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# **BIOGRAPHY**

Aron is an award winning cinematographer, director and photographer, descended from a long line of storytellers.

A journalist by training, for over twenty years his passion for documentary filmmaking and ethnology has led him across the globe to photograph cultural and human diversity.

Jungles, oceans, and volcanic craters—Aron has shot movies in them all.

His Masters mentors were the Academy Award winner cinematographer Zsigmond Vilmos, John Schwartzman and the American photographer Steve McCurry.

To this day, his filmography includes more than 200 titles.

Aron is a devoted Animal Rights activist.

# FILMS

## **The Explorer**

The documentary presents the life and research of Emil Racovita, one of the first Antarctic explorers, a pioneer of oceanology and the founder of a new science, the bio-speleology. He created in Cluj the first Institute of Speleology in the world.

Using photographs made by Emil Racovita in Antarctica, the film focuses mainly on the Belgica expedition (1897-1899), the first scientific expedition who wintered in Antarctica, having Roald Amundsen, Frederick Cook on board and Adrien de Gerlache as captain.

[www.emilracovita.com](http://www.emilracovita.com)

## **A Life Devoted to Chimpanzees**

Dr. Géza Teleki (1943-2014) was a devoted guardians of untouched nature. In 1968 he was one of the first people to join Jane Goodall in Gombe, to assist and shape the research carried out there. He spent his entire life serving the chimpanzees' cause, defying illness, lobbyists' pressure, a shortage of time and money. He always considered the interests of the entire species paramount, and was advocating it at universities, at his lectures, in his books. He was convinced that in order to save animals and plants, one has to mobilize people's emotions. He considered himself a nature conservationist rather than a scholar.

His greatest achievement was the foundation of the first national park in Sierra Leone, Outamba-Kilimi National Park, which is still open to visitors. He devoted five years to this endeavor (1979-1984); along with his health.

In fighting against animal experiments, he remained, to the end of his life, an ally to Jane Goodall. And he played a significant role in focusing international attention on the endangered status of chimpanzees, using every means he had to fight for their protection.

He is a member of the historical Teleki family from Szék, the grandson of Pál Teleki. He was born in Kolozsvár [the city of Cluj in today's Romania], grew up in the United States, but the most important years of his life were connected to Africa. He moved back to his homeland, to Hungary after 63 years.

## **Black gold**

Delta caviar mafia. Black caviar sellers and the indolence of the authorities condemn the disappearance of the last wild sturgeons of Europe.

### **How long ago did Vîrtop man live? The oldest Neanderthal footprint in the world**

After an ascent and a narrow passage, two speleologists from Cluj entered a virgin chamber of the Ghețarul cave at Vîrtop in the Bihor Mountains. They realised that they were not the first to have trodden the immaculate cave floor: imprinted in the calcite were visible three human footprints. It was obvious that the mysterious visitor had entered the cave thousands of years ago. How many thousands? The enigma was solved in 2004, after years of research. The first studies were carried out by speleologist I. Viehmann and anthropologist C. Rîșcuția. Based on ichnological data (ichnology is the science of the traces left by plants and animals), they concluded that the prints were similar to ones left by a Neanderthal in Italy. The Vîrtop prints, measuring 22/10.6cm and 1.6cm between the big toe and the rest of the foot, reveal definite primitive features. One of the prints has been cut out of the cave floor and is now an important item in the collection of the Institute of Speleology. The decision to do so was correct: the other two prints were later removed by thieves. In the meantime, the Italians reached the conclusion that their print was more recent. The facilities provided by the laboratory in Bergen, Norway, allowed me to date the Vîrtop print using the uranium/thorium method. I analysed samples taken from the surface and the base of the cave floor, establishing that the deposit was made within an interval of 24,000 to 120,000 years. In order to understand the relationship between the print and the substratum, I carried out a number of X-rays of the cave floor. I concluded that the print had been deeper but was subsequently filled in. What helped me to establish its age with precision was a small stalagmite that had grown from the base stratum. The three dating analyses carried out based on the stalagmite indicated 62,000 years. Therefore, the print within which the stalagmite began to accrete is older and must have been left by a Neanderthal. It is the oldest dated footprint in the world. The full study was published in Quaternary Science Reviews. Yet another enigma has been solved. But why did the prehistoric visitor enter the cave?

