

TZIGARA-SAMURCAS AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESERVATION OF POPULAR OBJECTS AND AS A MUSEOGRAPHER AND ETHNOGRAPHER

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Abstract

The work tries to highlight the activity of a complex personality such as Alexandru Tzigara - Samurcaș, who through his efforts made a rich contribution as a museographer and ethnographer having an important role in preserving the objects of folk art. He laid the scientific foundations of museography, pioneering the classification of objects and the introduction of catalogs in the museum. He also played an important role in the establishment of the National Ethnographic Museum in Bucharest and also made an important contribution to the creation of open-air museums. He also had a rich journalistic activity in various newspapers of the time and was an important art critic.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Museography, Monographic research, Open-air museum*

Introduction

"Dimitrie Gusti" National Museum, built in the second half of the 19th century to Alexandru Odobescu's idea, an eminent man of culture, in the form of a pavilion with monuments of popular architecture that will later be developed under the leadership of Alexandru Tzigara - Samurcaș. It envisages bringing to the Museum of Ethnography, National Art, Decorative Art and Industrial Art in Bucharest, founded by him in 1906, "authentic and complete households from the most important regions of Romanians" the first of this genre, being a peasant house in Gorj county [1].

The creation of the Village Museum is the result of historical and field research coordinated by Professor Dimitrie Gusti, founder of the Sociological School in Bucharest. Dimitrie Gusti, as head of the sociology department at the University of Bucharest, organized between 1925-1935, with specialists in various fields and with his students, interdisciplinary monographic research campaigns in many villages from Suceava, Vrancea, Brașov, Maramureș, Hunedoara, Gorj, Buzău etc, counties.

With a special work and based on the experience gained, as well as with the support of the Royal Foundation "Prince Carol", between March and April 1936, in only two months a special open-air museum was built, which was a pioneer for The Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania in the "Hoia" Park in Cluj, founded in 1929 by Professor Romulus Vuia, given that there were only two open-air museums in Europe: the Skansen Museum in Stockholm (Sweden, 1891) and the Bygdøy Museum in Lillehemmen (Norway) [1].

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The museum was organized according to the criteria of authenticity, respect for local traditions, and the translation and reassembly of buildings in the museum were carried out under the supervision of specialists such as Henry H. Sthal and Victor Popa and craftsmen brought from the villages of origin of the monuments.

The role of this museum, as conceived by Dimitri Gusti, as a sociological museum, was to present to visitors the reality of village life, as it was lived by the Romanian peasant.

Tzigara Samurcaș's activity as a museographer

Tzigara – Samurcaș a known art historian, champion in conservation, ethnographer, museographer and journalist held various positions in the National School of Fine Arts at the University of Bucharest and Chernivtsi and he was also a member of the Literary Society, Junimea, representative of traditional Romanian conservatism.

After the establishment of the permanent collection at the World's Fair in Paris, he keeps his interest in crafts which, according to the art conservator Isabelle Longuet (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandru-Tzigara-Samurcaș) [2], have been raised to the status of “national art, the peasantry representing an authentic Romanism”.

Other ethnologists such as Ioana Popescu [3] mention that *“the [Tzigara] collections were to become the argument and the source of inspiration for national ideology and creation”*. Tzigara Samurcaș is also the founder of the private museum of folk-art Casa Minovici and a textile archive, but his main work, as an ethnographer, was the establishment in 1906 of the Museum of Ethnography and National Art in Bucharest, which later became the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, where he held the position of director for a period of forty years and which he intended to call the “Museum of the Romanian People”.

The project of this museum was supported by the then Minister of Education Spiru Haret, and by his predecessor, Titu Maiorescu. This museum will later be called the “Carol I Museum of Ethnography and National Art”.

An *“unusually close”* connection with the royal family, a popular rumor even mentioned that he was the illegitimate son of King Carol I of Romania, a fact reinforced by him, who argued: *“this legend is natural, difficult to verify, but in any case, it is a possible one, since Tzigara – Samurcaș was born in 1872 and Carol I was present on the throne of Romania as Ruler, since 1866”* [4, 5].

In his capacity as director of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, he created two distinct sections, one dedicated to ethnography and the other to sacred art. In this sense, taking over objects of worship that he kept and preserved at the Museum of Antiquities, where he was custodian and where he organized an exhibition of artifacts, which attests to the Roman Empire's rule over Dobrogea and which includes the metopes (rectangular architectural element), Tropaeum Traiani.

