

**ION SIMIONESCU – LEADER AND TRAILBLAZER  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI**

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The paper synthetically presents some of the leadership positions and dignities assumed by Professor Ion Simionescu, as follows: member of the Council of the Faculty of Sciences, head of the Department of Geology-Palaeontology in the Faculty of Sciences, member of the General Council of Instruction, Higher Education Section, founder of “Vasile Adamachi” scientific journal, which he directed for two decades, general secretary of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, deputy for Botoșani county in the first Parliament of Greater Romania and then in the National Constituent Assembly of Deputies, founder of “Cartea Românească” Publishing House and former president of the editorial board of directors, Rector of the University of Iași, Senator of the University of Iași in the Romanian Parliament and, last but not least, President of the Romanian Academy.

The numerous projects developed by him to promote the science and culture during his years at the University of Iași are also discussed in terms of their long lasting impact.

*Keywords:* Ion Simionescu, geology professor at the University of Iași, leadership positions, dignities, projects to disseminate science and culture

This paper aims at providing a brief chronological presentation of some of the leadership positions and dignities assumed by Professor Ion Simionescu, as well as a series of his projects he initiated during his years at the University of Iași, meant at promoting Romanian science and culture among common people.

Ion Simionescu served the country’s first modern university for nearly three decades, from 1900 to 1929. A scientist of great prestige, a tireless and passionate scholar, he fulfilled his lifelong duty as professor and researcher in the fields of geology and geography, guided by his constant preoccupation for the dissemination of culture among the broad masses of the Romanian people.

During his time as a member of *Alma Mater Iassiensis*, due to his professional authority and moral profile, Professor Simionescu was appointed to various structures or leadership positions within the university, and held important positions within the Romanian state.

After being hired on February 1, 1900, as an instructor in the Department of Mineralogy, Ion Simionescu was first appointed associate professor on January 15, 1902 and then full professor, starting from March 15, 1905. On the same date he was appointed *head of the Department of Geology-Palaeontology in the Faculty of Sciences*, which he headed and represented as a *member of the Council of the Faculty of Sciences* until 1929, when he transferred to the University of Bucharest. At that time, the laboratory of geology-palaeontology was, in his own words: “*in a state that would make it impossible for one to describe it by such a pretentious name as a laboratory, being rather a collection of borrowed tables and cabinets, of different shapes and colours, which couldn't possible serve its right purpose*”. [1]

In 1905, immediately after becoming head of the department, his perseverance earned him four rooms in the East wing on the ground floor of the university palace. In two of these rooms, he organized laboratories for practical works with students in geology and palaeontology. A room was reserved for the collection of specimens, as more than 800 specimens of fossils and sedimentary rocks from the country had been added to the existing collection. The fourth room housed the library department, enriched with 89 books, 25 journals and more than 170 works obtained from exchanges with other specialist laboratories in the country and abroad. [1] In the same year, the necessary funds were budgeted for the employment of an assistant and a servant, 1,000 lei being also allocated annually for laboratory materials. Still, in 1905, Gheorghe Macovei, a graduate of the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Iași, the Natural Sciences section, was hired as assistant at the Department of Geology-Palaeontology. Four years later, Gheorghe Macovei became the first Romanian specialist to defend a PhD thesis in the field of Geology, on the topic “*Geology of the Tertiary Basin of Bahna*”, with Professor Ion Simionescu as his *doctoral supervisor*. Worth mentioning here is that Professor Ion Simionescu coordinated at the University of Iași two other doctoral researches, conducted by Mihai David (*Geological research in Podișul Moldovenesc*) and Theodor Văscăuțeanu (*Silurian formations in the Romanian bank of the Dniester*, publicly defended on June 25, 1931).

Besides Professor Ion Simionescu's outstanding scientific work, we should also mention two extremely valuable achievements of his activity as head of the Department of Geology-Paleontology, namely the organization of a systematic geology library and the development of a collection of fossils and rocks, [2,3] on the basis of which the present Museum of Paleontology and Paleobotany of the Department of Geology was established, which also contains one of Professor Ion Simionescu's personal collections, consisting of 607 fossils exhibited in showcases, representing Paleozoic, Mesozoic and Tertiary mollusc, brachiopod, echinoderm, vertebrate, etc. taxa, of which 66 are new to science.

In 1907, when he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, by Royal High Decree no. 628 of February 9, 1907, at the proposal of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, Constantin G. Disescu, Ion Simionescu was appointed, for a period of five years, *member of the General Council of Instruction, Higher Education Section* [1].

