

## THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY – PROMOTER OF THE FOUNDING OF THE ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

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*L'Académie Roumaine – initiatrice et partisane de la fondation de la Société Roumaine de Géographie.* La création de la Société Roumaine de Géographie (SRG) par le prince Carol I (roi depuis 1888) était basée sur la confiance et la collaboration d'un grand nombre de membres de l'Académie Roumaine qui soutenaient la nécessité d'avoir une organisation qui s'occuperait de la présentation géographique précise du territoire, de la population et de l'économie de la Roumanie. L'évolution de la SRG a connu de nombreuses étapes complexes, correspondantes aux aspects politiques, économiques et sociaux de la Roumanie: les débuts et les précurseurs (1875–1900); le développement de la géographie moderne (1900–1946); la géographie pendant la période communiste (1946–1989) et la géographie après 1990. Le développement de la géographie roumaine moderne, sous la coordination du professeur Simion Mehedinți, membre de l'Académie Roumaine, s'est fait en étroite collaboration avec la géographie française et allemande auprès de l'Université de Bucarest. Des départements de géographie ont ensuite été créés aux universités de Iași (1904), Cluj (1919) et Cernăuți (1919, actuellement en Ukraine). Le géographe français Emmanuel de Martonne, membre honoraire de l'Académie roumaine, et des membres de l'Académie roumaine (George Vâlsan, Constantin Brătescu, Vintilă Mihăilescu et Victor Tufescu) ont joué un rôle important dans l'évolution de la SRG.

### INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Romanian Geographical Society (RGS) in Bucharest, on June 9/21, 1875. The Society was founded by Prince Carol I (who would become king in 1881) and was a culmination of the activity carried out by the Romanian Academy for the knowledge of the Romanian land and people.

According to the great historian Nicolae Iorga, the Romanian Academy was, for King Carol I, “a respite from the eternal tempest of the surrounding turmoil”, while the academic institution saw the sovereign as a supporter and protector in the purest and deepest sense of the word (Rusu Dorina, 2013).

The Romanian Geographical Society is one of the first scientific institutions in our country and among the first of its kind worldwide (Geography of Romania I, 1983).

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE TO UNDERSTAND THE PAST

Currently, Geography in Romania is involved in various scientific and educational activities related to the current issues of globalization, carried out at pre-university and university education and in research institutes, such as: the increasing anthropogenic pressure on the environment; the impact of anthropogenic climate change on the environment and society; natural, social, and technological risks (floods, landslides, desertification, poverty, unemployment, pollution etc.); changes in land use; the geographical issues of ecosystems; the health of the population; current geopolitical aspects; current

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issues of urbanization and metropolitan areas. Romanian Geography is involved in the activities of the IGU by regularly taking part in and organizing scientific events, aiding and coordinating specialized committees, becoming engaged in various interdisciplinary debates and ensuring the participation of young people in the Geography Olympiads. Recently, an interest in geographical applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerged and is constantly increasing. The constant outstanding results obtained by pupils Romanian are owed to the fine teachers that are part of the RGS.

In 2022, the Centennial Geographical Congress was held in Paris, followed by the 35<sup>th</sup> IGU Congress in Dublin (2024), and together they established the future directions for the development of geography, and promoted a closer collaboration between the National Geographic Committees and the National Societies. These strategic directions, to which Geography in Romania would also adhere, include the following aspects: promoting the study of and education through geography at all levels; expanding the dissemination of geography; coordinating international collaborations and involving geographers in the global community of scientists; taking part in the organization of IGU geographical events (<https://igu-online.org/>).

### PRECURSORS AND BEGINNINGS

The establishment of the RGS on the initiative and with the direct support of the members of the Romanian Academy unfolded over a period of remarkable enthusiasm towards science felt throughout many countries, and an increase in interest in collaboration in various fields of science. On January 24, 1859, the union between Moldavia and Wallachia was achieved, and the Romanian Academy (initially called the Romanian Literary Society) was founded in 1866; it was to be the highest forum of science and culture in Romania. Botanist Anastasie Fătu, president of the Natural Sciences Department of the Romanian Academy, stated that it would be auspicious if the first endeavours of this department were to produce a complete scientific map of the country that would include “all branches of our geological, zoological, botanical and agricultural wealth”, as well as statistical data on agriculture and the population.

