

## Obituary

### Matei Alexescu, 1929-1993

Matei Alexescu was born into a family of Romanian public servants on 1929 September 6, and was interested in astronomy from an early age. He graduated from Bucharest University in 1950 with a degree from the Faculty of Mathematics. He immediately found employment in the recently-

founded Popular Observatory in the Romanian capital, which housed a planetarium and a fine 6-inch (15-cm) Zeiss refractor. He made good use of the telescope, and, benefiting from the advice of Dumitrescu and Popovici was appointed Director in 1957.

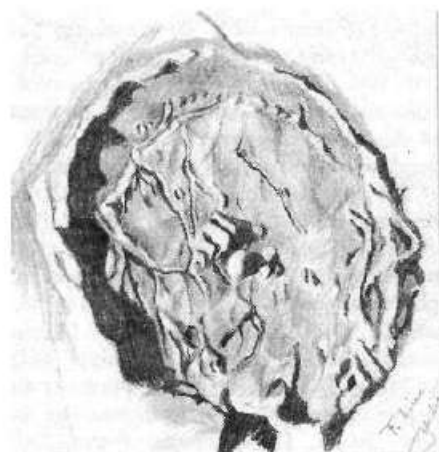
During his Directorship, Alexescu constructed various telescopes, grinding the optics and making all the mechanical parts himself. He made the first coronagraph in his native country in 1963. In 1979 he went to Bacau, where he worked in the local museum of Natural Sciences. From the 1970s, Alexescu was to send his observations abroad for analysis. There was then no national society in Romania; one had existed before WWI, and it was not until

recently that another was established. The Societe Astronomique de France recognised Alexescu's careful planetary observations (of Mars and Jupiter) by the award of the Prix Henry Rey in 1974, and the title 'Laureat' of the SAF. He also contributed to the ALPO. In his last years he was a member of the BAA, contributing many solar and planetary observations. His work was also well known in Germany and Japan. A lunar drawing is given here as a fine example of his observing skill.

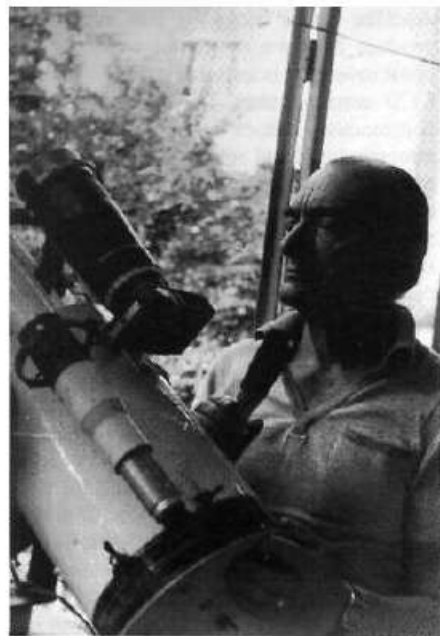
In Bacau, Alexescu continued to work with skill and enthusiasm, and founded a Popular Observatory there. He made a number of telescopes, and his final instrument (used for personal observational work) was a 20-cm Nasmyth-Cassegrain. Alexescu wrote a large number of papers and 16 books, especially on the subject of popular astronomy, one of his longest works being *Laboratorul Astrofizicianului Amator*. He also left a Lunar Atlas in manuscript form. With the ending of the Cold War in recent years, the Alexescus were able to travel to visit their family in the West. Unfortunately, Matei Alexescu's health declined, and he died on 1993 January 23 from a terminal illness.

Alexescu was an excellent teacher and lecturer, and also acted as scientific advisor for a series of 16 films on Romanian television. His loss leaves a gap in the ranks of Romanian astronomers that will be difficult to fill.

Jean Dragesco & Richard McKim



The lunar crater Gassendi drawn by Alexescu with the 15-cm OG in Bucharest, 1952 August 31, 1945-2135 UT, x270, x386.



Matei Alexescu with his 20-cm Nasmyth-Cassegrain telescope in August 1990.