

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF BIOSPELEOLOGY:
UNPUBLISHED NOTES AND DOCUMENTS CONCERNING
THE INITIATION OF THE CUBAN-ROMANIAN
BIOSPELEOLOGICAL EXPEDITIONS TO CUBA (1969, 1973)

LAZAR BOTOȘĂNEANU, ȘTEFAN NEGREA

The rediscovery by the first author of the three letters received by him from A. Núñez Jiménez – at that time president of the Academy of Sciences of Cuba – throws new light on the events having led to the organisation of the first biospeleological expedition to Cuba, this being at the same time the first scientific expedition abroad made by Romanian naturalists from the post-war period. A key role has been played in this by A. Núñez Jiménez, eminent Cuban geographer, speleologist, archaeologist, ethnographer (20.04.1923 – 13.09.1998), considered by some as being “the fourth discoverer of Cuba” and, in his quality of president of the Academy of Sciences, a personality with strong social weight in Cuba at that time.

The story begins with the memorable visit of A.N.J. at the Speleological Institute “E. Racovitza” of Bucharest (July 12, 1963). The main aim of his visit to Romania was the signing of a collaboration protocol between the Academies of Sciences of Romania and Cuba; but for the Romanian speleology/biospeleology things took, during this visit, a remarkable turn, as vividly narrated in the unpublished personal diary kept by the second author, and in a book published by him in 1980 and making use of notes from this diary. It was during this visit that a first idea about our future fruitful collaboration had been sketched-out, as reaction to A.N.J.’s account about Cuba as extraordinary field for speleological and biospeleological research..., and, surprisingly, about the lack of biospeleologists on the island. Despite the fact that only vague proposals were formulated during this visit, the idea that in the future a team of Romanian speleologists could visit Cuba for biospeleological field work and that this idea could find a place in a cooperation agreement between the Academies of Sciences of the two countries was greeted with enthusiasm by the scientific staff of the Institute of Speleology.

During a private visit of the first author to A.N.J. (Bucharest, July 13, 1963) an effort was made to convince him – apparently with some success – that a joint biospeleological expedition to Cuba is not only desirable, but also possible, and the names of the Romanian members of the expedition *in spe* (L. Botoșăneanu, Ș. Negrea, V. Decu) were suggested, too. But more than five years should elapse until this dream was made true; in this interval, apparently almost nothing of importance happened, but

this is contradicted by the recent rediscovery of some pieces of correspondence between L.B. and A.N.J. (1963–1968: Figs. 2–4), correspondence ending a long-lasting deadlock, and finally leading to the realization of the first Cuban-Romanian Biospeleological Expedition to Cuba (March 9 – June 19, 1969) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – The members of the first joint Cuban-Romanian expedition to Cuba, in front of the Capitolio Nacional of La Habana, surrounding the president of the Academy of Sciences, Antonio Núñez Jiménez (in uniform). Left to right: Ștefan Negrea, Acelia Caballero (translator), Lazăr Botoșăneanu, Vasile Decu, Carlos Fundora and Nicasio Viña. Gheorghe Racoviță is missing, as he arrived in Cuba a month after this picture was taken.

Only three letters of A. Núñez Jiménez have survived. In the first of them (Fig. 2), addressed to the first author of the present note, A.N.J. remembers with pleasure his visit at the Institute of Speleology; he writes that although the Cuban Academy does not have the possibility to invite foreign scientists during 1964, my proposal will be considered in the planning for 1965; in the final part of this letter we read how much my “valuable activity as scientist and as trainer of young Cuban staff in the field of biospeleology” is appreciated by the Cuban part.

