

BRUKENTHAL NATIONAL MUSEUM (PUBLIC INSTITUTION FOUNDED IN 1817). CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH UNIVERSITIES, MUSEUMS, RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND PERSONALITIES IN THE LAST 15 YEARS*

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Cuvinte cheie: cultură și civilizație Transilvană, Muzeul Brukenthal, legături cu instituții culturale și științifice, România, Europa.

Keywords: Transylvanian culture and civilization, Brukenthal Museum, links with cultural and scientific institutions, Romania, Europe.

(Abstract)

In 2021, Brukenthal National Museum celebrated the 300th anniversary of baron Samuel von Brukenthal's birth. We hope our gesture will honour, once again, a great personality that ennobles the history of the lands that we inhabit. In the past 15 years, our institution has undergone a reintegration into the cultural, scientific and university world.

The Transylvanian lands, individually developed, have offered high value in time, throughout their people and actions.

The inhabitation of the current territory of Sibiu city is attested in documents since 1191¹. The German name of the town comes from the legendary character Hermann, founder of the medieval city².

The XVIIIth century led to an individualization of Transylvania within the Habsburg Empire, which led to the occupation of the province's chair by baron Samuel von Brukenthal. He is, without a

doubt, a product of the age he lived in³, so that in addition to political and economic improvements (which are not the main subject of these lines), he also was an important cultural patron⁴.

Samuel von Brukenthal was a builder, initiating the construction – on the southern side of the Grand Square – of a baroque palace adapted to the Transylvanian architecture of the time, intended for daily living of his family and also for hosting high ranked personalities.

In this palace, the baron gathered, in a relatively short time, extraordinarily diverse but essential books, art works, and archaeological remains, numismatic, mineralogical, botanical and faunistic collections. During his lifetime, especially the second floor hosted – since 1780 – a private exhibition that could be visited by citizens or by other guests of the baron.

The cultural and scientific relations were flourishing between the potentates of the time and also between universities, scientific associations and personalities, phenomenon that led to the opening of new horizons. Activity related to the collections and museums has reached new, unknown territories until that moment, requiring development of

* The paper is a translated and edited version of the article S. A. Luca, Muzeul Brukenthal de la începuturi până în prezent. Ctitoria Baronului Samuel von Brukenthal. Artă-Istorie-Memorie-Patrimoniul cultural național. Mariana Lazăr (coord.), București (2021), 491–504.

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¹ Zimmermann *et alii* 1998, 1; Luca *et alii* 2003, 191–203.

² The bust of the legendary knight Hermann was unveiled in the courtyard of the Altemberger House, History Section of the Brukenthal National Museum, with the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

³ Cozma-Vlaicu 2006; Luca 2011, 447–454.

⁴ Ittu 2008.

an improved, appropriate legislation, but also a new, diverse public.

Influenced by the times of changes he lived in, at the beginning of the XIXth century Samuel von Brukenthal drafted his will⁵. He was asking the family for permission to transform the Brukenthal Palace from Sibiu into a public museum, open for citizens, placed under the administration of the Brukenthal Saxon College and financed through an account administered by the Evangelical Church of Sibiu.

This wish has been fulfilled after the death of the baron, in 1817⁶. The community of Sibiu, paying respect for the founder, made large and valuable donations in favour of this museum. Thus, after the Union act from 1918, colossal values of the Transylvanian civilization, belonging to all “nations” of this land were sheltered within the walls of the Brukenthal Palace.

For us, the existence of one of the oldest public museums in the world, at Sibiu/Hermannstadt, is an opportunity for intellectual enjoyment and pride, in the context of achieving a United European Community and integrating high-level values in the cultural community concert.

Beginning with manager Nicolae Lupu⁷ (1921–2001), a student of academician C. Daicoviciu, Brukenthal Museum began its new development, step by step, towards what has become today.

With the establishment in Sibiu of the Faculty of Letters and History, under the auspices of the “Babeş Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, in 1969⁸, more and more future and current teachers of the institution from Cibin were formed. Moreover, under the aegis of Cornel Irimie (1919–1983)⁹ the Ethnography Section was founded under coordination of the Brukenthal Museum, with one of the most beautiful ethnographic parks, the one located in Dumbrava forest, in the southern side of the city.

After this date, with the year of 1980 began a gradual increase in the number of buildings

occupied by the museum. Even though in 1990 the Ethnography Section was transformed into the Astra National Museum Complex in Sibiu, Brukenthal Museum remained one of the most important cultural institutions in Romania.

