

**ION TH. SIMIONESCU (July 10, 1873 – January 7, 1944) –
SCIENTIFIC CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

NICOLAE ANASTASIU

Acad., Profesor emeritus, Bucharest University
nicanastasiu@gmail.com

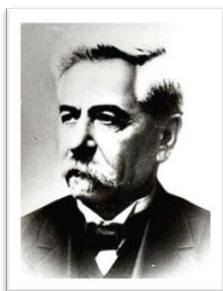
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In the year 2023, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ion Th. Simionescu, one of Romania's much-revered scholars. A standing member of the Romanian Academy (since 8 May 1911), president of the Sciences Department (1928–1931), vice-president (1932–1935) and president of the Romanian Academy (three successive terms – 31 May 1941; 1942; 1943–1944), professor Ion Simionescu devoted all his 71 years of life to scientific culture and education.

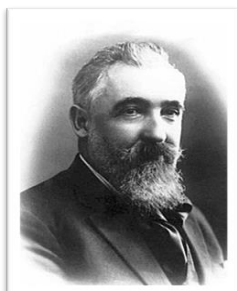
He was also president of the Romanian Science Society (1930) and of the Geological Society (1932).

In Iași, he was the student of Grigore Cobălcescu. A multilateral personality, whose memory we are honouring now, here, in Iași.

Gh. Macovei, member of the Academy, former assistant and the very first doctor to be tutored by I. Simionescu, is the one who, in his volume entitled “A lifetime of work” (*O viață de muncă* in Romanian), devoted to Ion Simionescu, was saying: “*The value of his ethical and spiritual personality, and the richness and diversity of his writing and research, which he started way before he became a standing member (1913), make him worthy of becoming president of the Romanian Academy*”.



Grigore Cobălcescu



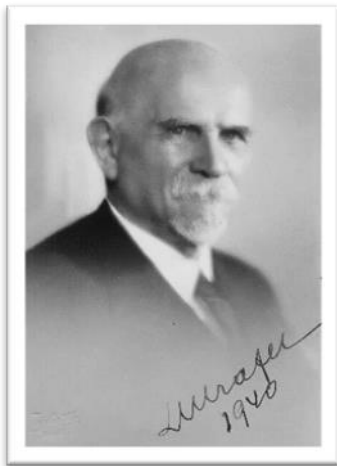
*Ion Th. Simionescu
between predecessors and descendants
(Wikipedia screen captures, 2023)*



Gh. Macovei

His belief in Academy's mission and in his role in promoting this institution are clearly suggested by the speeches (messages) which he frequently delivered in the General Assemblies of the Romanian Academy. During his third term as Academy president, which he held during WWII, he would say: *"We are now at the outset of a new year of activity, the 78th in the lifetime of our institution, in circumstances where the guise of a deceitful peace obscures lurking concerns. It is not just the fate of our people and country that is at stake, silence should not be mistaken for humility; yet silence may be taken for the abdication of our duty to assert our right to life. So could the Romanian Academy, representing the essence of our cultural life, stay stolid toward the tactics of the fight against our souls? Well, no!... The Romanian Academy lives up to the moment and by doing so it reaffirms its purpose, that of a forum that guides the intellectual endeavours of our entire nation"*.

These were some of the words he said during his *acceptance speech* (18/31 May 1911 ??24 May 1913)¹, when he also spoke of the *Evolution of the scientific culture in Romania* – a refined and intricate retrospective of Romanian research in general. And he added: *"It is exactly because we live in times where science rules over everything by explaining the causes of phenomena and by adding value to the energy, that our science plays such an immense role in the life of individuals and in the life of peoples, just as much. That is why our duty to science itself, but also to our nation, requires from all the servants of science that they sacrifice some of their time in order to educate the nation. Science will prevail!"*