Whithout diminishing his undisputed leadership merits, we must mention that Professor Ion Simionescu was wrongly attributed the position of *Dean of the Faculty of Sciences* between 1910 and 1912 [4–7] or 1912 and 1914. [1]

From 1908 until the end of 1910, the dean of the Faculty of Sciences was Professor Aurelian Mănescu, a mathematician. On 14 December 1910, at the end of his two-year term of office, elections for the position of dean were held with the participation of 11 professors from the Council of the Faculty of Sciences. According to address no. 78/23.12.1910 sent to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction (National Archives Iași, hereinafter ANI, “Al. I. Cuza” University, Faculty of Sciences, file 79/1910, f. 12), Professor Aurelian Mănescu was re-elected Dean of the Faculty of Sciences for a new 2-year term (until December 1912), with 6 votes, the remaining 5 votes being distributed as follows: Anastasie Obreja - 1 vote, Leon Cosmovici – 1 vote and Vasile Butureanu – 3 votes. At the end of this mandate, on 17 January 1913 Professor Paul Bujor, biologist (ANI, fund “Al. I. Cuza”, Faculty of Sciences, file 84/1913, f. 86) was elected dean of the Faculty of Sciences. According to Article 82 of the Law on Secondary and Higher Education (sanctioned by Royal High Decree No. 1.097 of 23 March 1898, published in the Official Gazette No. 283 of 24 March 1898): “The internal affairs of each faculty shall be conducted by a dean elected for a term of two years by the Faculty Council from among its active professors and confirmed by royal decree. The dean is re-eligible” [8].

In 1910, Professor Ion Simionescu founded the “*Vasile Adamachi*” *scientific journal* together with Petru Poni, Paul Bujor, Dragomir Hurmuzescu, Dimitrie Pompeiu, Nicolae Costăchescu, Ioan Borcea and Constantin Bedreag (all members of its Steering Committee), *which he directed for two decades*. We should also mention that Ion Simionescu had previously received a Vasile Adamachi scholarship to Vienna, specialization geology and palaeontology (1895–1898). At the end of his studies, he defended his thesis *Über die Geologie des Quellengebietes der Dâmbovicioara (Rumänien)*, and was awarded the title of Doctor of Philosophy (specialising in Geology). The first volume of the journal was issued in February 1910. In the Preface, on behalf of the Steering Committee, Ion Simionescu mentioned: “*The journal we are publishing will not be a popularizing journal, in the sense of spreading elementary scientific precepts taught in primary or secondary schools among the masses. Our activity is restricted, at this timid initial stage, around those who once enjoyed a scientific training, but who for circumstances related to the evolution of our society, were no*

longer able to keep abreast of the progress of science. It is to these people, scattered throughout the country, isolated from the centres of culture, that we turn at once, for we have great confidence that it is only through them that the more distant, the more profound spread of scientific culture can reach the ignorant masses. On the other hand, our desire is to awaken confidence in our scientific centres, the university centres in the first place, to show that they too are nests of intense, laborious productive activity, which by no means disturbs the order in the country, as has unfairly been implied, but on the contrary, contributes to the development of a sense of duty and honest work in the pursuit of truth and wellbeing. Each issue of the journal will contain two distinct parts. In the first part, general questions will be addressed from a wider perspective, whereas the second part will include bibliographical references and overviews of studies conducted in our country, as well as any fact that may be related to scientific progress in Romania". [9] Subsequently, the first substantial study written by Ion Simionescu was included in vol. I, no. 3, under the title *The Prehistoric Man*. [10] In the last study [11] written by Ion Simionescu before his death for Vol. XXX no. 1 (January-March 1944) of the "V. Adamachi" Journal, entitled *Science in Iași*, the author stated that: "33 years ago, to express pious gratitude and remembrance of the great donor and supporter of science in Iași, the former scholarship holders of the Romanian Academy founded the «V. Adamachi» Scientific Journal, aimed not only at spreading scientific knowledge but mostly at emphasizing the ever-growing scientific progress of our country. It has overcome countless challenges – I myself have faced many difficult obstacles in the 20 years in which I have been running it – and it is still going strong. It has become a journal which, if issued in a foreign language, would not be inferior to the widely appreciated «Revue générale des sciences» due to its variety of topics and outstanding level."

The definitive confirmation of the value of his scientific work came with his appointment as a full member of the Romanian Academy in 1911. In his acceptance speech delivered on May 24, 1913, he spoke about *The Evolution of Scientific Culture in Romania*. Professor Ion Simionescu was subsequently appointed by Royal High Decree no. 81 of 08.01.1914 to the position of **Secretary General of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction** (ANI, "Al. I. Cuza" University fund, Rectorate, file 821/1914, f. 5), which he held during the Liberal Governments of Ion I.C. Brătianu between 04.01.1914–11.12.1916 and 11.12.1916–28.01.1918, respectively (when the city of Iași became the capital of the country). At the time, the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction was Ion G. Duca, holder of a bachelor and PhD degree in law and political science of the University of Sorbonne. With regard to the appointment of Professor Ion Simionescu in this position, [12] he recalls that: "having been appointed Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public