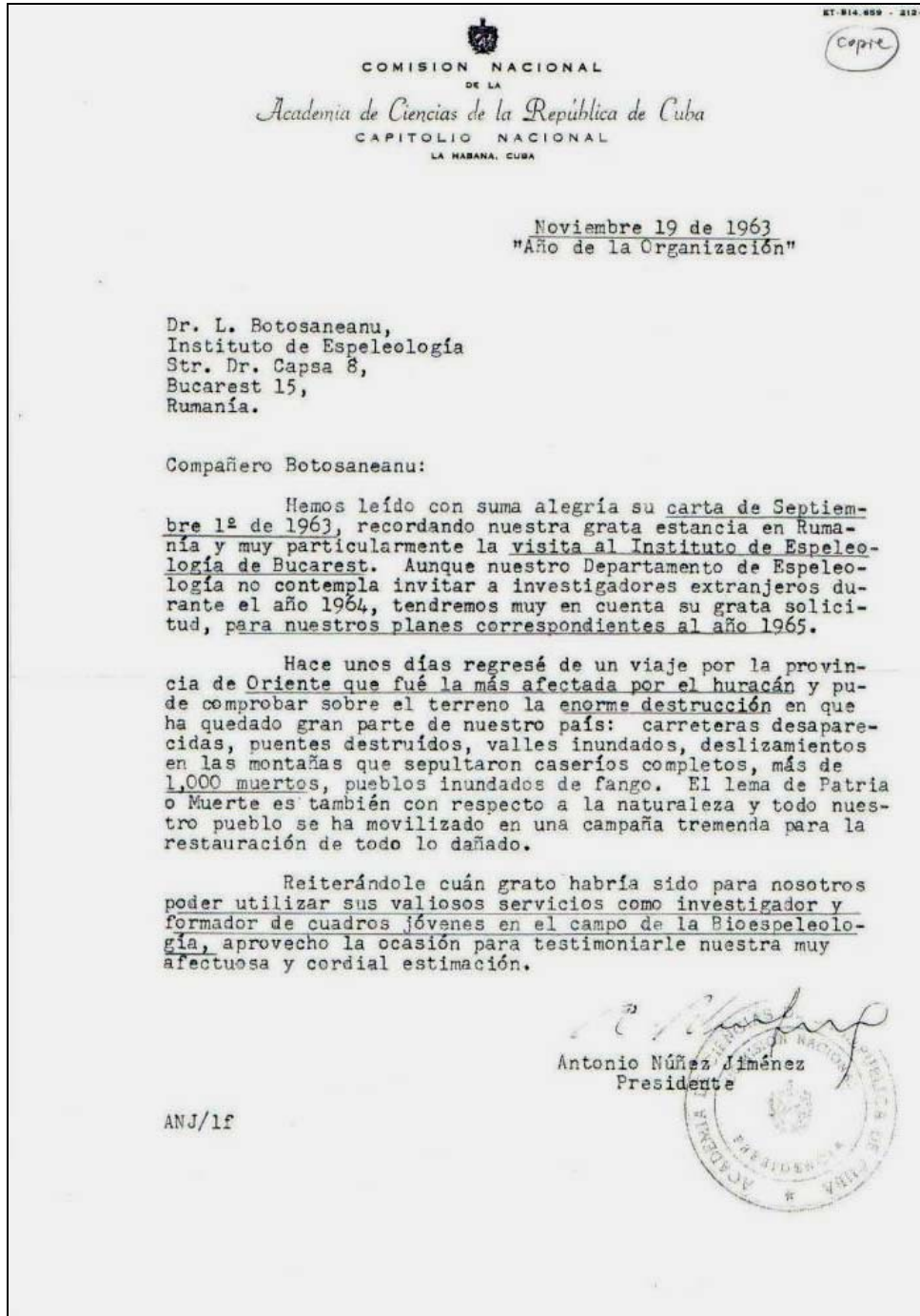


Fig. 2 – Letter of A. Núñez Jiménez addressed to L. Botoșaneanu on November 19, 1963 (facsimile).

