

Ten Years National Anthropological Museum: Review

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National Anthropological Museum is a scientific, educational and cultural institution that presented anthropological studies of the Bulgarian population and the people who inhabited the Bulgarian lands in the past. These results known to a limited circle of specialists were not available to the general public. The creation of the permanent exhibition and the subsequent opening of the National Anthropological Museum on March 21 2007, contributing to the promotion of anthropological knowledge. Amid the data for the historic and cultural development and religious beliefs in different eras are presented physical types of people, knowledge about illnesses and injuries that have left marks on the bones, and medical and ritual influence on them. The museum is the youngest in the structure of BAS and it is an integral part of the Institute of Experimental Morphology, Pathology and Anthropology.

On March 21 2017 is the tenth anniversary of the opening of the permanent exhibition of the National Anthropological Museum. Designed to promote anthropological research in Bulgaria, the museum has become a center of attraction for those seeking answers to questions such as “Who are we?”, “Where did we come from” and “What happens to us?”

The beginning of the museum is associated with the creation of a traveling exhibition “Man in the Past” at the Institute of Experimental Morphology and Anthropology (now the Institute of Experimental Morphology, Pathology and Anthropology), BAS realized by corresponding member of BAS prof. Yordan Yordanov. The interest shown by various groups of Bulgarian society as well by foreign experts and visitors of Bulgaria is a reason to proceed with the establishment of the National Anthropological Museum as a separate structure to IEMPAM, BAS.

The museum exposition is built in compliance with the two main principles in museology: the thematic and the chronological. At the same time it is in connection to the main exposition material - human bone remains found during archaeological excavations of necropolises, shrines, temples and settlements from the corresponding historical periods studied in the territory of modern Bulgaria [1].

Since its opening in 2007, ten years already, a team at the National Anthropological Museum, has been working in several directions. The first goal has been to make



Fig. 1. Book of impressions, responses and recommendations

the museum more accessible and attractive to visitors. The efforts in this direction can clearly be seen by those reflected in the “Book of impressions, responses and recommendations” (**Fig. 1**). This is a stimulus, necessary for the team to continue in the future in the promotion of anthropology as a science and of the National Anthropological Museum to the public as scientific, cultural and educational center.

In parallel with the permanent exhibition the museum realizes temporary exhibitions aimed at attracting wide public and promoting the possibilities of anthropology. Such exhibitions are *The monastery of Mostich* with guest professor Kazimir Popkonstantinov (2009), *Prominent Bulgarian anthropologists. Kadanov and Balan* (2010), *Modern Anthropology* (2014), and the latest dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the opening of the museum - *Anthropology in Bulgaria* and many others.

European Night of Museums, was born in France and became a tradition in Bulgaria, has become awaited event of the museum public. Despite its tender age and in competition with the leading museums in the capital, the National Anthropological Museum managed to establish itself as an attractive place for “The Night”. The events which were organized in cooperation with scientists from the Department Anthropology and Anatomy of IEMPAM at BAS became desirable and sought in these ten years. Diverse program and submitted interesting facts and processes in the field of anthropology attract the attention of a large audience, and the established traditions of anthropological measurements have become an anticipated event in Night of Museums (**Fig. 2**).

In 2016, with the partial financing by the Ministry of Culture, National Anthropological Museum implemented a project with an educational focus “Funeral practices in our lands from Prehistory to the Middle Ages”, including a temporary exhibition. This initiative has created new opportunities for collaboration with other museums and universities by presenting their material findings and research activities in the exhibition. Its main purpose is to acquaint the general public with the funeral practices from different historical eras and the significance of scientific research and analysis, as well as the promotion of results of the studies. The interdisciplinary approach set out in the project, allow to outline clearly the important components in the study of human – anthropo-



Fig. 2. Opening ceremony of the Night of Museums

logy and archeology. By visualizing the different burial practices from prehistory to the Middle Ages, the changes in our lands during the historical process – ethnic, religious, social stratification are illustrated. The educational program included in the project as a module to the temporary exhibition allowed the creation of sustainable product combining social and creative activities aimed at the promotion of anthropology as a science, on the one hand, and on the other, the inclusion of this type of museum in support of interactive learning in museums and schools. The exhibition caused serious interest among both the ordinary visitors and the specialized audiences. The inclusion of training modules proved to be the winning model to attract teenage audience, which wants to watch, co-experience, to participate in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills and to be widely informed.

Over the years, through good cooperation with various educational institutions (schools, universities), the National Anthropological Museum has become an educational center where the knowledge of history, biology and art are completed with the new knowledge in anthropology. This is the second major direction of development in which the museum team focuses its efforts. The museum lessons are combined with interactive sessions designed to engage the learner in the process of acquiring knowledge. This is possible thanks to the available copies of original exhibits and the good equipment, allowing various demonstrations and screenings of specially selected films. In interaction with schools through museum lessons and practical activities, the museum has the following targets:

- formation of permanent interest among youngsters to the museum as a source of knowledge in biology, history; anthropology;
- widening the knowledge of the material culture of different eras by studying the exposition;
- to stimulate analytical thinking and creative imagination.

The main museum educational programs conducted in the museum are:

1. Practical exercise: “The human body”.

The program is designed for students from grade 5th to 11th. Activities pass through clearly familiarizing students with the human anatomy on the model of the skeleton.

Conducting these exercises in an informal environment, such as the museum, the students more easily and affordably acquire knowledge about:

- What does the human body represent?
- How does it operate?
- What are the key elements of the human body?
- What is the bone?
- How are reflected injuries upon us?

2. Practical exercise: “Man and his environment” .

The program is designed for students of different ages and is bound to learn from these historical periods - Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance and so on. For each historical period has developed its own terms of reference, consistent with the exhibition resources of NAM, which include:

- Information on particular individual including: sex, age, physical characteristics, ethnicity;
- Information on diseases and applied medical practices;
- Information on the applied specific ritualistic effects;
- Information on the funeral rites for the period.

In its work to attract new audiences National Anthropological Museum organizes lectures titled “Lesson from the Past” aimed at secondary school students. The cycle of lectures and exercises are based on educational programs for students in prehistory, medieval history and modern times. The smooth introduction of these periods contributes to the chronological order of exposure. Representing the past through the dynamics of societies and the world as well as people’s perceptions of them, this course lectures reveals the main features of the past and modern eras. The emphasis in conducting “Lesson from the Past” is on the students to gain knowledge about basic historical problems and processes to master skills that allow them to orient in the huge flow of information that will help them in the process of building their own positions [2]

Since its inception in the spring of 2007 until now the National Anthropological Museum has passed a long way in becoming recognizable to the general public, but its development does not stop here. In the plans for the future of the museum stays the creation of a National Ossuary as an integral part of it. The purpose of this unique for Bulgaria repository is to preserve human bone remains of generations of people who lived in the Bulgarian lands from ancient times to the present day. The accumulated until now material and the findings from the upcoming archaeological studies will be subjected to specialized research. It includes systematization of data objects and periods and interdisciplinary research of the structure.

If necessary human bone remains will be preserved and restored. They will be stored for subsequent work of all Bulgarian and foreign experts dealing with anthropological issues. The provision, collection and storage of human bone remains from throughout the country in the National Ossuary have to be regulated by legislation and coordination with the institutes of the Academy and museum system in the country.

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