

CORNEL CONSTANTIN PLEȘA
(3 August 1931–15 August 2008)

Corneliu Pleșa, cave biologist was born on August 3rd, 1931 in Cluj. He attended the primary school in his hometown and in 1940, at the age of 9, he moved to Bucharest as a war refugee, city where he lived until 1949. He started the high school education in Bucharest, at Archiepiscopal High School *Sfântul Iosif* and returned to Cluj where he continued his formation at *Gheorghe Barițiu* high school. After graduation and in spite of his family wish to become a medicine doctor, Corneliu Pleșa entered Natural Science Faculty (pedagogic section). He graduate in 1954 and in the same year he was employed as a Research Assistant at the Institute of Speleology, institution at the time under the auspices of “Babeș” University.

He will be promoted to Scientific Researcher in 1956, when the Institute of Speleology from Cluj became a Department of the newly founded institute in Bucharest. In 1967 he was promoted to Senior Researcher III and defended his PhD in biology in 1969. In 1990, Corneliu Pleșa became Senior Researcher II, and in 1998 Senior Researcher I.

Dr. Corneliu Pleșa, a devoted biologist and field researcher, was deeply interested in all manifestations of the living nature. He had great passion for the natural world and he dedicated his scientific life to the study of groundwater fauna. During his career, he investigated more than 650 karst phenomena, especially caves in Romania, Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, former Yugoslavia, Austria, and Switzerland. He participated to several expeditions and speleological explorations in Romania, mapping over 10 km of cave passages and, together with his colleagues from the institute, discovered new caves or new passages in caves. He was also deeply interested in cave photography performing over 5000 karst-related photos.

Dr. Corneliu Pleșa’s main scientific interests were: biospeleology, namely the systematics and taxonomy of subterranean cyclopoids (Crustacea, Copepoda); biology of fresh, marine and brackish subterranean waters. His PhD thesis, *Investigations upon reproductive periodicity in troglobiont cave crustaceans*, is a milestone in the research of cave aquatic fauna from Romania. Supervised by Dr. Theodor Busnitza (Corresponding Member of the Romanian Academy at that time), his thesis is an ample investigation of three aquatic cave crustaceans, cyclopoids, bathynellacea and isopods, in one of the most important caves in Pădurea Craiului Mountains (north-western Romania), the Vadu Crișului Cave.

He was a worldwide specialist in systematics of cyclopoid copepods, continuing the work and the famous school on groundwater fauna initiated in Cluj by



Fig. 1. – Taking samples with Karaman-Chappuis method in Vadu Crișului Cave (north-western-Romania).



Fig. 2. – Presenting the *Biospeologica* collection: C. Pleșa, Ch. Juberthie, D. Coman, and C. Delamare-Deboutteville (from left to right) (in 1970, Centenaire of Institute of Speleology “Emil Racoviță”).

Pierre Alfred Chappuis, deputy director of the institute between 1922 and 1948. It was P.A. Chappuis who coordinated his first steps in the knowledge of systematics and taxonomy of this group of crustaceans, leading Dr. Pleșa’s PhD thesis in the

first years of research. They had an intensive correspondence during this time, changing also cave material collected from Romanian caves. At the beginning of his research on cyclopoid copepods he had also a fruitful correspondence with other known researchers in the field of systematics and taxonomy of copepods: René Jeannel and Claude Delamare-Deboutville (France), Friedrich Kiefer and Karl Lang (Germany). P.A. Chappuis and C. Delamare-Deboutville named a new microcerberid isopod, *Microcerberus pleșai* Chappuis & Delamare-Deboutville, 1958, in his honor. The species was discovered in one of the cave intensively investigated by Corneliu Pleșa during his PhD research.

Dr. Pleșa's scientific activity focused on cave and interstitial cyclopoids mainly from north-western Romania. However, he took part in the scientific campaigns organized by his colleagues from Bucharest in the karst of Banat, Mehedinți Plateau and Dobrogea. Over the years he collected a vast scientific material from caves, groundwater, hypogean and epigean habitats (both terrestrial and aquatic) selecting a huge amount of specimens (over 150,000). By studying such an impressive number of organisms of various aquatic crustacean groups, he published the results in more than 50 scientific papers in national and international journals. He described 1 genus and 13 new species for science. He was interested also in collecting other scientific material like floristic, archeological, palaeontological and mineralogical samples. He enlarged his research interests in the field of hydrobiology where he conducted rigorous research on biology of hyper-saline lakes (1979–1984) and on fishing pools in Cluj County (1983). Dr. Corneliu Pleșa was interested also in the general aspects of karstology. He was co-author of several monographs (more than 20 publications) and conducted researches in this field.

