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The Avatars of Nourishment. Industry and Metaphysics

Șerban Anghelescu

Ideally and symbolically, the European collector of the 16th and 17th centuries was the owner of the universe compressed into the cupboards of curiosity cabinets: „The ambition to include a whole national territory in the collection, as well as the escape into the exotic realm by going beyond the boundaries generally confirm the desire to encompass the whole world spatially, horizontally. This is why the curiosity cabinet’s vertical hierarchy with its three successive stages – from *Naturalia* to *Artificialia* and up to *Scientifica* – was intersected with a horizontal plateau that tended to embrace the whole globe. To a certain extent, the curiosity cabinets were concurrently a microcosmos and a blur of time“ (Horst Bredekamp: 2007, 37).

Constantin (Dinicu) Golescu, an enlightened boyar, was fascinated to discover in his travels (1824, 1825, 1826) the Viennese and Hungarian museums. He was not aware of any system for classifying the collections, such as the one formulated by Samuel Quiccheberg in *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatrum amplissimi* (1565) and put to use by the Habsburg cabinets in Ambras and Prague (Bredekamp: 2007, 32-37). Nevertheless, while visiting the museums of Pesta, he wrote down the exhaustive „capture“ of objects: „All kinds of metalsșș, and the soil they have been extracted from, as well as skins of *all* species of

animals *all over* Hungary, both those living on earth and underground, those that fly and those that live in the sea, some preserved in spirits, others so beautifully stuffed that they cannot be distinguished from those alive.“ (s.n.) The species and the great variety of beings and things scattered in space and time are „captured“, they go into the captivity of a totalitarian fiction embodied by the museum and come close to each other by eliminate real huge distances.

The Renaissance demons of taxonomy and universality have made their presence felt again in the organization of universal exhibitions. Only the old hierarchy has disappeared. The 1900 Universal Exhibition held in Paris displayed 18 groups and 121 classes to the participants. Here are the 18 groups whose value or chronological scale can hardly be recognised: I. *Éducation. Enseignement*; II. *Oeuvres d’art*; III. *Instruments et procédés des lettres, sciences et arts*; IV. *Matériel et procédés généraux de la mécanique*; V. *Électricité*; VI. *Génie civil. Moyens de transport*; VII. *Agriculture*; VIII. *Horticulture. Arboriculture*; IX. *Forêts. Chasse. Pêche. Cueillettes*; X. *Aliments*; XI. *Mines. Métallurgie*; XII. *Décoration et mobilier des édifices publics et des habitations*; XIII. *Fils. Tissus. Vêtements*; XIV. *Industrie chimique*; XV. *Industries diverses*; XVI. *Économie sociale. Hygiène, assistance publique*;