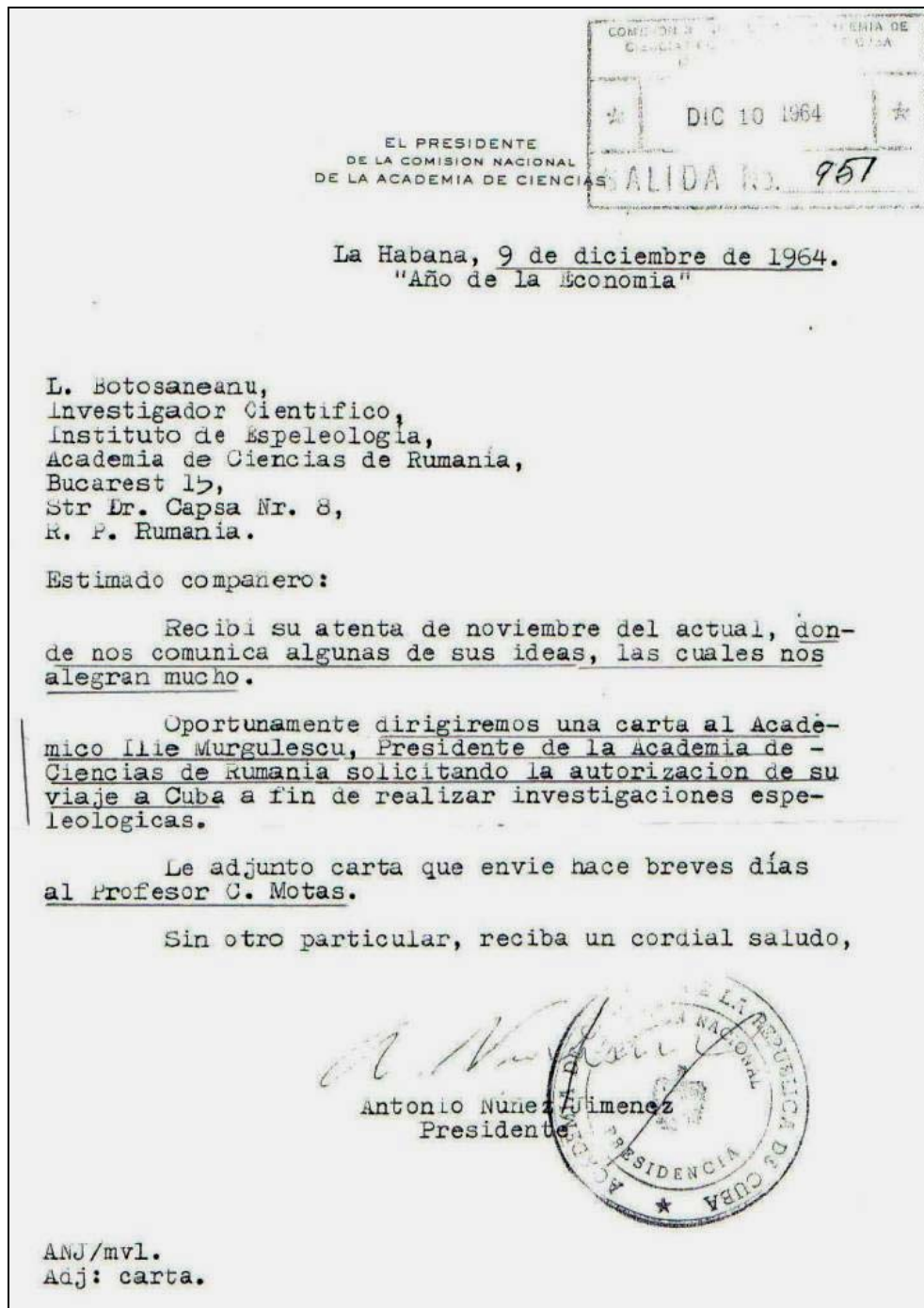


Fig. 3 – Letter of A.N.J. addressed to L. Botoșăneanu on December 9, 1964 (facsimile).

