

## ION TH. SIMIONESCU'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE

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The scientific activity of Ion Simionescu was remarkable, the appellation of scientist being fully justified by his undeniable scientific merits, but also by his special didactic concerns both at the University of Iași and that of Bucharest. For this reason, an original volume published in Iași in 2010 called him “scholar and teacher of the nation”. His concerns for the culturalization of the broad masses of people are extremely numerous and diverse as both theme and approach. His entire work is of a broad humanist breath, on the one hand militant, and on the other - cultural.

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Talking about the astonishing personality of Ion Simionescu a century and a half after the birth of the scholar and eminent man of culture represents only a pale attempt at bringing back to our memory a name with unique valences in Romanian science and culture.

So, where and when did he see the light of the day and what schools did he attend in his youth? Without issuing value judgments, we can only confirm that he was born somewhere in the central part of Eastern Romania (in the village of Fântânele, Bacău county), but the early disappearance of both parents brought him to Botoșani, a crucible town which modelled great and brilliant Romanian personalities, such as Nicolae Iorga or George Enescu, to be extremely demanding in enumeration. Here, he changes his name (taking over that of his maternal grandmother), and he attends a prestigious school – the “August Treboniu Laurian” National College. Upon graduating the high school, he holds the baccalaureate in Sciences and Letters at the University of Iași and, in the fall of 1900, he enrolls at the Faculty of Sciences, where he has Grigore Cobălcescu and Petru Poni as professors [1,2]. After finishing the faculty and a short professional journey in Botoșani, at the suggestion of his former teacher Petru Poni and with the financial

support of philanthropist Vasile Adamachi, he obtained a scholarship to study in Vienna, where he also got, in 1898, the title of PhD in Geology. In the same year, he continued his geology studies in France, in Grenoble, which opened his prospects for a university career and scientific research, both extremely valuable and fruitful at national level [3,4].

But what are the supporting points of Ion Simionescu's exceptional career?

In our opinion, a first landmark is the special genetic background of a young man born in a simple family, who was orphaned from early infancy but never abandoned the fight for life and, implicitly, for education. From this point of view, the fact that, in the primary school, he was a colleague of another luminary of Romanian spirituality, Nicolae Iorga, whom he tenderly envied for his much better material conditions, but not for his brilliant mind, deserves special attention [5].

In fact, another element of reference regarding the vastness of Ion Simionescu's scientific work is precisely his exquisite mind, which allowed an extremely solid accumulation of knowledge, both in the very attractive field of Natural Sciences and in several other related fields.

On the other hand, the entire scientific activity and all his contributions to the development and advancement of science would not have been possible without a sustained work, continued since his deprived years of childhood until full senescence, when he enjoyed unanimous respect for his entire activity. His creativity was focused on a most practical purpose: development of science, opening of education for all social categories, elimination of inequities and involvement of intellectuals in the education of masses. Thus, bringing culture and education to the younger generation acquires special significance, which constitutes an extremely solid landmark in the activity of Ion Simionescu, in the university environment of both Iași and Bucharest [2,6].

After moving to Bucharest, Ion Simionescu's multilateral activity diversifies, acquiring new values, especially regarding culturalization, as he is convinced of the fact that a thorough training of the young generation will ensure the progress of the Romanian nation.

So, what brought Ion Simionescu to Romanian historiography?

To begin with, all exegetes, especially in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, use the term *reference scholar* for describing his personality. His scientific contributions to Geonomic Sciences (Geology and Geography) and Life Sciences (Biology) testify this [1,5]. In addition, his didactic activity, with small insertions in pre-university education, but with ample contributions to the development of higher education in Iași and Bucharest, should be also mentioned [7,8]. His managerial activity should not be neglected either, considering the positions of chair/ department head and rector, plus those held within the Ministry of Public Instruction, Ministry of National Education and Romanian Parliament. His contribution in the academic field is also particularly relevant, as he was successively elected corresponding member, full member, with attributions within

the scientific sections, and finally President of the Romanian Academy [2,5]. The simple enumeration of the specific fields of activity cannot elude the extremely vast and diverse contributions in terms of popularization of science and culture, by the multitude of conferences, radio broadcasts, articles in the newspapers and magazines of the time, but also the numerous speeches and interventions delivered at various manifestations of didactic, social, or political type.