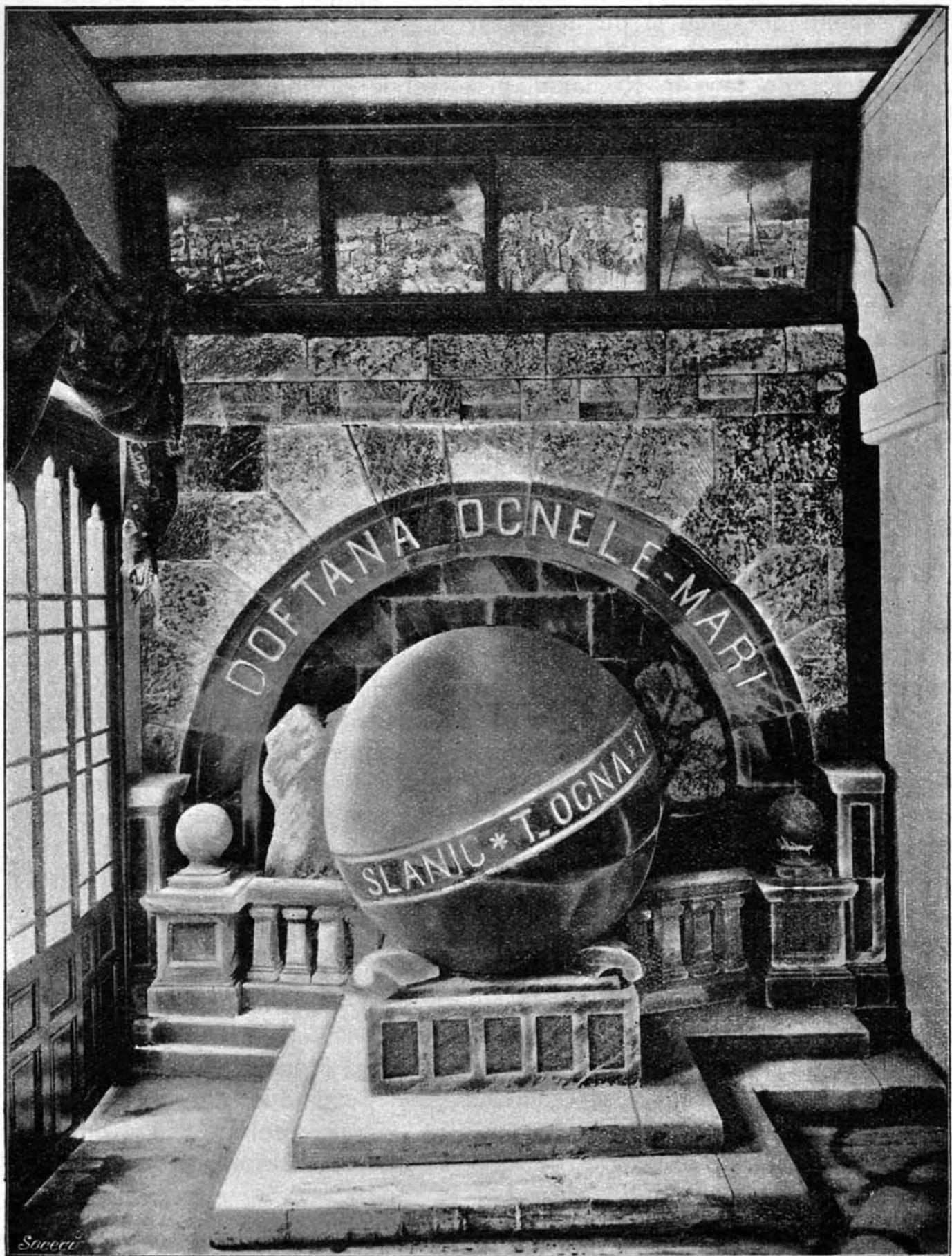
XVII. *Colonisation*; XVIII. *Armée de terre et de mer*.

Raportul general asupra participării României la Expoziția Universală din Paris (General Report on Romania's Participation in the Paris Universal Exhibition) drafted by Commissary General D.C. Ollănescu could have confined itself to an accurate record of expenses, displays and awards but in fact it is a remarkable description of Romania from which we provide you an anecdotal quotation. There were 464 engines, 1,009 carriages lit by rapeseed oil, they manufactured ordinary and perfumed soap, shoe polish, ointments and pomade, we had four 2480 hp paper and cardboard factories and a ruling capital of 2,350,000 francs, the „Filaret“ Matches Factory in Bucharest – spread on 7 ha, its output amounting to 5,675,332,000 matches per year. In the Romanian tobacco pavilion based on Quay d'Orsay „the back wall was covered by a painting of the country's coat-of-

arms, all made of matches whose heads were dipped in colours specific to the topic“ (Ollănescu: 1901, 399). In 1824, Dinicu Golescu admired in Vienna such a great wonder that it could not be depicted in words: „Even the Austrian symbol, a two-headed gryphon, could be seen on a large room ceiling, looking as if it were painted; it was made of such artfully arranged arms that, if somebody had looked up, they would have believed that it was painted; and, to the best of my knowledge, the wing feathers were made of swords whereas the chest feathers were made of smaller knives. I am fully aware of my hopeless endeavour to describe it, for the reader will not be satisfied with my account and will be unable to think how this composition of arms could stand for a painted gryphon; this is why I said that he who will not see this wonder is worth being punished.“ (Dinicu Golescu: 1963, 66-67)