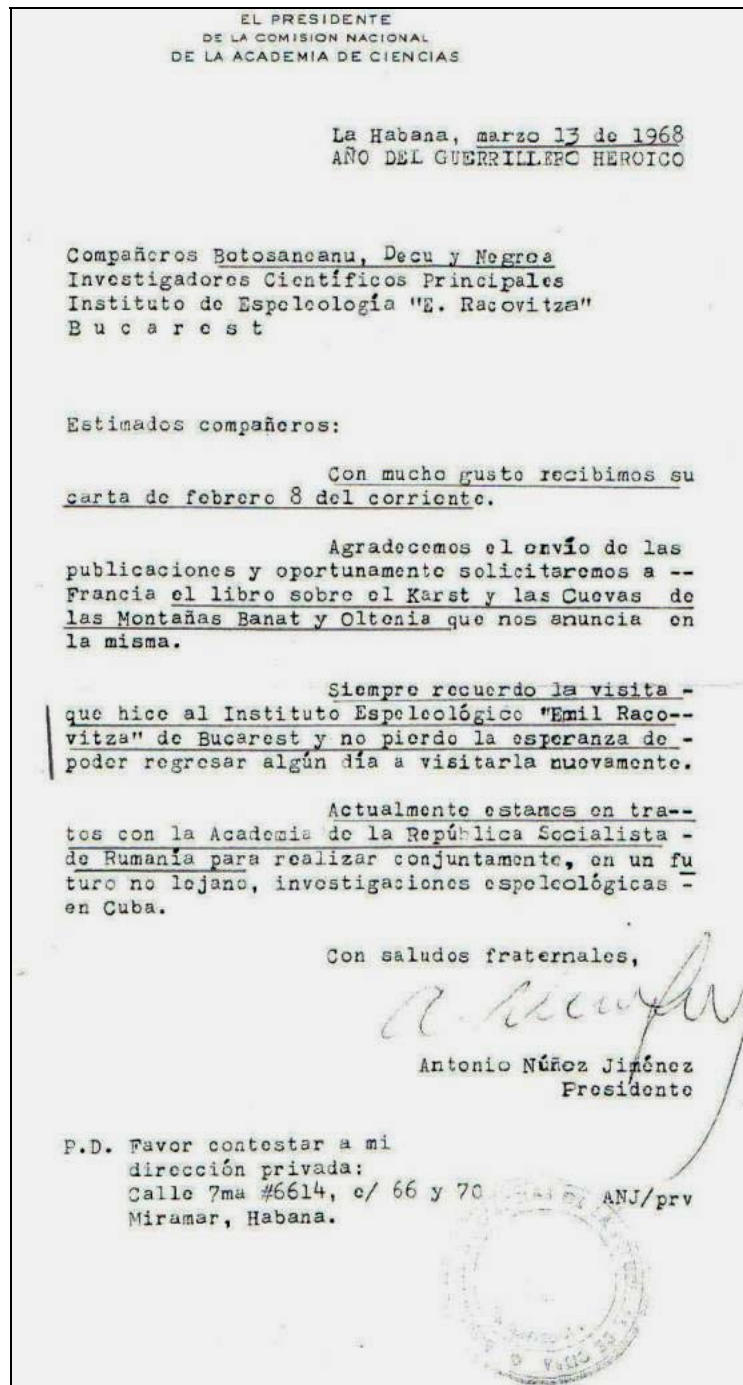


Fig. 4 – Letter of A.N.J. addressed to L. Botoșăneanu on March 13, 1968 (facsimile).