*Instruction, he preferred to take leave rather than commute between Iași and Bucharest. Not even the easily accessible Romanian railways in 1914–1915 could convince him. He would rather endure the pain of a few-years separation than commute between the two centres, which would not have allowed him to fully carry out his duties as a professor”. While holding this important position he intervened to support the University of Iași with consistent funding. Such an example is the hand he provided to Professor Orest Tafrali, who pleaded for the establishment of a Museum of Antiquities for preserving the prehistoric objects that were in the care of the university and the casts that had to be purchased from abroad. With the help of Professor Ion Simionescu, Orest Tafrali was commissioned to lease, on behalf of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, a building at 6, Paladi Street, the first location to shelter the collections in the possession of the University. [13] The former minister I.G. Duca recalls the period when the Royal House and the Government were housed in Iași: “in between the meetings with parliamentarians and councils of ministers where we were faced with the most difficult decisions, in order to convince myself that life was still following its usual course, I used to go every morning with Simionescu to the primary schools of Iași, to listen to the pupils – the representatives of the next generation – and to inspect the school canteens that I had organized to alleviate the miseries of the war. At times, I would catch a certain look in Simionescu's eyes that seemed to ask, in those tragic times: whom does the Minister want to confuse with all his apparently normal activity, him, me, or the others? Neither him, nor me, nor the others, and yet both him and me and the others”. [14].*

At the end of the First World War, Ion Simionescu was elected **Deputy for Botoșani on the lists of the National Liberal Party in the first Parliament of Greater Romania (1919-1920)**. [15-16]. Few years later, he was also elected **Deputy for Botoșani** for the period 1922–1926 **in the National Constituent Assembly of Deputies**, [17,1] which, on 26 March 1923, was to adopt the Constitution regarded as much ahead of its time, representing Professor Constantin G. Disescu’ work of maturity.

*On July 30, 1919 the initiative of a group of liberal intellectuals, in particular Ion Athanasiu, professor of general and comparative physiology, of general and comparative physiology and rector of the University of Bucharest between 1915–1920 and Professor Ion Simionescu laid the foundation of CARTEA ROMÂNESCĂ, the most prestigious and oldest Romanian publishing house, through merging of several publishing and printing houses, such as: C.I. Rasidescu Printing House (successor of the old C.A. Rosetti’s one), “Ioanițiu și fiii” Bookshop & Publishing House from 1858, “Librăria Școalelor”, established since 1891 and “Minerva” Institute, founded in 1898. The founders of the new publishing house, aimed “to create a publishing institute with the purpose of*

printing cheaper books with literary, but especially scientific content for the dissemination of culture”. Ion Simionescu was considered to be the leader who most pertinently left his mark on this interwar institution, which he also directed, later on, as *president of the editorial board of directors*, from October 1926 to January 1944 [18].

For his exceptional scientific work and his contribution to the promotion of science and culture among masses, academician Ion Simionescu was awarded the **Romanian Star in the rank of officer** on December 30, 1922 [7].

Certain works mention that Ion Simionescu held the honourable position of **Rector of the University of Iași** in 1912, 1923, [4–6,1] or between 1912–1914 [7]. However, archival documents preserved at Iași County Directorate of the National Archives of Romania and other available works confirm that Ion Simionescu held the function of **Rector of the University of Iași** only in 1923, when the country's first modern institution of higher education was closed during the student strikes triggered by the intensification of the Christian nationalist current in the student milieu, under the slogan “*numerus clausus*” [19]. In this regard, worth mentioning is the article written by Cătălin Botoșineanu in 2009 about Professor Ion Simionescu's Rector mandate. According to the author, Professor Traian Bratu's resignation from the Rectorate in December 1922, following a dispute with Professor Alexandru Constantin Cuza and after violent student movements, brought the University of Iași in a state of administrative uncertainty. Both the Senate and the vice-rector, doctor Constantin Bacaloglu, found themselves powerless when confronted with students' protests over the issue of cadavers for dissection at the Faculty of Medicine and the application of the “*numerus clausus*” principle. On February 5, 1923, the Great University College agreed to elect three professors, among whom the Minister of Instruction would appoint the new rector. The elections were won by Professor Alexandru Slătineanu, but were “invalidated” by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, who appointed Ion Simionescu as rector. He had been nominated in the list of professors sent to the minister precisely because he had informed the latter that he would not accept the high commission. It was at this time that the University of Iași, already closed since December 1922, experienced moments of administrative chaos, to which violent students' movements were added. Its professors denounced the serious infringement of university autonomy, and the minister had called for new elections following the resignation of Ion Simionescu. On the eve of the new elections, scheduled for 16 April, he accepted the appointment made in February. At the instigation of Alexandru Constantin Cuza, who thus saw the “peasant” project achieved, student movements resumed and the opening of the University, scheduled by the Ministry to take place on April 17, was postponed again.