Undoubtedly, his scientific field of reference is that of Geology, his most numerous and valuable contributions belonging to Paleontology and, implicitly, to Stratigraphy. Exegetes of the work in question group his concerns in this field into three great cycles. If the works from the first cycle (*Geological and paleontological studies in the Southern Carpathians*) still bear the imprint of the great masters from Vienna and Grenoble and resume some ideas of their predecessors, the second cycle of monographs (*Geological and paleontological studies from Dobrogea*) stands out for its originality, being totally new [9–11].

After the establishment of Greater Romania and the return of Bessarabia to the motherland, the field of geological investigations extended immediately to the east of the Prut River, for the study of Tertiary deposits, especially the Sarmatian ones, situated in the Moldavian Platform, materialized in a reference monograph for that time – the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: *The Sarmatian Fauna of Romania* (1940) [1,9]. The scientific contributions in the fields of Geology and Paleontology are undeniable, their value being unanimously recognized and appreciated by the specialists of the domain, including the representatives of the Iași university center (Liviu and Bica Ionesi, Viorel Erhan, Leonard Olaru, Ilie Turculeț, Mihai Brânzilă, and the list could go on). The results of the titanic work done in this field can also be appreciated statistically – for example, Theodor Neagu mentions that, in the paleontological works of Ion Simionescu, he has described countless taxa, among them 1,500 species of fossil invertebrates, of which over 160 new ones [10].

A simple look at the bibliographic list of his Geology and Paleontology works indicates a number of 95 scientific titles (including some monographs), to which two other treatises should be added: the *Geology Treatise* (1927) and *Introduction to Paleontology* (1928) [1,4].

Apart from his valuable scientific contributions, mention should be made of the didactic geographical ones, for use in the field of geographical higher education. It all started with his taking in charge of the Department of Geography in 1911, which became vacant after the death of Ștefan Popescu [2,8,12,13]. Without entering controversies regarding the duration of the geographical teaching activity at the University of Iași (according to some authors until 1919), we accept the point of view of Ioan Donișă who, based on indubitable evidence, concludes that his activity in the Department of Geography extended between November 11, 1911 and January 5, 1914 [12,14].

In relation to his geographical contributions, we cannot overlook the monumental work *Our Country. Nature, people, work*, published in 1937, one year

after another remarkable work, that of Vintilă Mihăilescu (*Romania. Physical geography*, 1936). Comparing these works issued in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we particularly appreciate the novelty they brought, to which we add the conclusion of Ioan Donisă (2010), according to which “*Simionescu’s work is more complex, in it being treated the social economic aspects, as well*” [14].

The list of scientific contributions in the field of Geography is much wider. Worth mentioning are the five volumes of *Pitorescul României*, totaling 622 pages (published between 1939 and 1942), as well as the two biogeographical monographs, *Flora României* (1939) and *Fauna României* (1938), which add up to over 900 pages [1,13].

Absolutely fabulous is also his science popularization activity, which targeted very diverse aspects regarding the description of nature, human settlements and inhabitants of our country. Numerous other contributions include travel notes, miscellaneous articles, and pamphlets published in *Science Popularization Library (Geographical Reading Series)* and *Useful Knowledge (From the Wide World Series)*, describing lands and places of both Romanian and foreign territories [3,6,15].