His work was appreciated at the time, and was often mentioned in the newspapers of the time. An article in the newspaper *Luceafărul*, 1914 [5] underlined that: *“[He] reorganized the museum and turned it into a true national institution. The rich collections of the Museum are due to the diligence of Mr. Tzigara-Samurcaș”*, and later Mihai Plămădeală [7] highlighted the fact that *“Tzigara's activity had an impact on everything that this Museum has ever meant in the history of Romanian culture”*.

He carried out a rich field activity and collected numerous objects of ethnographic value necessary for the museum. He was very active in Oltenia where, as Ioana Popescu mentions, he was attracted to *“decorated, colorful objects used for holidays”*, and Casa Antonie Mogoș, considered a masterpiece of wood carving, was transported from Gorj County to Bucharest, becoming an important collector's item. An important role in the development of museography was played by his photographic collection, which extended to the Oltenian carpets, which later helped their “taxonomy” (classification).

These "slides on glass", quite difficult to make at that time, were initially kept in the image archive "Alexandru Tzigara - Samurçaş" of the Department, and then, after the death of Tzigara - Samurçaş, to be donated to the Institute of Fine Arts "Nicolae Grigorescu", where they served as teaching material for the courses in aesthetics and art history at the School of Fine Arts started in 1899. Later, part of this archive from the National University of Arts was donated to the Museum of Samurçaş.

Although the authorship of some slides is not certain in all cases, as some belonged to Samurçaş and others to other authors, these are relevant for the richness of information and "their aesthetic strength". Some images have a strictly didactic-documentary role and are "*difficult to submit to an aesthetic analysis*" [4, 5].

Regarding these slides, the images representing the Romanian peasant and the village life at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the ethnologist Ioana Popescu presented three types of perspectives or "looks" on them:

- a. A picturesque perspective "for the eyes and the heart", in which types of peasants, seen as "depositories" of traditional wisdom and values, are presented in "template positions in the realist-poetic style" [3].
- b. A national-romantic perspective of building the national identity, are true "images-show", directed by the photographer.
- c. A militant-sociological documentary perspective, which proposes "truth as the value of the documentary image" is used by Professor Dimitrie Gusti in his attempts [8].

Also, important to mention in his activity are the years when he worked as an evaluator of works at the Secu Monastery and Diocese of Bacău, becoming a member of the Royal Society of Geography and the Society of Architects [9]. Tzigara was the representative of the Romanian curators in European colloquiums: the Congress of Public Art in Liège, Belgium (1905) and the Braunschweig Congress for the Conservation of Art (1906), where he presented a report on the conservation of Romanian monuments [10]. In 1906 he also participated in the 8th International Congress of Art History. Following the participation in this event, he will report to the then Minister of Education, Spiru Haret, on the need to reform the education system to provide talented peasant children with an artistic education, thus developing the education system, by bringing moral and economic reasons.

Another great achievement is the Aman Museum, which opened its doors under his leadership, Tzigara-Samurçaş contributing to the cataloging and preservation of works left by the great Romanian painter, Theodor Aman. Throughout his life, he also had controversies with Ioan Lahovari, whom he accused of poor management of the activities in Carol Park, but also with other contemporaries of the time [11].

It is important to mention his contribution as an adjunct professor of art history at the University of Bucharest, then as a participant in the Great Art Exhibition in Berlin and Italy [12]. He also taught folk art at the Kunstgewerbe museum Berlin and in Austria-Hungary at the "Museum für angewandte Kunst" [2]. In these contexts, his contribution consisted in bringing to the attention of an international public the Romanian art, a fact noticed by Luceafărul magazine: "he arranged the Romanian pavilions, making known for the first time in history the artistic creations of our people. In all the exhibitions he registered successes [6]. A little later he participated in the event "Thisonstelling De Vrouw" in Amsterdam, where he presented a monograph of the Court of Argeş [6].

In 1909 Samurçaş will visit Sweden, Norway and Denmark where he could admire the museums that Skansen, Bygdøy and Lyngby mentioned, but he did not consider them suitable for the Romanian society, but he was inspired by the Nordic Museum which became probably the starting point and model for the museum in Bucharest.

During his lifetime he published a number of books, which came to support the substantiation of his efforts. Among them we mention: "Public Art", which appeared in 1906, in

Bucharest, then the study in German "Denkmälpflege in Rumänien" (Historical Conservation in Romania), which was printed in Karlsruhe [6]. He also wrote a series of bibliographic and critical short story, in the 1907 edition of the volume "Allgemeins Lexicon der bildenden Künstler", then the Aman Catalog of 1908, the essay "What is understood by today's archeology" and the monograph "The Church of the Forest Philippi", the last one in collaboration with Nicolae Ghica –Budești and Gheorghe Balș. It should not be forgotten that in 1906 the volume "Art in Romania" appeared at the Minerva Publishing House, which includes a collection of essays and the monograph "The Museum of the Romanian Nation" [6].