According to the sources mentioned by the same author, to whom I am deeply grateful for helping me identify several files on the work of Ion Simionescu, preserved at the Iași County Directorate of the National Archives,

at the meeting of the University Senate of April 15, 1923, held after the meeting of the Faculty College, Vice-Rector Constantin Bacaloglu, mentions the following: *“In its desire, which motivated its previous motion to preserve undiminished the prestige of the faculty and at the same time not to let a conflict with the central school authority arise, the College, taking note of Minister's reply on the election of the rector, makes a warm and persevering appeal to the feelings of sacrifice and devotion of Professor Ion Simionescu, asking him to overcome all difficulties, and trusting in the unconditional support of all of us, to consent to withdraw his resignation and, on the basis of this declaration, the College asks the Minister to maintain and renew the confirmation of Mr. Simionescu as Rector, a new election remaining as an option only if Professor Simionescu does not respond affirmatively to our appeal”* (ANI, University “Al. I. Cuza” fund – Rectorate, file no. 1024/1923, f. 104). Subsequently, at the meeting of the University Council of **April 19, 1923**, Vice-Rector Constantin Bacaloglu announced the telegraphic reply of the Minister at the end of the last meeting of the Great College, as well as Professor ***Ion Simionescu acceptance of the position of Rector*** (ANI, “Al. I. Cuza” University fund – Rectorate, file no. 1024/1923, f. 111).

At the University Council meeting of April 21, 1923, the first one presided by Professor Ion Simionescu as Rector, he expressed his gratitude and promised to be nothing but the executor of Council's decisions (AN Iași, “Al. I. Cuza” University fund – Rectorate, file no. 1006/1922, f. 131).

The following aspects should be outlined about the period when he held the position of Rector:

- the post of University Accountant Cashier was created for the first time in the University, the Rector handing over to him “University’s scrip and funds”;
- the Regulation for administrative and service staff was elaborated;
- the deans of the faculties presented reports with improvement proposals;
- Professor Alexandru Popovici presented a report with proposals for the landscaping of the Botanical Garden (ANI, fund of “Al. I. Cuza” University, Rectorate, file no. 1006/1923, f. 152; ANI, “Al. I. Cuza” University, Rectorate, file 1021/1923, f. 120)

**Ion Simionescu's “provisional Rectorship”, to which he finally consented in order not to give the Liberal Minister the impression of a symbolic domination over the University, ended in October 1923**, following his second resignation. In the convocation of the Senate no. 1560 for the meeting of 31.10.1923, the resignation of Rector Ion Simionescu was the first point on the agenda. During the meeting, Rector Ion Simionescu informed the Senate that, by address number 124172 of 30.10.1923, the Ministry received his resignation from the Rectorship on 1.11.1923 (ANI, “Al. I. Cuza” University - Rectorate fund, file no. 1022/1923, f. 322). [20]

Finally, the last dignity fulfilled by Professor Ion Simionescu as professor at the University of Iași was that of ***Senator of the University of Iași in the Romanian Parliament (July 1927 – December 1928)***. According to the 1923 Constitution, Art. 71: “*Each university elects, by the vote of its professors, one senator*”. Thus, in 1927, on July 12, the University held elections to appoint its senator. Only Professor Ion Simionescu, who was seen as **one of the apostles of the Faculty of Sciences**, was nominated to the first section of the Iași County Court. Ion Simionescu's political and academic stature explain why, after his defeat in the 1926 elections (when he had also run for the same office), the academic community agreed to eulogize the former rector. It was a restorative measure, as left-wing professors refused to nominate a favourite, showing their gratitude to the one who, during the elections for rector's office in 1923, had agreed to support the University of Iași in the conflict with the liberal minister Constantin Angelescu. [21]

In 1929 he transferred to the University of Bucharest, where he headed the Paleontology Laboratory until 1940. In 1941, at the end of the mandate of acad. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, he was elected President of the Romanian Academy, which he led until his death on January 7, 1944.

In his reception speech in the Romanian Academy Hall on May 24, 2007, acad. Theodor Neagu [22] said about Ion Simionescu that he was “*the greatest and most gifted Romanian palaeontologist that has ever existed*”.

To conclude with, it is worth quoting the former Rector of “Cuza Voda” University (the former name of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, between 1942 and 1948), acad. Mihai David, [12] who wrote in 1944: “*Professor Ion Simionescu's efforts were crowned with the laurels of victory, but he could not have achieved his life's goal had he relied solely on the qualities with which he was so generously gifted by God. His work was his religion. He worked enormously and restlessly. When, on Sunday afternoons and holidays, the lights on the University façade went out and all its scholars rested, one window remained lighted with Professor Ion Simionescu at his desk, behind it*”.

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