

IONEL G. TABACARU (1932–2024) – TEACHER, COLLEAGUE, FRIEND

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Abstract. This essay retraces through a recollection of souvenirs the scientific and human personality of Ionel G. Tabacaru.

Key words: essay, cultural notes, scientific significance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Below we present a short recollection of moments and places where we met Ionel G. Tabacaru and where we had the pleasure to exchange both scientific and cultural experiences with him. Our text could be of interest for readers who had not this chance to meet Tabacaru directly and/or to appreciate his rich personality. The notes which follow represent in some way an extension of the objective analysis of his long scientific activity made by D.L. Danielopol and A. Giurginca (this volume). Here we offer what our subjective memory retained as vivid images. We will transmit them perhaps not with the sharpness of a photographic device but hopefully with enough details from which the personality of our teacher, colleague and friend can be appreciated.

2. DAN L. DANIELOPOL – MOMENTS WITH IONEL G. TABACARU

I met Ionel G. Tabacaru for the first time in 1962 when he and his colleague Dan Dancau intended to explore terrestrial fauna from the southern Dobrogea, near the Black Sea coast, in Romania. At the time, I was a student, enrolled to the Faculty of Biology, University of Bucharest. During the exploration of the galleries of the “Peștera de la Limanu” (named also “Limanu” Cave) in southern Dobrogea, I was fascinated by the spectacular small milliped *Trachysphaera dobrogica*, white-coloured, blind, moving slowly on the dark soil. One year later we explored the wells used for drinking water supply from the same area along the Black Sea coast and I discovered the beauty of a large blind crustacean, swimming with agility, that the Tabacaru’s colleague, Dan Dancau, described as a new species

Niphargus dobrogicus. From this experience I decided to participate in a more active way in the scientific activities of the speleologists from the institute of Bucharest and I asked if I could follow their example by studying a group of subterranean animals still poorly known in Romania. I was advised that such a group could be the Ostracoda, with surface dwelling and subterranean inhabitants. During the next period (1963–1964) working at the Institute of Speleology, Tabacaru showed me how to identify, how to dissect, and how to prepare the limbs for further morphological studies. The technique to prepare permanent slides with the dissected limbs, was so effective that later on I presented my experience to other colleagues and students. Ionel Tabacaru was extremely generous and enthusiastic to share his experience. My first book on ostracod taxonomy was bought by him and given to me. This was the classic ostracod monograph of Walter Klie (1938) issued in *Die Tierwelt Deutschlands*, which Tabacaru could buy in Romania because the publishing house Gustav Fischer Verlag was still active in Jena, German Democratic Republic, a communist country!

As a student during 1963–1965 I accompanied Tabacaru to Cluj to the old institute created by Emile Racovitza in 1920. We spent a lot of time photographing with my old photo-camera classic Crustacea publications existing in the large library of Racovitza. I learned from Tabacaru how to search and complete bibliography, and how to use it. All this experience remained precious my whole scientific career.

After the completion of my degree paper in 1965 I got a position as research assistant at the Speleological Institute in Bucharest and I participated in various field-trips with Tabacaru and with other colleagues, *inter alia* with IJ-B. So, Tabacaru became now a colleague and a mentor and I continued to learn from him basic aspects of biospeleology, of biogeography of troglobitic animals and, of course, on the history of the Institute of Speleology and the memorable personalities: Emil Racovitza, René Jeannel, Radu Codreanu, Traian Orghidan, Margareta Dumitrescu and others.

Field trips to caves located in the Carpathians or in the Transylvanian “Mountains Bihar” during the 1960s were always like an expedition in a far-west country. We used a large truck (Fig. 1) with which we transported not only the sampling devices but also the provisions necessary for one or two weeks. The truck had only two seats beside the truck driver and the others stayed outside in all-weather situations. Still, as one can see from the Figure 2, we were happy and excited to participate in such activities. The pictures here inserted were made during 1969 when we visited the “Peștera de la Ferice” on the Bihar plateau. With Tabacaru I first visited this cave three years before and in a remote gallery we discovered a small terrestrial isopod that Tabacaru recognised as a new species but had not enough specimens to propose a clear diagnosis. Besides Tabacaru on this 1969 expedition we were accompanied by our colleague from Cluj Cornel Plesa, an expert in aquatic crustaceans (Copepoda Cyclopoida), by IJ-B eager to collect gamasids (terrestrial mites), and Doina Zincenco a young colleague who started to

study another group of crustaceans, Copepoda Harpacticoida. None of us had a drivers licence so the Institute in Bucharest had also hired a chauffeur for the truck. The atmosphere was extraordinarily stimulating. Cornel knew the cave and demonstrated the aquatic fauna, Tabacaru completed with the soil fauna, and both told us stories about various speleologists. It was also nice that we could find again the famous small woodlice belonging to the genus *Biharoniscus*, necessary to Tabacaru for his taxonomic description. It was an isopod belonging apparently to an endemic group of the area and moreover Tabacaru could finish the description of the new species which he named *Biharoniscus fericeus*. It was published 1973 in the journal *Travaux de l'Institut de Spéologie "Emile Racovitza"*.

So even if the life was not necessarily easy during such field-trips, the compensation of the human atmosphere and scientific communication were absolutely rewarding.

Early in 1972 I left Romania, and I returned for short visits only after 1990 when the political situation of the country changed from an oppressive communist system to a democratic one. During this new period, I could visit my friend Tabacaru practically every year and enjoy his hospitality. We had long discussions and much cooperative work dealing with the phylogeny of Crustacea. I profited also from his extraordinary culture, of his memory for the story of Emile Racovitza, his family and his Institute. I enjoyed also the recollections of souvenirs or information related to Tabacaru's family, an old Armenian family with a long history. Related to Emile Racovitza and his close assistants, we wrote a series of essays (viz. details in Danielopol and Giurginca, this volume).