A few years later, in 1911, the volumes "Discussions on Archeology", "Romanian Folk Art" and "Romanian House in Rome" appeared, and in 1912, the monographs: "Romania's Special Exhibition", "History of Art and Its Notes" and "The National Museum of Bucharest". During this period, he was an art critic for the newspapers of the time, such as: Conversations, when he opposed the tendencies of the group Artistic Youth.

In recognition of the results of his work, Tzigara-Samurcaș also received the Bene Merenti medal of the Kingdom of Romania, for cultural services [13].

In 1914 he was the director of the Carol I Foundation [7, 14] and participated in a series of conferences that took place in Austria-Hungary, teaching art classes for the benefit of Romanians in Banat and Transylvania. During this period, he was also concerned with the collection of Transylvanian artifacts that he added to the Museum in Bucharest [6], and in Sibiu, Hermanstadt, he presented a work on the 50 years of development in Romanian art under the patronage of ASTRA. At this conference, Tzigara emphasized that he believed that *"art is an objective reflection of social and cultural development, identifying the process of Westernization, the proclamation of the Kingdom in 1881 and subsequent events, with profound transformation of Romania"* [14]. This presentation, as mentioned, included all his efforts in his artistic creed. Tzigara suggested that they did not find answers in the artistic field, thus contributing to the emergence of a specific Romanian phenomenon, such as the one related to the preservation of artistic heritage. He pointed out that many houses in Bucharest are being replaced by western villas and appreciated the restoration of Horezu Monastery in its original Brancoveanu style, but criticized those who introduced elements of neo-Gothic architecture to Tismana, Bistrița and Arnota Monasteries. He also emphasized the beauty of Ion Mincu's "healthy" neo-Brâncoveanu style, criticizing some muralists and praising the role of Carol I as patron of conservation.

In 1923 Tzigara was also Inspector General of Museums, during this period he revisited the Astra Museum and financially supporting it. Romanian cabinets have named him the national representative of exhibitions such as the Universal Exhibition in Barcelona, Spain, Athens and Greece [9]. He also participated in the 13th International Congress of Art History in Stockholm - Sweden and organized the Romanian pavilion at the Art Conference in Helsinki - Finland. He has received numerous international recognitions for his efforts in museography and ethnography, such as: the homage of the French ambassador to Bucharest, the Order of St. Sava offered by the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia [10].

Tzigara Samurcaș' contributions in ethnographic art

Tzigara-Samurcaș's contributions to museography and ethnography were remarkable for their pioneering nature and considerable volume of works. His entire work has focused on the establishment of the National Museum of Ethnographic and Folk Art. His written works had a documentary character being a true "scientific manifesto" meant to argue before the authorities, the need to establish these museums, motivating their usefulness. Many of his articles were published in the newspapers of the time, starting as already mentioned, with "Literary Conversations", "Romanian Life", "Universe", "Age" etc. or in the form of brochures that have been distributed separately. These articles were later published in the volume entitled "Romanian Museography", being a review of his work as a museographer and presenting his theories related to the

establishment of the Museum of Ethnography and National Folk Art. They are a source of information for those concerned with museography and ethnography, although some principles are no longer valid today. A series of arguments were exaggerated by Tzigara -Samurçaş, who focused and channeled his entire activity in order to establish the National Museum of Ethnographic and Folk Art. To this end, he prepared a scientific basis using the analysis of museums in the country and abroad, but also the knowledge gained in the field of art history.

The passion for museography, said Tzigara-Samurçaş [15], begins in childhood *"in a completely unconscious way, my education in this regard begins in childhood. There I gained the respect of tradition, the love for the so-called antiquities and the passion for their preservation, qualities absolutely necessary for a true Museum curator"* [16]. But his museographic training began in his high school years, then later as a student, he made slides and photographs under the leadership of Al Odobescu and became "custodian-preparator of the Museum of Antiquities" where *"my initiation into the career of museography was then a conscious guidance in this direction constantly preoccupied me"*, mentions Al. Tzigara - Samurçaş [17]. During his student years he will complete his training at the University of Bucharest, and later in Germany in Berlin and Munich, where he will practice in the museum archives. During the holidays he will search the archives of Denmark, Scandinavia, Italy and France and then return to the country through Italy where he will visit a number of museums.

Starting with 1899 and later on was the period in which the idea of creating an ethnographic and national art museum crystallized, an art that he calls "the living art of the Romanian people". The internship of the custodian-preparator at the Museum of Antiquities helped him to know the existing shortcomings by mentioning that "pottery and folk pottery are not presented even by a single object" [18] and fights against the tendency to introduce objects worthless, such as some pieces – "ordinary and uninteresting national costumes" [18].