Brukenthal National Museum included at that time several sections, like art, history and natural sciences.

Surprisingly, the development of the museum after 1989 was not as explosive as many would have expected. Thus, it was after more than 15 years since the Romanian Revolution in December 1989, when the inhabitants of Sibiu – who considered that the liberation movement from communist oppression must begin in Sibiu in front of the Brukenthal museum building / Brukenthal Palace¹⁰ – the museum’s development rhythm was not the same with that of the local community.

University of Sibiu re-joined the normal cultural-scientific life starting with 1990, when new staff was hired with the mission to transform the previous education into a much more progressive and balanced one. Therefore, within the History Specialization, we sought to integrate student activity towards new research directions developed in libraries, museums, research institutes and archives, primarily in the city of Sibiu, but also in the entire country or abroad.

In Sibiu, the first national history student communications symposium took place. The University of Sibiu has initiated the great archaeological school sites in Romania, Orăştie area¹¹. We must mention the fact that on these sites, which continue almost uninterruptedly since 1991, hundreds of students from our university have been trained not only in archaeology, but also in medieval history, history of architecture, ethnography, history of arts, church history and many other culture areas.

Moreover, in the last decade of the XXth century, Conservation and Restoration specialization was established within the History Department, which trained hundreds of students in this very demanding field regarding the cultural heritage protection¹².

⁵ Ittu 2008, 78–85.

⁶ Luca 2007, 1–2; Luca (coord.) 2012; Luca – Hrib 2017, 65–66.

⁷ The bust of professor N. Lupu was unveiled in the courtyard of the Brukenthal Palace, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

⁸ <https://www.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/despre/despre-ulbs/istoric/infiintarea-si-dezvoltarea/>, 13.06.2021.

⁹ The bust of the professor Cornel Irimie was unveiled in the courtyard of the Brukenthal Palace, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

¹⁰ 30 years after this a bronze plaque was mounted on the Brukenthal Palace, in the right side of the gate, to commemorate the revolution and the first man killed with this occasion in Sibiu.

¹¹ Prof univ. dr. Zeno Karl Pinter – Orăştie Fortress; Prof univ. dr. Sabin Adrian Luca – Orăştie-Dealul Pemilor (*points: X₂, X8 and Romos*) and Turdaş-Luncă.

¹² The practice part of this specialization was done, for the most, in the Astra and Brukenthal museums laboratories, in Sibiu.

Sibiu city was proposed as the European Capital of Culture,¹³ along with Luxembourg in 2007, but the museum was not prepared for this celebration of the European community.

Even though in April 2006 this reality was extremely visible, the museum staff in collaboration with Romanian Government (Culture Ministry) and the City Hall of Sibiu managed to recover in just 8 months ahead and in January 2007 Brukenthal National Museum became one of the most important cultural objectives in Romania¹⁴.

Art Sections are located today in Brukenthal Palace (Grand Square, no. 5), in the Blue House (Grand Square, no. 4) and Tribune Street, no. 6.

Brukenthal Palace is the main headquarters of the museum and in 2005 it was returned together with the collections called “Brukenthal Heritage” to the Evangelical Church C.A. Sibiu. All these exceptional values can be viewed following the conclusion of a loan agreement between the Brukenthal Museum (Romanian Government, Culture Ministry) and Evangelical Church C.A. Sibiu. As a result of this agreement, the museum has accomplished unprecedented national and international projects.

The exhibitions in this building includes, on the first and second floor, Baroque salons, Samuel von Brukenthal’s “apartment”, Sofia von Brukenthal’s “apartment”, art galleries, a vintage library, curiosities collection and the masterpieces gallery of the Brukenthal collection.

These cultural values belong to the European art, to painters and important painting schools from Europe (Flemish, Italian, French, German etc.). These exhibitions are included in the guides dedicated for adults¹⁵ or children¹⁶.

In the same building we created new exhibitions and storage spaces, such as the warehouse and exhibition space for maps and a painting restoration laboratory in the area of the European painting warehouse.

The Brukenthal Palace also provides space both for the Anatolian Carpet warehouse linked to the exhibition with the same type of cultural values, and the Brukenthal Library, which is an impressive collection of incunabula and prints that cover hundreds of years of writing.