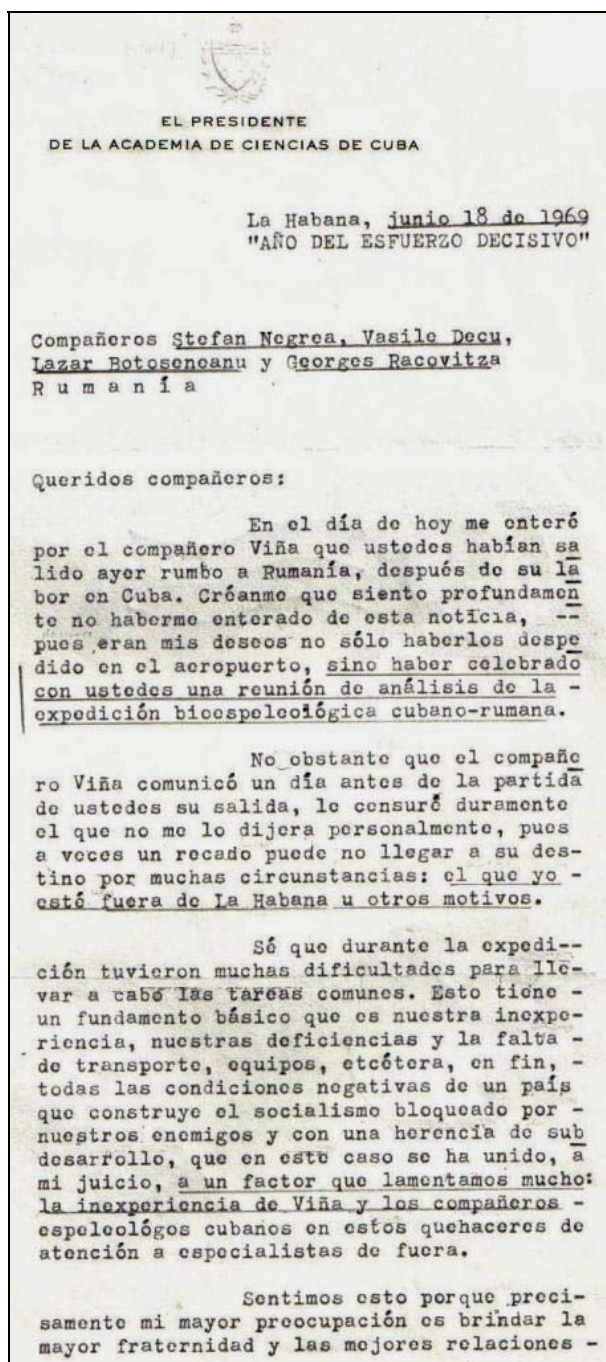



Fig. 5 – Letter of A.N.J. addressed to Șt. Negrea, V. Decu, L. Botoșăneanu and Gh. Racovița on June 18, 1969 (facsimile).


 EL PRESIDENTE
 DE LA ACADEMIA DE CIENCIAS DE CUBA

La Habana, octubre 9 de 1969
 "AÑO DEL ESFUERZO DECISIVO"

Compañeros Vasile Decu y Stefan Negrea
 Instituto de Espeleología
 B u c a r e s t

Estimados compañeros:

Recibí su carta de fecha 29 -
 de julio de 1969, la que paso con mucho gusto a
 contestar.

Efectivamente sé de la ^{salud} del compañero Botoseneanu porque recibí carta de
él donde me dice que des cansa como convalecien
te en esa.

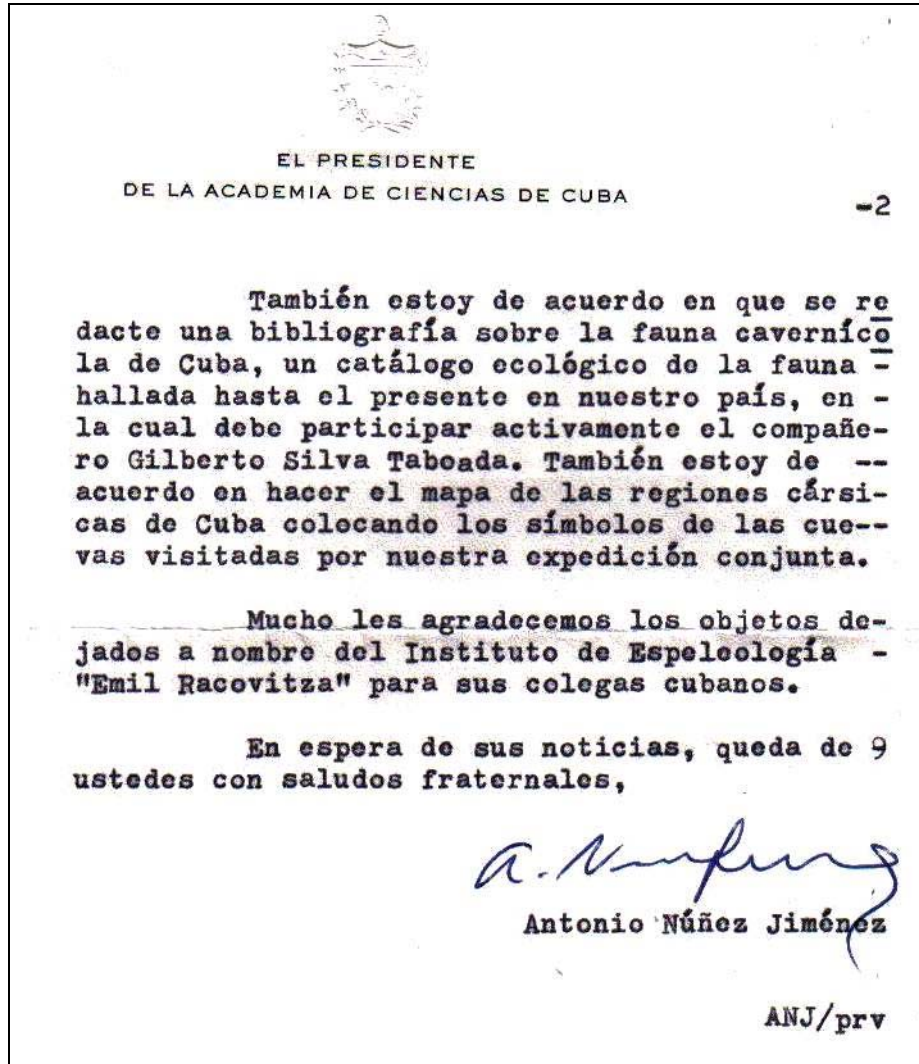
Estoy de acuerdo en recibir el
 programa que contenga los distintos temas para -
 el estudio de la fauna terrestre en Cuba, de --
 acuerdo con lo que me dicen ustedes en su carta
 y con lo que hablamos anteriormente con Fundora.