Secțiunea alimentară la Expoziție



Expoziția Sărei, Globul de 10.000 de kilograme

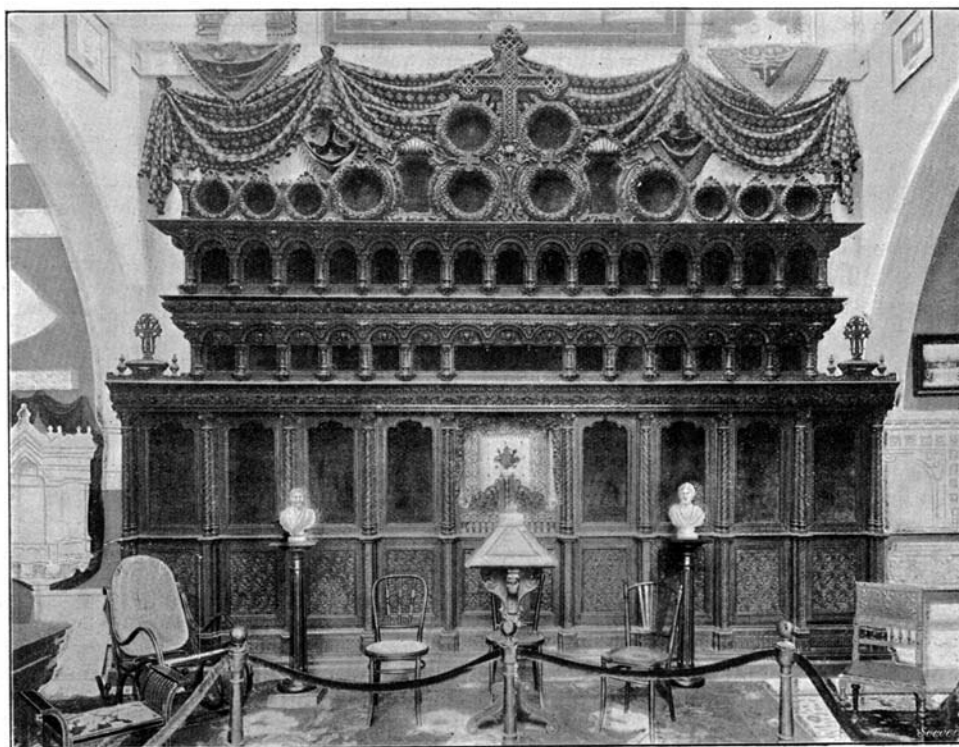
The Commissary General constructed the image of a country from lists and figures. Universal exhibitions stage civilisation as a measurable, perfectible, saleable production. If I am not wrong, the author of the report yields to „poetic“ enthusiasm twice. The wall carpets, the rugs, the pillow sheets, the curtains are soft, transparent, thin, the legs are lovely stretched on the carpet, the head rests on the silk thread-woven cushion, the eyes rejoice at the gentle sunbeams that stream through the silk curtains. Statistics and the pace of production are interrupted by a voluptuous rest. „It’s such a sweet sight“ (Ollănescu: 1901, 363).

The agricultural section of a completely agrarian country had to have an unparalleled visual impact: „First of all, exhibitions are meant to please the eyes. Thus, agriculture can hardly vie with the grand creation of art and industry. Except for animals, agricultural products become

important only due to their amount, for once they are considered in particular, they are usually insignificant and with no external charm. This is why it is very difficult to present the public – in an exhibition – the agricultural sector of a country in order to heighten the non-connoisseurs’ interest and to convince them of its economic importance.

Failing to present agricultural products at great international exhibitions would actually be a big gap in the production process of a country and, unlike the other sectors of industry, its value would be severely compromised. This is why, the detailed explanations recorded here did not make me hesitate to capture at the scene the influence exerted by the exhibition of our cereals on the crowd. The exhibits themselves could not possibly offer these explanations.