Samurçaş emphasized that "a Museum is not a simple barn in which the objects are sheltered from rain", "a Museum in the true sense is the best school for the people" [18], so it must be built, as he claimed, by professionals, experts in folk art, but also with the broad participation of the large masses of the public. The collections must be made on a scientific basis, giving "structures an important role". His whole effort was to advocate for the establishment of a national museum: *"We do not have enough artistic wealth to endow several districts of the Capital with one Museum at a time"*. Concentrating them all together, we set up an institute worthy of representing the tradition and artistic pursuits of the Romanian people" [19, 20].

During his time as director of the Museum of Ethnography, National Art, Decorative and Industrial Art, he will organize it on scientific grounds. In this sense, he will divide the museum into two sections: the first one of ethnographic or folk art and the second one with objects of worship.

The ethnographic section is subdivided according to the nature of the objects into textile, wooden and ceramic artifacts. In addition to these sections, there are also metal objects, horn, mother-of-pearl, but also leather objects and decorated eggs.

The author groups them into each section according to their destination. This classification corresponds to the modern requirements of ethnographic museography, given that it also uses local terminology, which denotes the orientation towards ethnography and Romanian folk art. The museum addresses its structure to everyone, both the public and the specialists. "The whole people will have their satisfaction through the Museum. The learned scholar will have at his disposal an archive of documents of the time". He advocates the establishment of a Museum Catalog, which is made on a scientific basis and is intended to apply measures to protect the artistic treasure that involves "the existence of an inventory of all monuments and works of art".

Tzigara-Samurçaş considers that the only possibility to purchase ethnographic pieces to enrich the museum's collections is the "scientific field investigation". This raises the issue of saving traditional heritage in order to prevent the abandonment of artistic crafts by alienating

pieces, distorting or transforming models. Valuable pieces he mentioned "were lost through the attics of peasant houses without their owners knowing their importance."

Tzigara-Samurç also played a special role in the purchase of artifacts for the Village Museum from Antonie Mogoș's house in the village of Ceaura – Gorj, which was ceded to the museum when its owner and builder demolished it to build a house made from bricks [21]. This peasant house was considered a Romanian architectural monument called "*architectural jewel*".

As mentioned, Tzigara - Samurcaș emphasizes the research and field acquisition of museum pieces, noting that many pieces are lost and others undergo transformations of the actual models or artistic message.

Throughout his activity, he focused his attention on the museums in the country and abroad with the critical eye of the specialist, emphasizing the qualities and offering numerous suggestions for remedying some deficiencies. Throughout his activity, he always recommends the establishment of village museums in favor of which he mentions "*there is no need to insist here, they are useful even to large museums, which from these obscure centers for the proud of the cities, they can acquire, by exchange or acquisition, characteristic specimens from different regions*" [22].

However, he had some inconsistencies about open-air museums, first he was attracted to these forms of museum by supporting them, but later on his enthusiasm diminished.

He was a complex personality at the time, between 1900-1940, being one of the few specialists in museography and being aware of the importance of those who manage these museums. "*A museum director*" he said, "*is responsible not only for the superior authority on which he depends, but to a greater extent for the general public*" [23].

Throughout his career he had a strong critical spirit and made efforts to establish the museum, often fighting with the authorities for indifference to the culture of the people. In this sense, he uses all his means, starting from articles to direct attacks on rulers, Parliament, etc. [24, 25].

In the last period of his life, he actively campaigned for the extension of the museum networks including the less importance ones, such as those in the village, emphasizing the need to inventory objects in catalogs to avoid alienation.

As many personalities of the time have pointed out, Tzigara - Samurcaș was an "*explosive multipurpose personality*" in the first half of the century, but the following generations did not speak very clearly about his ideas. He was a rather incommode and inflexible personality mentioning "*that he knew in moments of balance to keep his verticality and to despise any compromise*" [26].

Over time, Romanian and foreign literature [9-13, 26-29] presented the professional merits of Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș as a sociologist and ethnographer, who with profound erudition highlighted rural architecture (old buildings with constructive, functional and ornamental elements, specific some geographical areas, representative for cultural Romania). These, through an authentic landscape integration and having in their composition cultural goods from the inventory of some valuable peasant households, have become very attractive objectives in the tourist circuit of some museums of the Romanian village.

Conclusions

Based on the historiographical analysis regarding the Museum of the Village in Bucharest and the contribution of the Romanian sociologist and ethnographer Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, the work highlights his reference contributions during the period he contributed to the development, these cultural institutions, which over time have become a great vernacular collection, a value recognized nationally and worldwide.

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