We found Brukenthal Palace in 2006 with the

¹³ Luca, 2007a; Luca 2007b (second edition in 2009); Luca 2007.

¹⁴ First guide of the new museum: Luca (coord.) 2007c; Luca – Hrib 2010.

¹⁵ Hrib 2007.

¹⁶ Hrib 2009.

attics, cellars and courtyards filled with garbage. Today all the cellars house exhibitions like: *Gothic: trăirea neo-gothică vs. Modelul iluminist*¹⁷ or *Copii în ghips după sculpturi celebre* or the general archive of the museum.

Finally, in the temporary exhibition halls hundreds of projects for all ages and tastes have been made, some of which are included in catalogues and books¹⁸.

We cannot end this presentation of the art collections without mentioning the *Blue House*, a construction located in Grand Square, no. 4. Also a historic monument, this building is attached to the east side of the Brukenthal Palace. We decided to move Romanian Art collections of the Brukenthal National Museum to the second floor of the Blue House where a permanent exhibition and a warehouse were placed.

The entrance to the Permanent exhibition starts directly from the Brukenthal Palace, which is – consequently – an integral part of the art exhibition.

In the same building there are also housed laboratories/restoration workshops for textiles, carpets, leather, papers, stones, woods, wood paintings – divisions of the museum’s restoration laboratory, which is an independent department, successor of Sibiu’s Zonal Restoration Laboratory¹⁹.

The *Blue House* was the place where the initial works from 2006–2007 were carried out: the debris removal from bridges and cellars, the yards redesign, replacing of the heating system, toxic components evacuation from laboratories and much more. The general evaluation and restoration of the new exhibitions²⁰, the multi-media room, warehouses, laboratories and service spaces from the building were concluded in 2008–2009²¹.

We mentioned several times, and we will mention again, the achievements of the Restoration and Conservation Section. We must take note of the fact that most of their employees based their theoretical training following the specialized courses of the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu.

Finally, the multi-media room mentioned earlier is a unique project on its own, for following the

¹⁷ Hrib 2010.

¹⁸ Ordeanu 2006; Ordeanu 2007; Hrib 2008; Mureșan 2007; Mureșan 2009; Mesea 2012; Mesea, Tiță 2014; Mesea 2014.

¹⁹ Barbu (coord.) 2015.

²⁰ Luca 2006, 108–110.

²¹ Part of the works was done with european funds, in a program governed by the Ministry of Culture and Brukenthal National Museum.

redesign and implementation of modular lighting systems, microclimate maintenance system, projection, sound, movable walls, special floors, exhibition or conferences systems, is among the few of this type in Romania.

In the end, the *Art Section* fulfils its role through the *Contemporary Art Museum*, a building located on Tribunei Street, no. 4, Sibiu, a historical monument. Here, on the ground floor, temporary exhibition halls have been arranged, on the first floor, an experimental warehouse visitable by the somewhat informed public and on the second floor, other two warehouses that can be visited upon arrangement. In recent years, even if purchase funds for the contemporary art were not available at our museum, we managed to increase the habit of donations, thus creating whole collections or consistent number of pieces that form warehouses with public access, organised in compartments dedicated to the donors.

Thus, we have received hundreds of contemporary art works, covering all categories, many of them extremely valuable, coming from Great Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Hungary and of course, Romania. Unfortunately, the existence of another institution with a different activity in the same building is not beneficial for the Contemporary Art section.

Following this short description, we find that the Brukenthal National Museum owns one of the most complete art collections in Romania.

As mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, everything that happened in the art sections of the Brukenthal National Museum could not have been done without the support of the cultural and educational institutions from Sibiu.

Among them, the most important help was received from “Lucian Blaga” University, especially from its departments in which students prepare for a cultural and scientific future. Thus, the most valuable of these were hired to replace the retirees or staff who left our museum. Through their work they carry on the existence of the beautiful institution initiated by Baron Samuel von Brukenthal.

Another important area of our museum is the *Natural Sciences section*, having over 1.000.000 items, being the second largest collection of this type in Romania.

The Headquarters of the *Natural Sciences Section* is on Cetății Street, no. 1. We completely rebuilt the main exhibition, the temporary exhibition spaces, conference room and warehouses. The attic and the cellars are also operable now. The garden has been reconstructed and now includes a

real size dinosaur collection. The basic exhibition is now extremely modern. The historical monument building served from the very beginning as a natural science museum, being built especially for this purpose²².