This exhibition could undoubtedly have been limited to the presentation of a few types or



Țâmplă de biserică de nuc sculptat
(Penitenciarul de la Mîslea)



Expoziția vinurilor și spirtoaselor

Sococă

samples of cereals meant to prove a particular degree of superiority. However, apart from that, I also insisted on giving a deep-seated view of our entire methodically classified agricultural activity that is easy to examine and appreciate – as it actually was. Arranged in the area of the military school’s machine gallery, our agricultural section was not only diverse, but also originally designed:

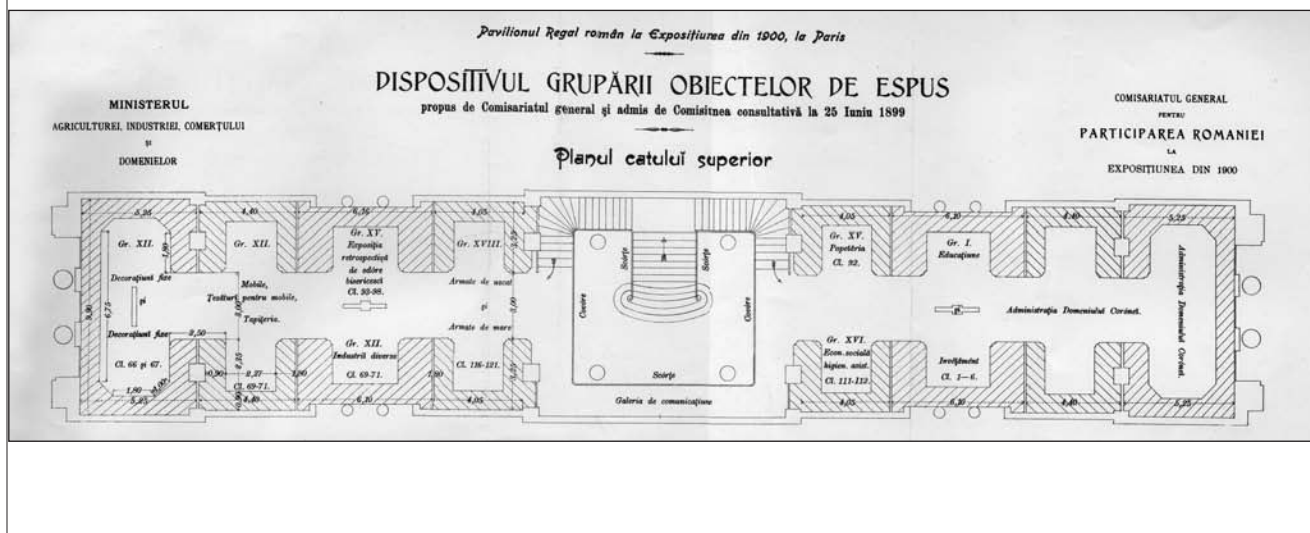
Made from Romanian white fir wood, a construction with pyrographed national ornaments was erected on an area of 180sqm. It was made in the workshops of the Bucharest military arsenal. Together with the gates, the attic, and the shingled eaves, it symbolised the surrounded yard of a well-to-do peasant who used to put all kinds of grains, dry vegetables and seeds harvested from his fertile fields on small or high shelves, function of their quality and category. Piles and rows of red, yellow and white corncobs decorated the entire house, hanging in all corners under twisted rows of red hemp; the wheat, barley, oat, flax, and millet sheaves proudly raised their moustache-like ears in all corners whereas the wealth of multicoloured wheat, hard wheat, Algerian wheat, Banat wheat with its ripe and swollen kernels delighted the avid eyes of the viewers through the glass bottles of all kinds and sizes; the bunch of Cinquantin red corn, pig-noletto, horsetooth-like and Moldavian corn

were each and all shining brighter than gold; the same with the full-grained black rapeseed, white-coloured two-row barley and golden or grey oat!