Another interesting aspect to note is the decision to print in “Latin text” Dimitrie Cantemir’s work “*Descriptio Moldaviae*”, appropriately timed in relation to Romania’s presence at an exhibition and during the second International Geographical Congress in Paris.

At the founding meeting of the society, Prince Carol I was elected president by a 15-member council, most of them associates of the Romanian Academy.

In his speech he called out the role of deforestation in environmental degradation, as well as the need to evaluate natural resources and to present abroad a comprehensive image of Romania in order to bring the country out of the “unknown” (the Geographical Society Newsletter).

The draft statute of the society was elaborated by historian V. A. Ureche from the University of Bucharest and had mainly aimed “to initiate and conduct studies in order to reach a perfect knowledge of the land of Romania from all geographical and economic perspectives” (Rusu Dorina, 1997).

Scientific activity was divided into three divisions within the RGS: mathematical geography and astronomy, physical geography and zoological sciences, and botanical and mineralogical sciences. The Military Geography Department was integrated into the RGS Mathematics and Astronomy Division in 1909 (Chiriacescu, 2000).

The number of RGS members increased from 80 in 1875 to almost 500 around 1900, and the scientific activity expanded (Mihăilescu, 1976). An aspect which generated great interest was the publication of the Great Geographical Dictionary of Romania and 32 geographical and historical dictionaries of the counties, under the coordination of G. I. Lahovari, member of the Romanian Academy and Secretary General of the RGS. The unitary structure of these dictionaries includes data from the fields of Physical Geography and Human Geography, as well as numerous details specific to each

respective county. These dictionaries are invaluable for the detailed regional knowledge of the respective period. RGS was also concerned with some global social issues and repeatedly emphasized the need to abolish slavery.

After existing for barely 25 years, the RGS was exchanging over 100 journals from foreign geographical societies.

Specialists from various fields worked in the RGS and supported the foundation of specialized institutes. The Geology Commission was established following the proposal of Acad. Gregoriu Ștefănescu; it would later become the Geological Institute; on the initiative of Acad. Ștefan Hepites, who also set up the first meteorological stations in Romania, the Meteorological Institute was later founded.

### THE FOUNDING OF MODERN GEOGRAPHY

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the RGS increased with the establishment of the first Geography departments at the Universities of Bucharest (1900), Iași (1904), Cluj (1919) and Cernăuți (1919, in present-day Ukraine).

The development of Modern Geography, after the year 1900, was favored by the close ties with other geographical societies, the participation of delegates in international congresses, as well as by the exchange of publications (Mihăilescu, 1976).

Professor Simion Mehedinți, head of the newly established Department of Geography, University of Bucharest (1900), and member of the Romanian Academy since 1908, is the founder of Modern Romanian Geography. In the following years, new Geography departments were founded at Iași (1904), Cluj (1919), and Cernăuți (1919, actually in Ukraine). After graduating, Prof. Mehedinți obtained a scholarship from the RGS and pursued his training in France with Prof. Paul Vidal de la Blache, and in Germany with professors F. Ratzel and Ferdinand von Richthofen.

The Professor's definition of Geography as a science of the relations between geospheres, and the specification of the increasingly extensive role human activities play in the global evolution of the Earth are still relevant today. His synthesis work "Terra. Introducere în geografie ca știință" ["Earth – An Introduction to Geography as a Science"] was published in 1931.

Through his endeavours as part of the RGS, Simion Mehedinți played a decisive role in the organization of Romanian education. He trained numerous generations of geographers who worked in pre-university and university education (Bălțeanu *et al.*, 2018). His students, G. Vâlsan, C. Brătescu and V. Mihăilescu, who became members of the Romanian Academy, contributed to the extension and development of new topics related to Physical, Human and Regional Geography.

The Romanian Modern Geography evolved in close connection to and with the support of the French and the German Geography.

An important role in the development of the RGS was that of illustrious French geographer Emmanuel de Martonne, who was elected Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy (1919).