Con Fundora hemos estudiado có
 mo realizar algún tipo de estudio biológico en -
la Cueva de Emilio, Con respecto a la cueva selec
cionada por el compañero Viñas para el laborate
rio, cerca de Santiago de Cuba, creo sería conve
niente lean copia de la carta que he dirigido al
Profesor Pora donde van algunas opiniones del --
compañero Viñas. En todo esto le he pedido conse
jo a nuestro querido Profesor Pora.

Con respecto a los datos que -
 piden ustedes de las cuevas visitadas, le dare--
 mos oportunamente los mismos, aunque les recorda
 mos que en la monografía que escribimos "Clasifi
cación Genética de las Cuevas de Cuba", se en--
 encuentran muchos de los datos que se necesitan pa
 ra la monografía que vamos a redactar conjunta--
 mente. He tomado nota de los distintos temas que
 debemos desarrollar como son las regiones cársi-
 cas visitadas, paleo-geografía cubana y los da--
 tos sobre paleo-botánica.

a.

Fig. 6 – Letter of A.N.J. addressed to V. Decu and Șt. Negrea on October 9, 1969 (facsimile).



b.

Fig. 6 – Letter of A.N.J. addressed to V. Decu and Șt. Negrea on October 9, 1969 (facsimile).

The second letter (December 9, 1964; same addressee) (Fig. 3) mentions that in short time a letter will be sent to the president of the Romanian Academy to ask his authorisation for my travel to Cuba for speleological research.

Finally, the third letter (March 13, 1968; directed to “Compañeros Botosaneanu, Decu y Negrea, investigadores científicos principales”) (Fig. 4) brings the decisive information that “At present we are in negotiations with the Academy of Romania with the aim of carrying out jointly, in the near future,

speleological research in Cuba”. We were now about one year far from the achievement of our dream.

A few final notes will suffice. The expedition was for the first time officially mentioned in the cooperation agreement between the two Academies (October 21, 1968). The initial composition of the Romanian team: T. Orghidan, L. Botoșăneanu, V. Decu, Șt. Negrea; latter on T.O. replaced – for medical reasons – by Gh. Racoviță, who will join the team later in Cuba.

The correspondence with A.N.J. continued after the first expedition (Figs. 5–6). For instance, in a letter (Fig. 6) dated October 9, 1969 (and directed to V.D. and S.N. – L. Botoșăneanu being still outrun by the consequences of a serious pulmonary histoplasmosis got in the Cuban caves) A.N.J. refers to projects of joint research, in some cases already initiated during the 1969 expedition, or to projects of publications. The excellent scientific results of the first expedition, obtained despite difficulties of all kinds, and published *inter alia* in four volumes of “Résultats ...” (1973, 1977, 1981, 1983) have determined the Cuban Academy to invite a team of Romanian speleologists for a second expedition to Cuba in 1973.

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