Pots of white, bluish-grey, red, flat, round or oblong beans, of green and yellow peas, of flax, hemp seeds, poppy seeds, white and black mustard seeds, of white, green and black-grained resin, of millet, buckwheat and sunflower seeds were lined up out there. If you turned around, you could see flocks of wool of all sorts and colours, washed and unwashed, combed or scissored. A great white and frayed bunch of cotton that was sown and sprouted in Isaceea lies next to them lies as living proof that this plant typical of warm lands might grow and be cultivated under the scorching sun of our Dobrogea.

Here are white and orange honey combs, crystal-clear and shining honey stored in bottles. Here is beehive wax and the queens deftly made by the Lipovenians from Balabanca and Galați. Light as a feather, the white, delicate cocoons deliberately rise in clusters, leaving an aristocratic mark on the corner where the well-to-do peasant hung them as a token of respect for his house of plenty which is already familiar to us.

There were 328 (individual and collective) exhibitors in Class 39 (agricultural food supplies of vegetal origin) where our appointed Delegate was D. George Nicolescu, the Head of the Department of Agriculture. The international jury

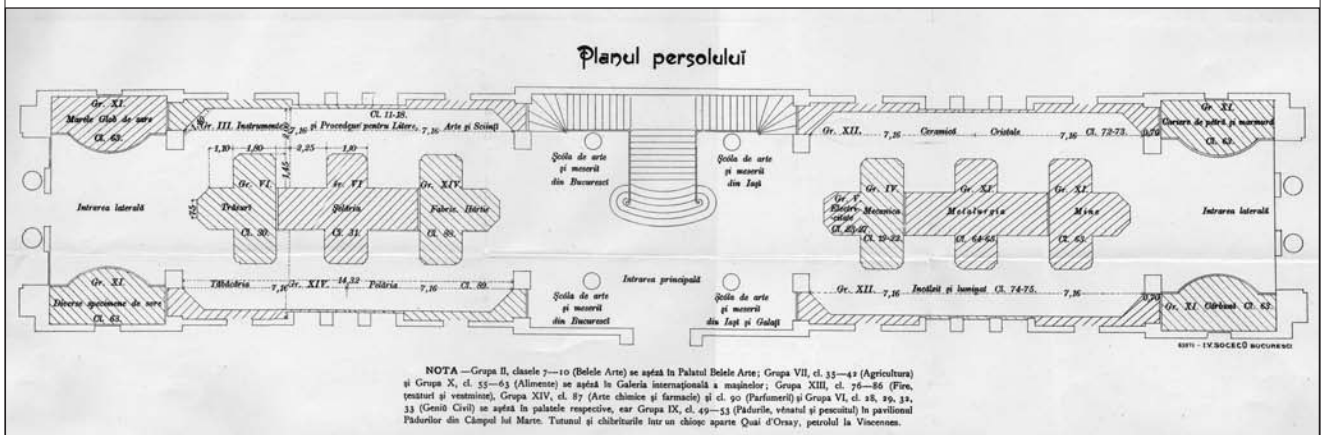


rewarded them as follows: 5 great awards, 85 gold medals, 76 silver medals, 136 bronze medals and 9 honourable mentions. The sum total of 311 awards represents 94%.“ (Olănescu: 1901, 228-229)

Unfortunately, no visitor to the exhibition could have understood the verbal show invented by the author of the text who is the only privileged viewer. The eye sees everything by means of words. The sonorous Romanian language, the rhythm of enumerations, the contrasting forms and colours of the grains and seeds, and the shining honey strictly depend on the materiality of the verb.