Dr Bogdan Onac  
E. Racovița Institute of Speleology

### **The systematization of rural settlements**

“The systematization of rural settlements.” This was the label used by the Romanian Communist Party in its regional developmental decision of 1967 for what is simply called village demolition today. Systematization, optimization—these are words favored by dictatorships; they suggest progress, the deconstruction of outdated systems. In communist countries, industrialization was of the highest priority, but the process was being hindered by villages that were specializing in agriculture only, keeping too much of the workforce away from industrial production. This was the economic reason behind the plan to demolish villages. The other reason, one that most likely played a far greater role, was that the central supervision of small rural communities is far more difficult than that of cities. Rural societies, which held onto their old traditions more than other communities, was a major hindrance in the construction of the dictatorship. In Transylvania, there was yet another crucial consideration against villages: they served as centers for the Hungarian population, thus making them prime targets for destruction from the government’s perspective.

In 1988, Ceausescu saw the time ripe for implementing his plan, but he encountered extensive international opposition, so he toned down his original program of drastic demolition, opting instead for a process of withering away. Eventually, as a result of the events of 1989, the withering did not transpire either. There was just one exception: the village of Bözödújfalu.

Bözödújfalu used to be on the southwestern border of Udvarhelyszék (Udvarhely County today), next to the Küsmöd Stream, surrounded by mountains on all sides. This was a Hungarian settlement isolated from the rest of the world; it was unique in that Catholics, Calvinists, Unitarians, Greek Catholics, Székely Sabbatarians and later on, even a couple of Jewish families coexisted here in complete peace and harmony.

The idea to destroy the village was first raised in the 1970s, and then became certainty in 1988. The plan cited primarily flood control as the reason for building a dam on the Küsmöd Stream (In Romanian: Cuşmed), thereby flooding the village as well. So the village did not directly fall victim to village demolition, but the fact that the evacuation began in 1988, after two decades of uncertainty, clearly connects Bözödújfalu to the village demolition project. By 1990, the village was mostly underwater.

For twenty years, the Bözödújfalu population was kept in a state of uncertainty. One year, the government claimed that the village would be spared after all, the next year, people were ordered to look for a new home. During all this time, no development of any kind was allowed in the village. Eventually, in 1988, inhabitants were told that they had to leave. Compensation was promised so they could start a new life, but this turned out to be a nominal amount only, which did not even come close to covering their financial losses. Inhabitants mostly moved to villages nearby, and to this day, their lives are profoundly affected by the loss of their birthplace and their home.

To this day, most of them identify themselves as Bözödújfalu residents and have not succeeded in finding a new home.

## **Africa, My Life**

THE LIFE OF LÁSZLÓ SÁSKA  
1890-1978

László Sáska was born on September 26th, 1890, in Nagyenyed (the city of Aiud in present-day Romania), into a family with many children. He began his studies at the local elementary school and continued his high school studies at the Bethlen Kollegium.

“He was a modest, diligent, well-behaved student. His teachers were fond of him, especially Zoltán Szilády, in whose museum of natural science, his right hand was none other than László Sáska; the two of them continue corresponding to this day. By this time, László Sáska was already known for his passion for nature. His adventurous soul craving freedom drove him into the lap of mother nature, which helps us forget everything. The boy lost in his thoughts was hiking through areas in the vicinity as well as destinations further out, and perhaps he was already spinning and weaving the colorful future of his life.” This passage appeared in the Enyed Magazine, while the following excerpt comes from László Sáska’s 1969 book entitled “Africa, My Life”:

“I was spending my sophomore year in high school at the famous Bethlen Kollegium in Nagyenyed. We were listening, with our jaws dropped, to the fascinating accounts our natural science teacher was giving about beetles and birds, and many others that live and manifest themselves around us in the great world of nature. Our teacher’s wonderful world of tales charmed us. ... And then came the end of year ceremony where deserving students’ names were called out one by one, and under the caressing glance of the city’s population, these students would walk up to receive their thoroughly earned rewards. And the teacher listing the rewards called out loud: “László Sáska, a high school sophomore receives, in recognition of the best insect collection, Ottó Herman’s book entitled “Birds Useful and Birds Harmful”, a gift from dr. Zoltán Szilády”. The world was spinning around me. I received a beautiful book in recognition of the fact that my insect collection was the best in my class. This book and the insect collection had a decisive impact on my life. Nature exploration became my passion...” During his senior year in high school, he was hiking around Red Lake, and in the next year, he spent his vacation around the Parâng Mountains of the Southern Carpathians. He subsequently became an explorer and admirer of the magical world of Dalmatia and Bosnia.