The private atmosphere in the house of Ionel Tabacaru was extremely friendly and pleasant and to this situation contributed also Mrs. Florica Tabacaru (Dica), a wonderful person who accompanied our friend until his end in December 2024.

2. NICOLE COINEAU – ENCOUNTERS WITH IONEL

Each encounter with Ionel Tabacaru has been an outstanding moment of my scientific life. The first one was at Banyuls-sur-Mer where Ionel came to the Laboratoire Arago (now the Observatoire Océanographique) in 1967 to visit and work in the terrestrial part, the Mas de la Serre. Invited at home in the villa "les Mimosas", I admired his easy elocution in French and his incommensurable knowledge about the subterranean milieu and groundwater biodiversity. He did not know, at this moment, that he put his steps in those of Emil G. Racovitza, since we learned only later on that, with my family, we lived in the house where E. Racovitza inhabited with his family. Ionel would certainly have been very proud and touched with emotion to know this, since while speaking about crustaceans, we evoked several times the great Scientist and several of his published articles show the exegete of Racovitza work Ionel was.



Fig. 1. A moment during July 1969 field-trip to the “Pestera Ferice”.
From left to right, DLD, IJ-B, Doina Zincenco, Costica Plopeanu
(the chauffeur) and finally IGT (photo Cornel Plesa).



Fig. 2. The same group, at a stop on the Bihor plateau during
the Pestera Ferice field-trip, July 1969. From left to right: Cornel Plesa,
Costica Plopeanu, Ionel Tabacaru, Ilinca Juvara-Balș, Dan L. Danielopol
and Doina Zincenco. (Photo, curtesy Traian Brad).

Then, in 1972, I had the chance (I was lucky) to discuss with Ionel while I was in Bucharest at the Institute of Speleology “Emile Racovitza” to work on bathynellaceans with Eugen Serban within the framework of the French-Romania exchanges. Here again, the discussions dealt with subterranean crustaceans and were enthusiastic. Unfortunately, I had to go to sample along several rivers, and I didn’t see again Ionel before the departure to France.

But, fortunately, in 1994, we both attended the International Conference of Biospeology at Montegufony near Florence, convened by Giuseppe Messina and Stephano Taiti. Dan Danielopol and other friends were also there (Fig. 3). It was an immense pleasure to meet Ionel again! At last, we had time for thrilling exchanges, especially on isopods!

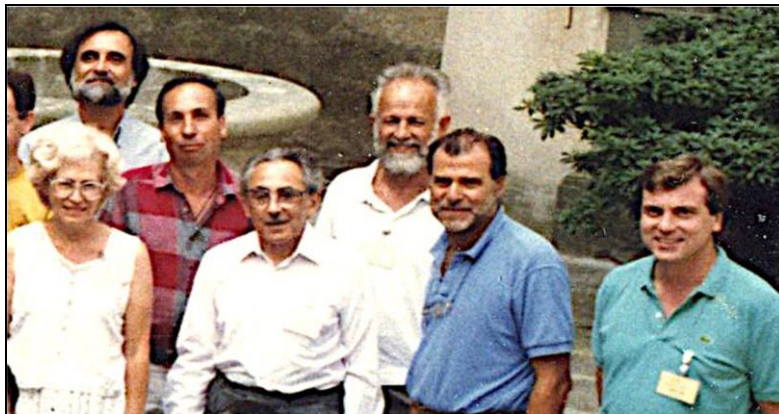


Fig. 3: A group of participants to the 11th International Conference of Biospeology, August 1994, at Montegufoni (Florence, Italy). From left to right, on the front line: Nicole Coineau, Ionel G. Tabacaru, Giuseppe Messina, Stephano Taiti; behind them also from left to right, Claude Boutin, Dan Danielopol and Boris Sket.

As Associate Editor of the journal *Vie et Milieu-Life & Environment*, I sometimes asked authors to contribute to special issues; both Ionel and Dan always sent significant manuscripts. During the last part of his life, Ionel was involved in malacostracan crustacean biodiversity; in his major article co-authored with Dan on the phylogeny of the isopods, he tackled questions that are still on the agenda, so that, Ionel leaves (= offers) an impressive impact on crustacean research.

3. ILINCA JUVARA-BALS – APPRECIATION FOR A REMARKABLE PERSONALITY

When I finished the University studies, I chose my place to the Institute of Speleology and I integrated the “Gutenberg laboratory”. I was happy because I knew all the researchers which helped me for my Master thesis.

The “Gutenberg laboratory” was a special place. A huge room where, separated by wooden cupboards, each researcher made his own “ecological niche”. We arranged my place just in front of Tabacaru’s desk.

His place was delimited by a library furniture along the wall and a huge desk with a microscope surrounded by so many samples all around.

Ionel (Jenica) was a biological encyclopedia and always happy to share his knowledge. He explained to me the importance of geographical speciation and got me familiar with Racovitza’s and Jeannel’s works.

One day he came very excited with a book in his hand, which he brought back from Munich. It was Willi Hennig’s book *Phylogenetic Systematics*. Then, in the middle of the laboratory, he explained with enthusiasm, to all of us, the new theory of systematics.

We were the “terrestrial” researchers with Isopoda and Acari. Over the time, he continuously provided me with mites. Once I received a new species from the Olt Valley, an important barrier in the dispersion of taxa. I named it in honor of my friend *Leptogamasus tabacarii*. This species helped me to change the generic concept of *Leptogamasus* (Juvara-Bals 2003).

When I was stressed because I couldn’t identify my mites, he always encouraged me. Ionel was sensitive of his colleagues’ problems and always tried to help them.

I was so pleased to meet, on the route of my life, such an amazing human being who was my friend.

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