Dr. Pleșa was also a promoter of cave science in the amateur caving community, having more than 250 participations at national conferences, the majority of them accompanied by the photos taken during the cave trips; he published over 25 articles, books and guides books for cave amateurs in various national and international journals.

He obtained several awards for his scientific activity, *i.e.* from the Education Ministry in 1996 for the article, *Flora and vegetation of the natural reserve Crișul Repede Gorges* and “Emil Racovitza prize of the Romanian Academy”, for his collaboration to the volume *Resultats des expeditions biospeleologiques cubano-roumaines a Cuba*. His enthusiasm for cave photography was appreciated at several international contests, *i.e.* Brussels (1958, 1974).

Dr. Corneliu Pleșa officially retired on the 1st of June 1999 but he continued his scientific activity at the “Emil Racoviță” Institute of Speleology until April 2003 when he suffered a stroke. Dr. Corneliu Pleșa past away on the 15th August 2008, aged 77. By his loss, the Cluj Department of the “Emil Racoviță” Institute of Speleology lost one of the most prominent researchers on subterranean copepods and aquatic cave biology in Romania.

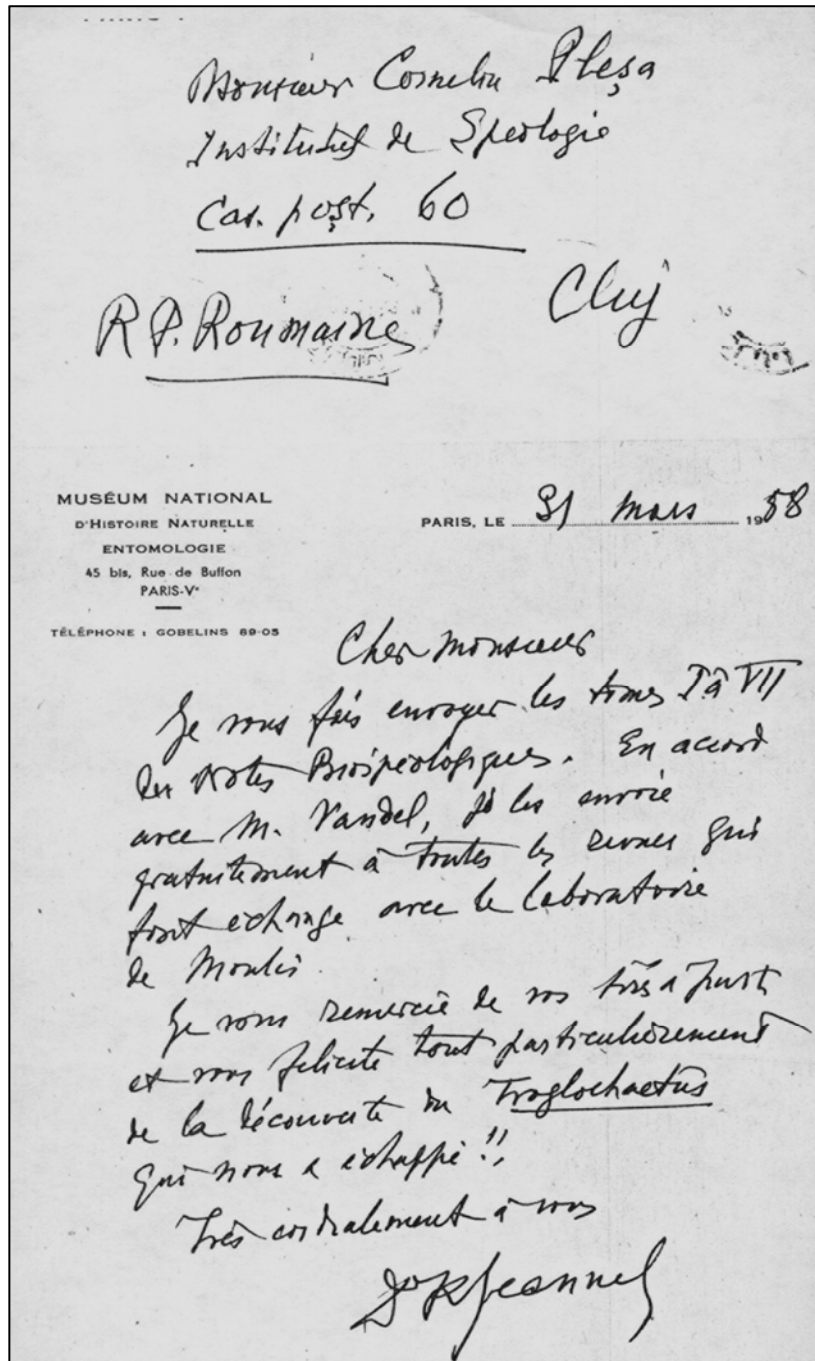


Fig. 3. – Regards from René Jeannel for discovering the archiannelid *Troglochaetus beranecki* Delachaux, 1921 in Romania.