After he completed high school, to earn some money, he accepted a town clerk position in Nagyponor (the commune of

Ponor in present-day Romania), but he soon realized that this work was not for him, and using the money he had saved up, he enrolled at the medical school in Kolozsvár (the city of Cluj in present-day Romania), and later transferred to Budapest. After World War I, he gave up his medical practice, sold his spacious house, his car, books, everything, and meanwhile, remarried and with his wife, moved to Africa: his first stop on his African journey was Abyssinia. And this is how his life-long medical career in Africa began. Besides his varied healing work, he organized numerous collection trips in Abyssinia, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Congo and Tanganyika. Besides Hungarian scientific institutions, he also sent natural science collections, particularly plant, insect and small mammal collections to several Swedish, English, American and Belgian museums. He was working tirelessly without support or generous sponsors from home. In 1988, his widow, Mária Mojzsis gave the Hungarian Museum of Geography Sáska's heritage weighing almost 100 kilograms, which was shipped to Hungary by the Hungarian Scientific Africa Expedition together with the messenger service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the scope of his medical work, he devoted decades to seeking a cure for malaria and cancer. In recognition of his cancer research, the English Royal Institute of Cancer Research elected him as an external member. He published out of his own private funds his book entitled "From Malaria to Cancer". In recognition of his half-century-long medical work, in 1970, Semmelweis University, Hungary's oldest medical school awarded him an anniversary Golden Diploma. In 1972, the Roman Medical Academy invited him for a one-month visit in Romania and Transylvania.

Besides healing, he considered it his life's goal to discover and protect African natural treasures that were being destroyed. It is worth mentioning the plant *Amorphophallus*, which was named in honor of him, as well as the discovery of an unknown species of the *Habenaria* orchid genus along with two water mite species, the *Oxus saskai*, and the *Piona angulata* var. *saskai*. With his wife, who was a magnificent work and hunting partner of his, they went on explorations of the African flora and fauna, took myriads of photographs as well as shot films. In 1972, when a journalist asked László Sáska about his collection of recorded material, he reported 6-7000 diapositives and 3-4000 meters of film about the life of the natives as well as about African landscapes. And the couple's garden served as a meeting ground for tiny nectar birds; theirs was one of the richest rose collections in East Africa. László Sáska's scientific articles primarily appeared in Hungarian publications: the *Globe*, the *Hungarian Hunting Magazine*, the *Natural Science Bulletin*, and the *Enyed Herald*, etc.

In his work and in building relationships with people, László Sáska was greatly helped by his excellent knowledge of languages. Besides Hungarian, his mother tongue, he was also fluent in Romanian, German, Italian, English, Abyssinian and Swahili, but he also understood the Galla (Oromo) and Amharic languages. This

way, he could speak in their native tongue to almost all the people he encountered. He was in contact with some famous figures, for example, he met the American writer Ernest Hemingway, he hosted the scientific researcher Bernhardt Grzimek, and was friends with Albert Schweitzer, who also worked on healing African patients. He received several visitors from Hungary, for example, he went on hikes to Mount Meru and Lake Manyara on several occasions with Zsigmond Széchenyi and János Szunyoghy.

Like many of his fellow Nagyenyed students, Dr. László Sáska absorbed in his alma mater, Bethlen Kollegium, the knowledge and humanity that would later determine his life's goal, steering him to become an internationally acknowledged researcher.

## **From Cluj to Hollywood**

It is the first decade of the twentieth century.

It is Europe's heyday. In Paris, Vienna, Budapest and Berlin wonderful balls are held. Projections of films by the Lumière Brothers begin in 1895-96. In Paris, cinema projections are all the rage. Everybody is in search of the new, and viewing life on the screen is an extraordinarily interesting and fascinating way of looking at things.

Cluj, the "treasure city" as it was called in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was in step with the other major cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Cluj had a centuries-old university, whose hundreds of students roamed the Europe of the day and brought back everything that was new.

This was how film came to Cluj, as a technical discovery and as a spectacle, in other words as cinema.

Strangely enough, in 1903-04 there was a cinema boom in Cluj. Interested, enthusiastic audiences went to Budapest to see films, but they also wanted to see them in Cluj.

Because the city of Cluj had a theatre, actors, directors, and the financial means to nurture the cinema, it became one of the first cities in Europe to begin production of silent films, shorts at first, and then feature-length films, which today may be regarded as relics of incalculable value for the history of world cinema.

By 1913-14, Cluj already had three film production companies. The most interesting films were produced by the Corvin and the Transylvania companies

Under the direction of Jenő Janovics, great thespians from Cluj, such as stage actors Lily Poor and István Szentgyörgyi, began to perform in front of the film camera, accompanied by a cast of supporting actors.

Transylvanian silent films burgeoned, an astonishing phenomenon in this eastern part of Europe.

