

Obituary for Ovidiu Constantinescu, 1933–2012

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On 23 January 2012, our dear friend Ovidiu Constantinescu passed away at the age of 79 years. The last years he lived in Sweden in a rather retired way, but still with eager interest in his two passions, jazz and mycology.

Ovidiu was born in Constanța in Romania, the place by the Black Sea where the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso, whose name he got, had lived in exile. Ovidiu was keen in literature and particularly admired the work of Dostoyevsky. Before his studies at Bucharest University, Ovidiu graduated at a military school. He entered the Biological Institute of Bucharest (started in 1949), which had a great mycological tradition from its founder Traian Săvulescu (1889–1963) and his wife Alice. Ovidiu had very good relationships with the Săvulescu family ever since his years as a student. Both Traian and Alice were his university professors and also his mentors. Being an appreciated student, Ovidiu was often invited to the Săvulescu home where he helped them organize their huge and very valuable home library. The relationship continued over the years, when Ovidiu had a position as researcher. He defended his thesis at Bucharest university in 1970 and kept positions as assistant and curator at the Mycological Herbarium at the Biological Institute, where he worked with Gavril Negrean, and published 24 fascicles of the Herbarium Mycologicum Romanicum, one of the most important recent herbarium series from Europe. He worked in Bucharest for many years as a passionate mycologist. He reorganized the mycological herbarium and increased its collections from a beginning of some 36,000 specimens (mostly from Traian Săvulescu) to, recently, about 128,000. Over the years, Herbarium BUCM has become one of the largest and most modern of its kind in Europe, but is, with Negrean's retirement, in a sleeping state. The acronym BUCM applies to the Mycology Herbarium, BUCA to the general Herbarium of the Institute, and BUCA-Zahariadi to the Constantin Zahariadi Herbarium,

collections of his highly appreciated botanical mentor. Ovidiu had a very broad interest in the taxonomy of various groups of fungi growing on plants. At that time he had produced about 50 scientific publications. His interest in downy mildews of the Peronosporales arose early. Participating in the project “Flora Criptogamică in Romania” he and his collaborators noted several novelties in this field for Europe, e.g. *Plasmopara (Bremiella) baudysii* Skalický and *P. skvortzovii* Miura 1930, as well as numerous taxa new to Romania and many new host records. They participated in the scientific exploration of several Romanian national or natural parks, Munții Bucegi, Muntele Cozia, Cheile-Nerei-Beușnița, Delta Dunării, Poștile de Fier, Domogled-Valea Cernei, Masivul Piatra Craiului, Munții Rodnei, and others.

Ovidiu had a good knowledge of languages, so he could particularly follow the wealth of Russian literature. But he also published manuscripts in five languages (English, French, German, Romanian, and Swedish), and his bibliography usually contained references in many more. What he tackled had to be documented completely. His book on mycological methods published in 1974 is the best documented survey in this field of that time. Although it is published in Romanian only, I consult it sometimes because of its completeness and connection of all methods with the original authorship.

Our contact dates back to 1971 when Ovidiu and W.G. attended the first International Mycological Congress in Exeter and he visited the Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures (CBS) in Baarn. Since then an intense correspondence subsisted with CBS and many mycologists all over the world. Ovidiu was extremely keen to keep abreast with the mycological literature, which he hardly could acquire directly in his country. Thus, he mainly acquired books and reprints using his herbarium specimens as a basis for exchange.

He visited the CBS again in 1978. He was very dissatisfied with the political situation in his country, being frantically opposed to joining the communist party, and decided to remain abroad as long as the Ceausescu regime was lasting. His then almost divorced wife was, however, concerned about consequences of his defection for the career of her son in the communist regime; she persuaded him to return and he went back to his country in great despair. At that time he could have obtained a position at CBS as an Oomycete expert.

Ovidiu was determined to leave his country again. It took us some effort with the assistance of David Hawksworth to force the communist director of the institute to let him go. The position at CBS was then no longer available. Ovidiu came to the Netherlands in 1982 and worked at CBS in Baarn for a few weeks. During this time, his wife’s son died in an accident in the mountains and Ovidiu’s return to Romania had in fact been of no avail. We could then only assist him in applying for a permit to stay and work in Sweden, which he eventually received.

In 1984 Uppsala university got money to support a scientist with the task of identification and preservation of living collections. It was called “Uppsala university culture collection” (*Mykoteket*) at the Institute for Systematic Botany of the University of Uppsala. Because of his expert knowledge, Ovidiu was the candidate of choice. He then devoted about 20 years of his life to run *Mykoteket*. Under his guidance *Mykoteket* was very active and the annual reports show thousands of identifications but also selling of cultures internationally. With a capacity as Ovidiu it was attempted to start a national center for fungal cultures in Uppsala, but for various reasons this was not successful. As long as his health permitted he worked with the cultures, but the last 10 years he devoted to closing the project and safeguarding the cultures in various international collections.

In 1983 he continued his specialization in the taxonomy of the Peronosporales. With his complete documentation of the relevant literature, and in collaboration with Jamshid Fatehi, Hermann Voglmayr, Young-Joon Choi and M.T., who did molecular work, this became the most successful part of his scientific output. His careful observations resulted in the descriptions of six new genera, after there had been a gap of more than 30 years in which no new genus was added to the Peronosporaceae. All of the genera described by him have been adopted by the scientific community, and also the two described before the use of molecular tools, *Benua* and *Paraperonospora*, were later confirmed by molecular phylogenies. The genera *Hyaloperonospora*, *Perofascia*, *Plasmoverna* and *Novotelnova* followed, all of which were based on both phylogenetic position and morphological distinctiveness. In addition, he described several new species of downy mildews and made numerous new combinations. His contributions to the taxonomy of oomycetes are thus outstanding and his annotated list of *Peronospora* names, which was published in 1993, is still the most complete and carefully conducted monograph of the genus *Peronospora*, with detailed taxonomic observations for all of its roughly 500 species.

W.G. visited Ovidiu in Sweden in 1987 and 1989. Ovidiu was selective in which conferences he attended, but in 2000 he attended the symposium “*Molecules, morphology and classification: Towards monophyletic genera in the Ascomycetes*” in Amsterdam, demonstrating that he had also retained his interest in ascomycetes. From Sweden he returned repeatedly to Romania to see and support his friends during critical years. In the eighties and nineties he was sometimes accompanied by Roland Moberg, meeting promising students there. When back in Romania he really felt at home; but he also welcomed M.T. upon their first meeting in Uppsala with the words “Welcome to my country!” (which also showed his love for classic literature).

Ovidiu visited Bomarzo in Italy in 2006 and 2007. He complained about the cold winters in Sweden but did unfortunately not get the chance to settle in a warmer country.

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Taxa described in honour of O. Constantinescu

Plasmopara constantinescui Voglmayr & Thines, 2007
Deightoniella constantinescui Melnik & Shabunin, 2011

Taxa described by O. Constantinescu in honour of others

Benua kellermanii (Ellis & Halst. ex Swingle) Constant., *Nova Hedwigia* 66(1-2): 259 (1998) (after Soviet mycologists Karpova-Benua and Benua)

Novotelnova scorzonerae Voglmayr & Constant., *Mycol. Res.* 112 (5): 491 (2008) (after name of Nataliya Novotelnova who studied downy mildews on Compositae, especially *Helianthus*)

Plasmopara majevskii Constant. & Thines., *Polish Bot. J.* 55: 294 (2010). In honour of the polish mycologist Tomasz Majewski.