

THE HISTORY MUSEUM OF SIGHIȘOARA 110 YEARS OF HISTORY

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The citadel of our town has been a major tourist attraction ever since the beginning of the 19th century. The fascination for the Middle Ages was one of the major preoccupations of Romanticism and the members of the *Hungarian Historian Society*, holding assembly in this town on the initiative of historian and MP Karl Fabritius in 1879, were fascinated by the multitude of the medieval buildings, and it was then that the idea of organising a museum emerged.

An exhibition was then organized, which inspired the young student Josef Bacon and the brothers Friedrich and Heinrich Kraus to lay the foundations of a history and art museum. This idea had already been promoted by the "*Gross-Kokler Bote*" newspaper, where the idea of using some of the citadel towers was supported. Unfortunately the idea was abandoned, and resumed only 20 years later. At the anniversary of the Hungarian jubilee in 1896 the government appealed to the communities to create humanitarian or cultural organisations. In this context Josef Bacon's appeal was approved by the town council considering the Clock Tower a good place for a museum and taking also into account the town budget.¹

On June 24th, 1899 the museum "*Alt Schaessburg*", organised with the support of the Sebastian Hann-

association, opened in the Clock Tower. In Josef Bacon's view, the purpose of this museum was to promote the cultural and spiritual values of the German community of Sighișoara, to support local artists by organizing exhibitions and meetings, and to apply old styles in both urban and rural architecture.²

Alongside with this museum, at the initiative of the same passionate custodian, Dr. Josef Bacon, in an outbuilding of the Clock Tower, in 1912 the Hygiene Museum was opened exhibiting over 700 charts and drawings illustrating the epidemics which had devastated the town and also the town's demographic evolution. Other museums opened in that period were *The Museum of Saxon Ethnography*, located in the "House with the Shingle Roof" (1908), and the School Museum, housed by the vestry of the *Monastery Church* (1932).³

This initiative of Josef Bacon had the financial support, as has been pointed out before, of the "Sebastian Hann"-Association from Sighișoara ever since the year 1904. Other supporters had been: Karl Seraphin, Betty Schuller, Friedrich Meltzer, Julius Holitzer, Julius Misselbacher (1903-1963). The latter had a major contribution to the systematic and scientific classification of the museum's first collections.

¹Richard Ackner
Das Bacon-Buch. Von Mosel an die Kokele. Familiengeschichte.
Familiendruck und für Siebenbürgische Bibliothek
Gundelsheim, 2002, p. 77.
Familiengeschichte.
Familiendruck und für Siebenbürgische Bibliothek
Gundelsheim, 2002, p. 77.

²*Die Schäßburger Museen*, Friedrich Horedth Verlag, Sighișoara, 1933, p. 2.

³*Ibidem*, pp. 4-10.

The Romanian community, no lesser, opened in 1937, in a house rented in the lower town, the museum of Romanian ethnography – *The Ethnographic Museum of the Târnave Region*,⁴ founded by the Romanian ethnologist Gheorghe Cernea, a teacher from the village of Paloş-Ardeal.

The communist era brought about substantial changes in the evolution of the museums of Sighişoara. In 1952 the entire collection of the Saxon museum was nationalised, the museum now being housed in the Clock Tower only. The name of the museum had been also changed, varying from *The Museum of the Rayon of Sighişoara* in 1952 to the *The Municipal Museum of Sighişoara* in 1968, up to *The History Museum of Sighişoara*, the actual name of the museum.

After Gheorghe Cernea was arrested in the 1950's, his collection of Romanian ethnography was confiscated and distributed to other museums. The collection of icons on wood and glass was the only one to remain in Sighişoara.⁵

In the 1970's some rooms on the second floor of the Vlad Dracul House were used by the museum to create an exhibition of medieval weapons. The cohabitation with a restaurant being unusual, in 1988 this collection was moved to the ground floor of the building housing the primary school of the Joseph Haltrich High School, where can be found even today.

In 1999 the old military prison of the town located on the ground floor of the Clock Tower was reorganized as the *Torture Chamber*, showing items and illustrations of procedures of torture from the *Codex Criminales Teresiana* (1769), the last criminal law allowing the use of torture in penal proceedings under the Habsburg Monarchy.

This anniversary is an opportunity for us to express our gratitude to our forerunners for all their efforts in the field of museology in Sighişoara, and at the same time our commitment to further develop our museum according to the standards of the 21st century.

⁴Adriana Antihi,
„Despre activitatea
muzeelor din
Sighişoara”
în *Vatra*, 6, 2006,
p. 20.

⁵*Ibidem*, p. 21.