Then came the First World War. "When arms resound, the Muses fall silent."

After the War and the subsequent decline in the cinema, Professor Levaditi, a world-renowned physician, arrived in Cluj from Paris. He came to the city to help set up medical clinics, along with representatives of the Romanian medical school.

Dr. Levaditi was terrified by the menacing spread of the fearful disease of syphilis in the cities and mountain villages of Romania.

With young doctor Dominic Stanca, who founded Cluj's first gynaecological clinic and who besides being a practising physician and scientist was also passionate about innovative ideas, Levaditi made the world's first "applied" film, to inform the masses about the dangers of this transmittable disease.

In the making of the film, his partner was the already established director Jenő Janovics.

It was thus that the world's first popular scientific film, with titles in Romanian and Hungarian. The name of the film was "From the World's Horrors".

The film is one of five cinematographic productions shot in Cluj from which sequences have survived to the present day.

Cluj, an early-twentieth-century city of film, gave world cinema a number of major figures. Sándor Korda (Sir Alexander Korda) and Mihály Kertész (Michael Curtiz) went from the city's film studios to western European and Hollywood, where they forged glittering careers and became classics of world cinema.

Film production in Cluj attracted leading representatives of the young industry, including director Jenő Goldenweiser from the renowned Pathe studios in Paris.

In 1913, Pathe and Janovics made two art films in co-production.

In 1914, three films were produced at the by then independent studios run by Janovics.

The years from 1915 to 1917 were the most productive for the cinematic art in Cluj: the Proja studio made ten films, the Corvin studio seventeen, and the Transylvania studio one.

The Cluj studios also expanded to a neighbouring village, Florești, which thus became the first rural location to host a film studio.

The decline in Cluj's cinema industry began in 1919-20. Compared with the more than ninety films in various genres that had been produced in previous years, in the decade that followed only eighteen documentaries, five short films, and two feature films were made.

Between 1903 and 1930, fifty-five newsreels and documentaries, sixteen short films, and more than seventy artistic films were produced in Transylvania.

Dr Ghiorghe I. Bodea

## **Romania, the drawbacks of uranium**

### **Greening**

The mines at Baița Bihor and Ciudanovița were closed in 1998 and 2000 respectively. The Government allocated funds from the state budget for “greening of the areas”.

The operation cost forty-five million lei at Ciudanovița (between 2000 and 2005), and funds continue to be allocated to Baița, where conservation and greening is underway. Even for a layman, a visit to the two areas will reveal a landscape that does not lead one to think that it has genuinely been conserved, let alone greened. At Ciudanovița there the entrances to the mineshafts were concreted over and barriers reading “Danger, ionising radiation” had been set up.

The danger of uranium contamination increases day by day. The mineshafts and faces have deteriorated greatly due to the fact that work has either not been carried out or has been done poorly, and the resistance structures have been destroyed. Worst of all, Shaft 1 at the Ciudanovița Mine has since caved in. This has led to the galleries being flooded, and the uranium ore has dissolved in the water. The water has thereby become radioactive. The water has begun naturally to seep outside and form brooks, which flow into the Caraș River. The contaminated water crosses Ciudanovița, and animals drink from the river and women do their laundry in it.

At present, in the Ciudanovița area there are more than thirty landfills that have traces of uranium. Most of them are unmarked. Children play on them; animals graze on them. Uranium-bearing ore is not easily recognised, especially given that one of the two types found in the area looks a lot like granite. Rainwater washes away the landfills, which flow into the streams that cross the area.

In 2004, Canadian experts from an NGO called the Jules Verne Hobby Club took readings in the Ciudanovița area and drew attention to the fact that there are places where the radioactivity exceeds the danger level by thirty times.

Independent measurements are forbidden by law, and the authorities invariably claim that the radiation is “within the legal limits.”

In Baița Bihor the area is a little better guarded. The guards do not let you pass the barrier (as if radiation could be stopped by a barrier). Perhaps also because here, in a part of the former mine, the country’s only radioactive waste dump is housed. The authorities say that only waste from research and medical processes is stored, but

this cannot be verified.

Portrait of a miner.

A psychological and social approach.

The miners from the area are frightened. They are frightened to talk about anything to do with their life as miners. They tend to emphasise the positive aspects - the very high wages, the maximum of fifteen years before retirement, the generous pensions, and the chance of working abroad even many years after retirement.

It is interesting to find out what exactly they are frightened of. What have they been told about their work and the importance of keeping it a secret? What are their lives really like? What were working conditions like in the mine? What were safety measures like underground? What illnesses do they suffer from? What does the future hold for them after they retire at the age of thirty-five?