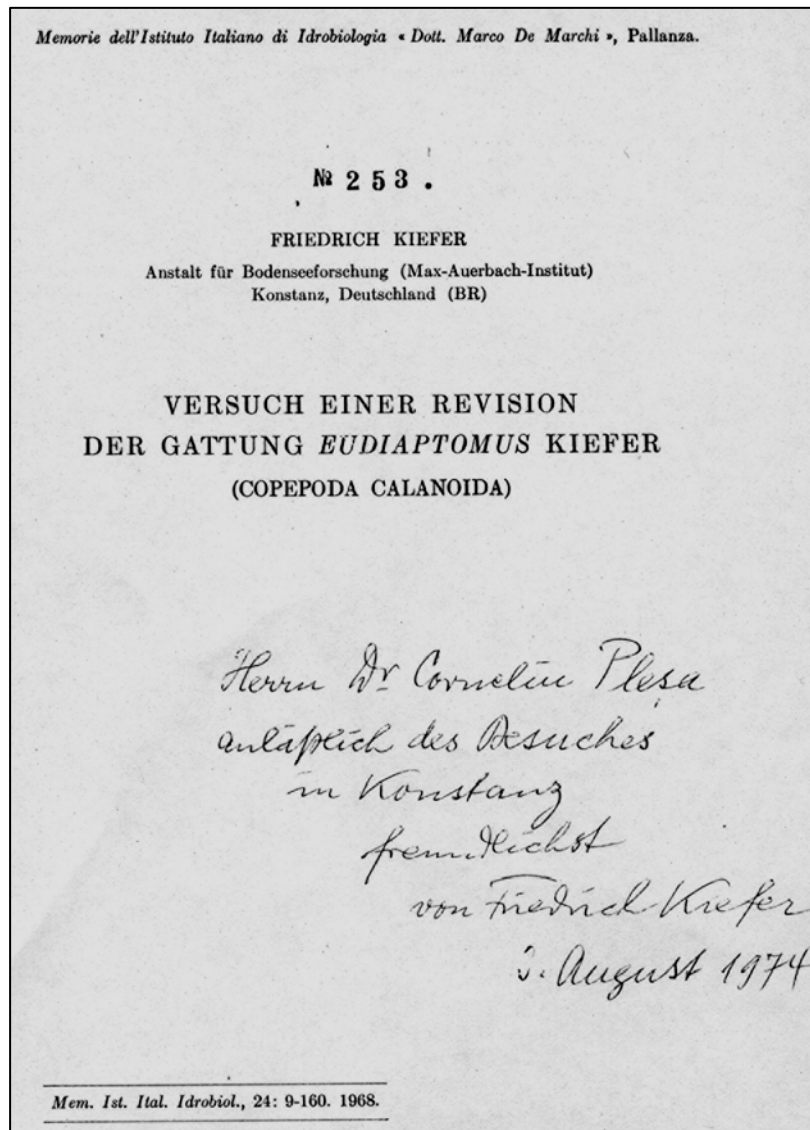


Fig. 4. – Dedication from the famous copepodologist Friedrich Kiefer.

New genera described by Dr. Corneliu Pleșa

Heterocyclopina Pleșa, 1968

Teratocyclops Pleșa, 1981

Species described by Dr. Corneliu Pleșa

Cyclopoida. Copepoda (freshwater)

Diacyclops languidoides spelaeus Pleșa, 1956
Acanthocyclops reductus propinquus Pleșa, 1957
Halicyclops brevispinosus psammophilus Pleșa, 1959
Neocyclops affinis Pleșa, 1961
Neocyclops improvisus Pleșa, 1973
Alloccyclops botosaneanui Pleșa, 1981
Cryptocyclops bicolor transactor Pleșa, 1981
Mesocyclops orghidani Pleșa, 1981
Metacyclops dentatus Pleșa, 1981
Metacyclops rudis Pleșa, 1981
Teratocyclops cubensis Pleșa, 1981
Diacyclops languidus maisi Pleșa & Buzilă, 1998
Eucyclops scythicus Pleșa, 1989

Cyclopoida. Copepoda (marine)

Heterocyclopina vietnamensis Pleșa, 1968

Calanoida. Copepoda (marine)

Pareuryte remanei Pleșa, 1964

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