Paying respect for the founders, we mounted at the main entrance the busts of 4 of the German naturalists who have worked in Transylvania²³.

Adult²⁴ and student²⁵ guides were also created for this museum. Over the past 15 years hundreds of conferences, symposia, thematic exhibitions and events have taken place in the temporary exhibition hall.

The staff that retired during the last 15 years from the *Natural Science Section*, whether they went to other institutions or simply left, were replaced by young graduates of the specialty department from “Lucian Blaga” University or other universities from Romania.

Second important building and exhibition of the *Natural Sciences Section* is on Școala de Înot Street, no. 4, the *August von Spiess Hunting Museum*. The museum’s guide²⁶, but also the books written by the niece of the owner and by the donor to the Romanian State²⁷, have shown us an activity related to the nature of the colonel with the name mentioned above. With a large garden, this museum is a peaceful place in the central area of our city. Value of the exhibits is special, many of them being awarded with gold medals (nationally or worldwide).

Third part of the *Natural Sciences Section* is the *History Museum of Pharmacy*, located in Small Square, no. 26. Furniture and instrumental areas are original, functional and have a very long age, showing how this kind of establishment existed and functioned in the Sibiu/Hermannstadt city and was connected with the big European pharmacies, especially those from Vienna.

Here we also find Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), the homeopathy founder, whose bust we can find in the Brukenthal Palace’s garden²⁸.

Third largest section of the Brukenthal National

²² Here was *Siebenbürgischer Karpatenverein Association*.

²³ The busts of Eduard Albert Bielz (1827–1898), Michael Fuss (1814–1883), Carl Friedrich Jickeli (1850–1925), Ludwig Johann Neugeboren (1806–1887) was unveiled on the occasion of the centenary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

²⁴ Ciobanu 2010.

²⁵ Cuzepan – Ciobanu 2009.

²⁶ Sandu 2008.

²⁷ Steinn 2005; Steinn 2015; Steinn 2017; Steinn 2018; Steinn 2019.

²⁸ The bust of the Samuel Hahnemann professor was

Museum is the *History Museum – Altemberger House*. It is located on Mitropoliei Street, no. 2 and it is one of the oldest, if not quite the oldest buildings of our museum. Its current architecture resembles the late Renaissance and the so-called neo-gothic.

Here we have basic exhibitions on Prehistory (Paleolithic, Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age), Classical Antiquity (Geto-Dacian Age, Roman Age) and medieval period.

Basic exhibition also has sections dedicated to the history of “industries” developed in the medieval and modern period (related to guilds), but also the recomposed scene of the hall of Sibiu Magistrate and traditional Saxon clothes from that time are placed, because the City Hall functioned in this building for 400 years. Among community mayors we must mention Thomas Altemberger, who donated this building to be the City Hall.

Other basic exhibitions are those from the tower, which contain parts of the precious metallic coin collection of Samuel von Brukenthal and a collection of goldsmith items from the collections of Saxon churches given to the Brukenthal Museum over 100 years ago²⁹.

The exhibition guide is available for adults³⁰ and children³¹. Educational activities take place in the two courtyards of the building³², places where we find the busts³³ – in the first courtyard – and three “self-portraits” of medieval builders placed on a stone column in the small courtyard.

With the launch of major investment works in connection with road, rail or other infrastructures, after 2010 the archaeologists’ team of Brukenthal National Museum made large preventive excavations³⁴.

Thus, in the museum’s warehouses and restoration laboratories, but also in exhibitions, thousands of new pieces have appeared. Dozens of new sites from all historical eras (from Palaeolithic to present) were described in communications and different published works.

As a result many scientific volumes dedicated to already known archaeological sites

unveiled, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

²⁹ Dâmboiu 2005; Dâmboiu 2008.

³⁰ Luca (coord.) 2008.

³¹ Tudorie – Hrib 2009.

³² Hrib *et alli* 2011.

³³ The busts of Knight Hermann, Avram Iancu (1824–1872), Iuliu Maniu (1873–1953), Thomas Nägler (1939–2011) was unveiled, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Romanian Unitary National state.

³⁴ Luca (coordonator) 2012a.