In the upcoming paragraphs, we will humbly strive to review and expound the diversity of Prof. Simionescu's interests and responsibilities, his lucidity, and his involvement in the life of the City, with his writings and speeches. And I believe that the similarities that one could note in the past and the present scientific and educational approaches are worth considering. Because the matters that concerned *Prof. Simionescu* surface again almost cyclically. But let us remember what **Ludovic Mrazec** (president of the Academy over 1932–1935) explained during his *Acceptance speech*, which gives us an insight into Ion Simionescu's personality and speaks of how valuable science is to society and of the role it

should play. *"In Romania, science came about out of the need to organise Romania into a state, we had certain needs dictated by the civilisation that we were supposed to build quite swiftly. Science is one and the same. It is common*

¹ *Acceptance speeches*, vol. IV (1907–1919), Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 2005, A volume edited by Dorina N. Rusu, member of the Academy.

knowledge that its essential trait is to help economise on thinking and might, in one's practical life. Science, which is thus revealed to the eye from underneath the veil of mystery in which it is shrouded by those who do not know anything about it or fail to understand it, comes out as a huge and glorious and unique supporter of modern civilisation. Science uses prudently the balance it finds in nature to master the powers of nature and harness them for the good of humanity”.

And then again, speaking of Simionescu: *“What makes your research different from the others' is meticulousness doubled by rigorous scientific reasoning and clear demonstration in a superb Romanian language.”* Mrazec understood with great lucidity what the statute of science was in the early years of the 20th century, and he was also able to see deeply into Simionescu's research and understand how the latter started fostering the educational needs of the many and less learned people.

“You stayed true to one of your soul's principal traits: always curious to see what lies beyond the bounds of your speciality, trying to share your knowledge with those whom fate keeps away from the virtuous concerns of science. You are, with what you say and what you write, a bellwether of the most alluring sort who believes in using universities as a bridge between the cultivated persons and the scientists from all over the world.”

Closely scrutinising Simionescu's *Acceptance speech* will take one to a virtual and necessary dialogue: what has been said and what will be said about science and education, those two realms where our community lives and works in.

Simionescu on science

In order to better understand and know this scholar and what he was thinking of science and researchers, one should take a look at his original messages.

“In the cultural evolution of humankind, science is the last to emerge. None of Greeks' nine muses (Hesiod's Theogony, 7th century BC) is the protector of science, because Urania is considered to be a contemplator of the mysterious sky rather than a connoisseur of areas important to the humankind...”.

“When silence can dwell in for more, when war-horn howls are not quotidian anymore, when balance settles in, although precarious at the outset, well, it is only then that – ununited and hesitant as if fumbling in the dark – heralds appear calling for an improved development of the humankind which will endow men with weapons other than the swords and spears, so they can defend themselves and their country, and help her thrive. It has been so in every place, we could not have been different. Science needs external conditions that must be different from those of literature or history, and those external conditions depend greatly on political circumstances, which in their turn are closely tied to a country's geographical situation.”

This is so resemblant of the times we live in. Let us follow, in the coming paragraphs, on the thoughts and voice of the personality we celebrate today.

“Culture is like the wind; it propagates far from the source that generated it. The stars in the sky will never appear all at once, they become visible one by one before they all become the sparkling trims of night. It was at last in the early years of the 18th century that two glimmering lights came through from very far away into Romania’s scientific culture, which – against the darkness of the times – seemed to shine like some elating beacons. High Stewart Constantin Cantacuzino and Dimitrie Cantemir are two pathfinders who started our country’s journey into the land of scientific research.”

Right after the first university was created in the Romanian Principalities (in Iași, 1860), Ion Simionescu notes that: *“Science has at last found a safe haven for itself. All that is new will be owed to the universities.”*

“The pioneers of Romanian science encountered much to be endured, fighting hardships, fighting the general indifference and the reluctance to consider that science may be of any good. The only weapon that could save them was their tenacious love for culture and science.”

True to his creed, alongside the efforts he was making as a researcher and publicist, Professor Ion Simionescu turned his attention to the *crowd*. Towards that social community that wanted to know more. He stayed continually in the public eye, with his publications in the media and the speeches he delivered in conference halls and schools.

In 1906, when the Geological Institute was opened, he applauded the role played by L. Mrazec to attract young talents, which he called *product of our universities*.

And it was also then that he commended the yield of the seeds planted by Gr. Cobălcescu and Gr. Ștefănescu, who contributed to the economic development with their studies and those of their professional successors. But those who would appreciate the toil of the geologists who strove to find and harness new mineral and energy resources were scarce in numbers.