## **ABOUT THE BUFFALO, WITH LOVE**

The wild water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis arnee*) was domesticated in ancient China, it spread from there to India and to Mesopotamia. Later on, in the era of massive migrations, the animal reached Europe, where, for centuries, the domesticated buffalo (*Bos bubalus domesticus*) was a popular breed to raise.

95 percent of the buffalo population still lives in Asia.

Today, the European population is at the brink of extinction, most young people today have never seen a buffalo, even though in the recent past, the animal was still widely known and raised throughout the continent.

In the 1980s, there were still close to 200 000 buffalos living in Romania, now their number is dramatically reduced. There is an estimated 10 000 of them remaining, bringing the population to the edge of extinction.

In Méra, we can still find the ancient tradition of wild buffalo raising, that has been sustaining one of the last remaining islands of the ever shrinking buffalo population.

From April until November, the animals are grazing in the wild. It is only in the winter that Roma herders lead buffalo to a sheltered area from the rudimentary camp grounds operating throughout the rest of the year.

An indispensable part of the buffalo's habitat is the marshy wetland where the animal can wallow and keep cool. The sight is

extraordinary.

The buffalo keepers cover several kilometers each day, at dawn and at sunset, mostly riding on donkey back, in order to milk their animals. It is an unusual sight when old women, men with hunchbacks are riding up the hillside on tiny donkeys, packed up with large milk buckets.

Buffalo milk is low in cholesterol and the organic products made from them using traditional techniques: buffalo cheese, farmer's cheese, butter, sour cream could become staples of a modern, healthy diet if the buffalo were rediscovered by industrial animal husbandry and the species were thereby saved from extinction.

In Transylvania, there are ancient traditions, legends associated with the buffalo. It is interesting, for example, that a buffalo wouldn't let just anyone milk her, only the master she is accustomed to. For this reason, often, women dress up in male clothing or men put on skirts so their animals would accept them. While milking these black creatures with a formidable look, their masters in disguise would sing or hum ancient songs to them and talk to them.

## **BOOKS**

Tichilesti Hospital

The Systematization Of Rural Settlements

Transylvanian Responses To The 1956 Hungarian Revolution

From Headhunting To Riots In Borneo

Selected Works (Photo Book)

## **FINE ART PRINTS**

For questions, please email [prints@aronxantus.com](mailto:prints@aronxantus.com)

[DOWNLOAD THE FINE ART PRINT CATALOG](#)

## **EXHIBITIONS**

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## **CONFERENCES**

8th EuroSEAS Conference

11 - 14 August 2015

Vienna, AUSTRIA

Unveiling Head Taking and Decorated Trophy Skulls in Southeast Asia (with a Special Focus on Borneo)

From Headhunting to Riots: Discussion of a Documentary on the Outbreak of Ethnic Violence in West and Central Kalimantan, Indonesia (2000-2001)  
Aron Xantus (Cluj Napoca, Romania)

## **MASTER CLASS & WORKSHOPS**

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## **EQUIPMENT**

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## **FOUNDATION**

Foundation  
The Founder

### Purpose

The purpose of the Foundation is the preservation, conservation and pervasion of the cultural heritage of the cinematic and photographic works of Aron Xantus for the general public in behoof of science, art and culture!

The Foundation will promote the world-wide non-commercial screenings of films by Aron Xantus, particularly at film archives, film schools and other cultural institutions. Included here is the non-commercial presentation at national and international film festivals.

The Foundation will take care of the preservation, the protection and the development of the film materials by appropriate storage and maintenance, including professional regeneration and processing of all such negative- and original materials.

The Foundation provides access to the works of Aron Xantus, particularly the photo materials, scripts, papers, articles and other such materials.

The Foundation engages in the set up and development of an archive of the cinematic and literary works of Aron Xantus in the form of audio as well as video, in written and/or electronic method including cataloguing of publications in connection with the work. The archive shall be generally accessible to the public.

[www.aronxantus.org](http://www.aronxantus.org)

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National Geographic  
The Nippon Foundation  
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CNRS National Center for Scientific Research  
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WWF - World Wide Fund For Nature (also known as World Wildlife Fund)  
The Romanian Academy  
The Romanian Filmmakers Union  
Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority  
International Documentary Association  
EDN - European Documentary Network  
Reporters Without Borders  
Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University  
The Union of Professional Journalists in Romania (UPJ)  
Ministry of National Resources  
ORF Österreichischer Rundfunk ("Austrian Broadcasting", ORF)  
Televiziunea Română  
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Romanian Polar Research Institute  
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