folk civilisation and the development of young artisans' skills and abilities of their respect for traditional values;

- Establishing educational programmes, using documentary movies, in order to achieve civic and educational purposes.

Due to this important programme, the "ASTRA" National Museum Complex is enrolled among the protagonist countries of the world-wide movement for protection and promoting the intangible cultural heritage and for active manifestation against globalisation - that threatens with cultural standardisation.