This is an example of his wisdom: *“the demand for peat is on the rise to replace muscle power during the threshing and winnowing works, or to generate electricity, of little peril, even to those abodes that have been lightless for so long; the coal gives life and powers movement up to the highest peaks.”*

Simionescu’s advice should also be heard by today’s incumbents. This is what he used to say with his unmistakable Moldavian accent: *“The state of evolution where we are right now must be real, and this liberty, just like the intensity of thinking that relies on the knowledge of life and everything around us, must also be bestowed upon those who have not evolved for more than one hundred years.”* This is a strong advice, rather sarcastic, but it is still so necessary today as it was in the past.

Simionescu and education; professor and educator

Ion Simionescu's *penchant* for science (research, scientific culture) was doubled by the fact that he was also a gifted educator and teacher, who devoted his energy to cultured learnings and to educating young generations and others.

As an illustration, I would like to review the institutions which he attended to study and improve himself and where his interest to education was formed: 1889 – “Treboniu Laurian” secondary school – Botoșani; 1889 – Fellow of the Hight Normal School – Iași; 1894 – Bachelor of natural sciences, Faculty of Sciences, Iași; 1895 – Fellow of the Romanian Academy in Vienna and Grenoble; upskilling courses taken in Vienna and Grenoble; 1898 – doctoral diploma (PhD in geology) in Vienna².



The façade of “Al. I. Cuza” University in Iași
(Source: Wikipedia, 2023)

After all these studies, when he was only 26, in 1899 he started teaching the fundamentals of trade, physics and chemistry (*Cursul mărfurilor și noțiuni de fizică și chimie*) in a vocational school in Iași (*Școala comercială nr. 1*), while he also became a lecturer at the pedagogical seminar of the University.

He became an instructor (*preparator* in Romanian) at the Mineralogy Department (headed by prof. Vasile Buțureanu) of the University of Iași, on 01 January 1900, and later that year he also became a substitute teaching geology and palenotology.

² Information quoted from *Ion Simionescu – savant și dascăl al neamului* (Ion Simionescu – Scholar and educator of the nation). Edited by prof. Mihai Brânzilă, Publishing House of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, 182 pg.

In 1902, he obtained a teaching tenure.

He became dean of the Iași Faculty of Sciences in 1910. This is when he started to organise the Palentology Collection of the “Al. I. Cuza” University in Iași.



Palentology Collection of the „Al. I. Cuza” University
(Source: Wikipedia, 2023)

He was rector of the Iași University between 1912–1923.

During the First World War (1914–1918), he was general secretary of the Ministry of Education.

He started teaching paleontology at the Bucharest University on 1 October 1929 and later on he became Head of the Paleontology Department.

He became president of the Standing Council of the Ministry of National Education on 13 April 1939.

After 40 years of uninterrupted work in the academic environment, when he was 67, he retired (1 October 1940).

With such education and with so many university titles, Ion Simionescu started writing manuals for primary schools, secondary schools and universities, in addition to his research work. His first manuals covered natural sciences (1902), then he wrote a major geology treaty and an “Introduction to paleontology” (*Introducere în paleontologie* – 1928).



Some covers of the books written by Ion Simionescu (Source: Wikipedia, 2023)

Yet, we should not forget his contribution to educating the public at large with his introductory papers and his constant publications in the newspapers and magazines of the time. The AGORA always expected him and he was present in the amphiteaters of the time. Just like the ancient Greeks in the Temple of Hephaestus.

Yet, we will only concentrate on the position that professor Simionescu had about science, which was very well decribed in the *Acceptance Speech* he delivered in front of the Romanian Academy members, and on his belief in the power of education.

Raised and trained in the Iași University, where Romania’s pioneering researcher, Professor Grigore Cobălcescu, handed him the baton, thanks to his

undisputed merits, he was then invited by Ludovic Mrazec to be co-leader of the geological research and to steer together the school of paleontology and stratigraphy of the Bucharest University. The sort of brotherhood that doubles our pride. We are here to honour our predecessors and commemorate the most capable ones.