(Turdaş-Luncă³⁵, Hunedoara County, Tărtăria-Gura Luncii³⁶, Alba County) or other totally unknown sites (Cristian³⁷, Cristian I³⁸, Cristian III³⁹, Miercurea Sibiului I⁴⁰, Sibiu County) were published. We’ve reached this knowledge level following the creation of several archaeological repertoires for Banat and Transylvania (Caraş-Severin County⁴¹, Banat⁴², Hunedoara County⁴³, Sibiu County⁴⁴ or Sălaj County⁴⁵). All of these researches have led to a much better, superior, knowledge of the cultural heritage from the researched areas.

The *History Section* of our museum has all the specialized staff (historians, archaeologists, numismatists and conservators) trained at specialized departments within “Lucian Blaga” University from our city.

Within the *History Section*, in the Small Square, no. 22 building, we can find the so-called *Fresco Hall*. Its walls are ennobled with painted scenes comprising realities from the medieval and modern age Sibiu.

Located on the right side of the building that belongs today to Sibiu City Hall, *Fresco Hall* has a vaulted structure and valuable mural paintings, depicting a court scene marked with the year 1631, a biblical scene, an allegorical composition and a hunting scene. The ceiling also has polychrome stucco with the year 1694.

All the works and deeds mentioned above would not have been as successful if they had not been used otherwise than in the subsequent stages of their realization. Therefore, we acted in order to bring back the Brukenthal masterpieces collection from the Romanian National Museum of Art (2006), to laboriously restore the cultural assets of the museum and we began a serious cultural exports program to Romania, Europe and the rest of the world.

First of all, we popularized collections of

³⁵ Luca (coordinator) 2012b; Luca 2018; Luca, 2019a; Luca 2019.

³⁶ Luca 2016 – Academy Award A. D. Xenopol, 2018; Luca, Mărcuți 2018; Luca, Aldea 2019.

³⁷ Luca (coordinator) 2012c.

³⁸ Luca 2015.

³⁹ Luca *et alli* 2017.

⁴⁰ Pinter, Urduzia 2015.

⁴¹ Luca 2004.

⁴² Luca 2010.

⁴³ Luca 2008.

⁴⁴ Luca *et alli* 2003.

⁴⁵ Luca – Gudea 2010.

the Brukenthal National Museum through master pieces in Paris (France)⁴⁶, Gdansk (Poland)⁴⁷, Hertogenbosch (Netherlands)⁴⁸, Berlin (Germany)⁴⁹, Luxembourg⁵⁰ and Istanbul (Turkey)⁵¹. The effect of these exhibitions is special because it drew the attention of the European and world community to the exceptional cultural heritage located in Sibiu/Hermannstadt.

Following these exhibitions, many museums “visited” by the Brukenthal National Museum wanted to respond through similar cultural events at the headquarters of our institution. Unfortunately, the related expenses demanded by law were not accepted and consequently, the exchange was not made (the last example is the exhibition of the Augsburg-Germany Museum which was supposed to be brought in 2021 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Samuel von Brukenthal).

Only Gdansk Museum (Poland) passed these obstacles and brought to Sibiu several exhibitions, extremely enjoyed by the Romanian public and by tourists and guests from Sibiu.

In addition to these exclusive exhibitions, our institution participated in dozens of events along with major museums around the world, in Europe (France, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland and Hungary), United States (Washington), Republic of China (Beijing) or Japan (Tokyo). To our delight, all these participations were also published in exceptional catalogues, which made a direct impact on the international community.

But we did not stop here. Starting with 2012, a big cultural popularization action and cultural exchanges in the country was started: the *Brukenthal cultural axes*. Within this action, exhibitions were held at museums in: Suceava, Baia Mare, Carei, Oradea, Timișoara, Reșița, Făgăraș, Râmnicu Vâlcea and Bucharest. Thus, tens of thousands of visitors were able to enjoy the cultural values of the Brukenthal National Museum in Romania.

Recognition of our museum’s activity is reflected by the Management Award in 2008 given by the Ministry of Culture of Romania; the European Union Award for “Europa Nostra” Cultural

Heritage in 2010, category 4 – Education, training and awareness, access to “The Best in Heritage” (Croatia – Dubrovnik), in 2011; Special National Award “The most promising Romanian Brand” in 2012 and the Award given to us by His Excellency Klaus Werner Iohannis, President of Romania – Cultural Merit decoration in Commander rank, on the 200th anniversary occasion of the opening of Brukenthal Museum to the public – February, 2017.

Our multi secular institution will further improve the results of specialized activity, will collaborate with cultural, scientific or academic institutions and will have, as main goal, preservation of the cultural heritage from our custody as well as education through culture.

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