He published over 70 articles and volumes about Romania, tackling different fields: geomorphology, human geography, extreme phenomena (such as floods), toponymy and regional geography. After the First World War, he played an essential role in drawing the western border of Romania. Emmanuel de Martonne taught in Cluj, gave lectures before the Geographical Society, contributed to the organization of interuniversity exchanges and supported the training of Romanian geographers at the Sorbonne.

Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu, member of the Romanian Academy and a prominent figure in Romanian geography, played an important role in the evolution of the Society. Overall, after the Great Unification of Romania following World War I, the Society broadened its horizons and expanded its interests, publishing valuable works, including doctoral theses in most branches of geography. Professor Mihăilescu had an interdisciplinary mindset and defined Geography as "the science which studies the territorial entity, from settlement to planet". For more than two decades (1922–1943) he managed the publication of RGS periodicals.

In 1942, V. Mihăilescu became vice-president of the Society, and in 1944 he founded the Institute of Geographical Research of Romania, which continued to support the activities of the Society until 1950 (Ielenicz, 2018). As such, for this period of time we ought to take into account that “the Institute of Geography was the main party which ensured the existence of the Society”.

Professor V. Mihăilescu developed new research areas related to the integrated study of the relations between nature and society, initiated studies of urban geography, and defined the idea of “pre-urban area”. He outlined the sections of human geography and tackled regional geographical functions.

### GEOGRAPHY DURING THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

After the Paris Peace Conference of 1946, Romania, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, entered the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union.

With the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, there was a gradual shift towards a “Soviet ideologization of Geography” (Posea, 2000).

Purges were carried out in higher education institutions, with some of the professors being subsequently employed by the Institute of Geography. These professors, such as Vintilă Mihăilescu, Victor Tufescu, Nicolae Al. Rădulescu, or Ion Conea, managed to form a new generation of valuable geographers. They are also the reason why valuable works, such as the National Geographic Atlas, or the Geography Treatise of Romania (4 vols. The 5<sup>th</sup> vol. was published in 2005) were issued during this same period.

After its activity wound down during a 5-year period, the RGS was renamed, after 1944, the Society of Natural Sciences and Geography of the People’s Republic of Romania, and received a new goal, that of doing away with “bourgeois concepts” and promoting communist precepts in geography.

After 1960, during a short period of time of partial liberalization, research within the branches intensified, valuable works were published on theoretical and methodological aspects in the spirit of traditional Romanian Geography, and annual meetings and summer camps were regularly organized.

During this period, there was only one university center with a doctoral school in Cluj-Napoca, coordinated by Prof. Tiberiu Morariu, member of the Romanian Academy. The valuable new generation of geographers trained in Cluj-Napoca played an important role in the development of Geography in other university centers, in the establishment of new geography departments, and in the involvement of geography in various research institutes. The activity carried out by this generation of geographers played an essential role in educating future pre-university teaching staff, in the development of the Geographical Society in accordance with the traditions of the Romanian school of geography, and in the partial reestablishment of international connections.

In 1968, the name of “Geographical Society” was restored and Acad. Vintilă Mihăilescu was elected president. It was also during this period of limited liberalization that Human Geography evolved only within the limits imposed by the totalitarian regime in order to not damage the communist ideology.

In 1975, on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the Geographical Society, a tribute volume titled \*\*\* *The Society of Geographical Sciences of the Socialist Republic of Romania, “100 years of existence”* was published. There was also a centennial reunion held in the Aula of the University of Bucharest.

### THE ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY AFTER 1990

The complex aspects of the transition from a communist, totalitarian state to a democratic and free state followed by integration into the EU and NATO made up the context in which Romanian Geography developed after 1990.

Today, 150 years after the founding of the RGS, Geography is developing in close connection with the whole of current economic, social, ecological and geopolitical issues, and in direct connection with the increasing human pressure on the Global Earth System.

University education evolved by leaps and bounds, Master's programmes and doctoral schools were set up, and branches of geography banned by the previous regime were reinstated. The RGS was reorganized; it took on the name of *Romanian Geographical Society*, and continues its activity in collaboration with the National Committee of Geography under the aegis of the International Geographical Union.

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