The food was exhibited in a separate agricultural section, but also in a hunting and fishing one. Group X contained 8 classes: 55. Materials and procedures used in the food industry; 56. Bakery products and their derivatives; 57. Bakeries and pie shop products; 58. Meat, fish, vegetable and fruit cans; 59. Sugars and confectionery, spices and appetizers; 60. Wines and brandies; 61. Syrups and liquors: various spirits, industrial alcohols; 62. Various drinks. All through 1900, the six Romanian can factories prepared pepper, artichoke, okras, grain, peas, beans, marrows, parsley, tomatoes, asparagus, tarragon, sour cherries, plums, apricots, peaches, bullaces, raspberry, gooseberries, great sturgeon, common sturgeon, dried herring, Danube mackerel, herring, pork, beef, veal. The sugar

factories used to display their manufacturing process that ranged from syrup to the refined sugar loaf. Capșa, Economu, Bella-Vista confectioneries displayed sweets, jams, preserved fruit, cakes, plated chocolate or the famous pistachio Turkish delight. The beverages were artistically presented, function of type, origin and quality. „Located in the machine gallery, near the Swedish stand, the entrance to the beverage stand designed at the Paris Exhibition was shaped like a vine arbour with a great iron-circled oak barrel on top of it. On both sides of the door were another two barrels with groups of small and big bottles that continued to spread everywhere among garlands, trophies and pyramids blended with vine and grapes. A 10-meter long and 1.50-meter wide double case lied on the lateral side. It contained bottled and labelled white and black wines ordered according to vineyards and categories of exhibitors. The spirits were classified by type and quality and arranged on the racks and walls inside the stand. Three large oak-carved cupboards, which were arranged near the left wall, contained the gas cylinders and the beer barrels of the Bragadiru, Luther and Oppler factories in Bucharest.“ (Ollănescu: 1901, 315) The forty-six spirits factories used yeast to fatten 25,000 cattle. Each factory had comfortable stables. Romania really feeds us.



The French architect Camille Formigé designed the Romanian pavilions and the building of the Romanian restaurant after he had drawn old churches and monasteries during his studies abroad. This may be suggestive of the building of the restaurant which „symbolised our old countryside house by shape, division and colour. The porch columns were the perfect copy of Antim Monastery’s columns whereas the cornices and the enamelled ornaments reminded of those in the church of Hârlău and in the Princely St. Nicholas Church of Iași. They produced a wonderful effect!“ (Ollănescu: 1901, 56). The site was perfectly designed for conveying the sacredness of nourishment. It enjoyed an extraordinary success: „The *Restaurant* was the first to be inaugurated in Bucharest on the 1/13th of May. According to the contract, Mr. *Ioan Doiciu*, our Concessionaire, had built it on the pillar of a first-class foundation. The finest Romanian and French cuisine, the most exquisite national and foreign beverages, the most reputed fiddlers (Pădureanu and Ciolac), the fast, kind waiters who served without being noisy noise, the furniture in good taste that was worthy of being admired, the attractive and joyful restaurant, the nice host ready to please everyone made it soon become the most elegant, the most visited and the most appreciated restaurant presented at the exhibition.

Famous politicians, artists, bankers and tycoons as well as French and foreign celebrities visited us and came back again to taste our dishes and to applaud the most thrilling songs performed by our fiddlers“ (Olănescu: 1901, 37)

In the Romanian Peasant Museum nourishment is conceived and exhibited in its symbolic dimensions. Nourishment means to us a natural passage from daily life to metaphysics, nourishment means sacrifice, initiation, alms. The 1900 Universal Exhibition is overwhelmingly industrial and laic par excellence. Its exhibits lacked any deep symbolism and intrinsic beauty, except for exceptional cases. Arranged in symmetric rows that were part of garlands and cable mouldings or of cylinders, pyramids and spheres, things became beautiful by merging with figures viewed as aesthetic by nature. Wheat was not the symbol of Christ. It was multicoloured, hard or Algerian. It had glassy, floury and transient kernels. In 1885, Gh. Dem. Teodorescu had published in *Poezii populare române (Romanian Folk Verse) Colinda lui Christos (Christmas Carol)* in which the crucified body gave birth to wheat, wine, and holy oil. His contemporaries looked anxiously in the opposite direction: modernity. The ritual life of peasant things passed unnoticed even in *The Ethnographic Museum of National, Decorative, and Industrial Art* founded in 1906.

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