However, the vastness of his activity does not stop here. The list of geographical concerns also includes participation in the elaboration of school textbooks for primary, secondary and higher education. Also added are a series of articles on geographical issues that target localities, regions or foreign countries, as well as more than 100 contributions in newspapers and magazines, treating multiple aspects of geographical nature (but not only!), the particularities of some localities, regions and unique elements of the Romanian lands. The same category includes broadcasted conferences, which prove the brilliant mind, the perfect training in the field of Life and Earth Sciences, as well as his permanent strive for the advancement and fulfillment of the ideals of the Romanian nation, in a century full of vicissitudes and potential national dangers [1,2,6,7].

Every time the documentation was extremely rigorous, the phenomenological observation stood out for its correctness, and the description assumed a thorough knowledge of the country, an aspect which includes him in the category of the great Romanian personalities of the last century, with an integrative vision, and the stature of geographer comparable to that of Simion Mehedinți or of historian Nicolae Iorga.

The scientific activity of Ion Simionescu was remarkable, the appellation of scientist being fully justified by his undeniable scientific merits, but also by the special didactic concerns both at the University of Iași and that of Bucharest. For this reason, in an original volume published in Iași in 2010, he is entitledly considered “scholar and teacher of the nation” [2,4,16], being also elected a member of the Romanian Academy, up to becoming president of this high scientific forum.

All these aspects would be sufficient for a high-quality biography of a reference personality for the Romanian science of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One should simply go through the reference list drawn up by Gheorghe Macovei and completed in the volume *Ion Simionescu – Opere alese*, to discover the extremely vast fields and diversity of concerns of Ion Simionescu, a token of his erudition, thorough training, knowledge of the realities in the territory and society, all with the undisguised aim of actively participating in the culturalization of the population of his country [5,15].

His concerns for the culturalization of the broad masses of people are extremely numerous and diverse in both theme and approach. He published more than 100 titles, not only of geographical nature, in the *Science popularization library* and *Useful knowledge* collections, to which the collaboration with magazines and newspapers of the time should be added. We mention only a few newspapers, such as *Adevărul*, *Vremea*, *Neamul Românesc*, *Universul*, *Timpul* and many others, as well as some magazines: *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, *Convorbiri literare*, *Viața Românească*, *Albina*, *Natura*, etc. [3,6,15].

The thematic spectrum of these contributions is particularly vast, including concerns about country's economy and energy, general culture level of the younger generation and “crowd culture”, including books, multi-reference calendars and yearbooks, politics, health, school and church related topics, etc. A very special place is occupied by the concerns regarding the Romanian space and its population (*Country and the Romanian people*, *The village and the people*), which also reveal the note of applied patriotism of a Romanian specialist familiar with both socio-economic realities and the territory inhabited by Romanians [7,8].

We cannot overlook the hundreds of conferences and radio broadcasts held in Bucharest and Iași, but also in other cities and localities in the country, which denote an exceptional openness to argue the Romanian state of the nation, as well as the fantastic work power of the scholar [5]. His entire work is a broad humanist breath, on the one hand militant, and on the other cultural. The patriotism that transpires in his work is totally devoid of extremist accents, being based on arguments especially about the realities in the field, about those experienced by himself or of historical nature [8,16].

As a scientist, Ion Simionescu represented an association of native qualities, diabolical mind, vivid and wide-ranging intelligence, but also critical spirit, a fine observer of nature and equally of the social environment, all these backed up by a special capacity of synthesis and an exceptional power of work.

The entire work of Ion Simionescu is a noble one, characterized by a total lack of ephemeral political ambitions, given that he also held ministerial positions (Ministry of Public Instruction and Ministry of National Education) and was a member of the Romanian Parliament [16]. His writing is objective, conditioned by scientific perceptions, with wide insertions related to his great love for nature, for the Romanian territory. Equally, one cannot overlook the remarkable literary talent

or the refinement of the passionate naturalist, which embodies the portrait of the complete man of his time, who remains a reference for our current times [5,16].

Based on all mentioned aspects of his life and career, we totally reject any note of ingratitude and fully accept the value, on the threshold of the anniversary of a century and a half since the birth, of the great scientist he was.

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