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GREGORIU ȘTEFĂNESCU (1838 – 1911) – THE THIRD DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY OF BUCHAREST

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Abstract. It is underlined the complex personality of Gregoriu Ștefănescu, first Romanian university professor (as a teacher of geology and paleontology, scientist and museum's manager), appointed director of Natural History Museum just moved in 1867 from the "St. Sava" College into the new building of the Bucharest's University.

Résumé. On a mis en évidence la personnalité complexe du professeur universitaire Gregoriu Ștefănescu (le premier professeur de géologie et paléontologie ainsi que chrecheur) désigné le directeur du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, transféré du Collège "St. Sava" dans la nouvelle immeuble de l'Université de Bucarest, en 1867.

Key words: University, National Museum of Natural History, Bucharest, collections of natural sciences, lectures and scientific publications.

National Museum of Natural History and Antiquities was founded by the Constitutive Deed No 142/3-rd of November 1834, signed by the Prince Al. D. Ghica, after the project made by his brother, Mihail D. Ghica, „mare vornic dinlăuntru” (Minister for Internal Affairs) and president of the Royal Council. The residence of that museum was the National School, as it was called „Sfântul Sava” College, whose director was Professor Petrache Poenaru. In 1937, he appointed Carol Walenstein, the drawing teacher of the school, „custode” (curator) of the collections of natural history, who wrote the first book on birds in Romanian, „Elemente de ornitologie după observații proprii, locale, chiar în Țara Românească” (“Elements of ornithology after personal observations, in Wallachia”), in 1853. He was responsible for the collections till 1859, when he died. In the same year, the collections of the Museum of Natural History were moved in „casele Hiotu” (“Hiotu Houses”). Walenstein was followed by the extraordinary Italian taxidermist Carlo Ferreratti (appointed director on 7th of November 1860), who had initiatives in systematizing and making the inventory of the collections, which he enriched with numerous invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, 500 well naturalized birds and 600 samples of rocks and minerals.

On 25th of November (7th December – after the new calendar) 1864, the Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza approved the Statute of Administration and organization of the National Museum, founded in 1834, and ordered its division on profiles: Antiquity Department laid at the foundation the future National Museum of the Romanian History; the picture gallery generated the future Art National Museum; and the collections of natural history were separated and formed the Museum of Natural History, whose director had to be an universitarian professor.

English translation by Mihaela Barcan Achim.

In this respect, in September 1864, it was decided the movement of the collections of natural history in the building of the new University of Bucharest. In 1867, the first Romanian Professor of Geology and Paleontology, Gregoriu Ștefănescu, was appointed director.

On the profiles under the windows of the first floor of “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History of Bucharest, Gregoriu Ștefănescu’s name is embedded next that of the well known Professor of geology and paleontology from Iași, Grigore Cobălcescu. This is normal, the more so as the first professor guided the destiny of the museum of natural history. But, undeservedly, Gregoriu Ștefănescu remained less known, even less another Romanian geologist, Matei Drăghicescu.

By this paper I want to underline Gregoriu Ștefănescu’s important role in the evolution of the National Museum of Natural History, within the period 1867 – 1893.

After he graduated the National School, and working in the collections of geology and paleontology of the museum sheltered by that institution, since he was a pupil, Gregoriu Ștefănescu chose natural sciences, attending the courses of the Faculty of Sciences of the Sorbona University of Paris. With patience and diligence, unhesitatingly he dedicated both to the educational career and the scientist one, pathfinder in new fields of scientific research, in geology and paleontology, in Romania.

Taking the degree in Paris, in 1862, he became professor at the same „Sfântul Sava” College, where he had been student till 1858; in the same time he taught at „Matei Basarab” High school of Bucharest.

In 1864, he was appointed professor of geology and mineralogy at the University of Bucharest, and in 1867 he became also director of the Museum of Natural History.

The collections, preserved in the western wing of the University (the old building), were reorganized as for a museum, displaying the exhibits of geology, mineralogy and paleontology at the 1st floor, and, at the 2nd one, those of zoology.

Later, when the patrimony enriched, and also because of the fire which damaged the University on 24th of May 1884, the universitarian professor and the director of the collections, Gregoriu Ștefănescu, decided to reorganize the museum.

Meanwhile, the reorganization strategy changed and ended when Dr. Grigore Antipa came back in Romania in 1893 after he finished his studies in Germany and took over the zoological collections. The new director of the zoological collections moved them in 19 Polonă Str., on 14^h of April 1894.

As long as he was the curator of the museum, Gregoriu Ștefănescu gathered so many pieces than he could have formed (what was later organized, in 1906) National Museum of Geology.

It is well known his interest in enriching the collections of geology and paleontology. Zoological collections were stationary, all pieces exceeding a little 2,000, pieces which were inherited from the previous curators. That is why, according to some opinions, Gregoriu Ștefănescu was perceived as a director of a Museum of Geology. But because this museum was not separated yet, and the institution was entitled the Museum of Natural History, I think it is correct to consider him the third director of this institution.

After his death, the reorganization started by Gregoriu Ștefănescu was changed. The unitary collections of a true museum of geology-paleontology were divided. A

part of them were taken over by the Laboratory of mineralogy-petrography led by Professor Ludovic Mrazec. The paleontological pieces were moved at the 2nd floor, replacing the zoological ones, which were already moved by Grigore Antipa. Geological collections were the only ones which remained at the 1st floor of the University. At the ground floor there was the Museum of History and Archaeology.

I have to say that in 1927, the collections which remained from Gregoriu Ștefănescu were moved in the eastern wing of the new building of the University, where they are still exhibited.

Gregoriu Ștefănescu wrote a lot: „Elemente de zoologie” (“Elements of Zoology”) (1874); „Curs elementar de geologie” (“Elementary course of geology”) (1890); „Curs public de istorie naturală” (“Public course of natural history”) (1874 – 1875 – part I and 1875 – 1876 – part II); many papers of geology, general geology, applied geology, paleontology; reports, reviews, popularization articles, and conferences (Fig. 1), all during he was professor and director of the Museum of Natural History.

From all his contributions I underline the valuable papers of paleontology. Besides the fossil plants and the molluscs, identified from Tertiary and Mesozoic deposits, Gregoriu Ștefănescu was interested in the discovering and identification of several fossil mammal species.

He published five different papers in the Annual of the Museum of Geology when he discovered the camel maxillary and other fossil remains, on the occasion of the earthworks for the railway of Slatina.

Then, he said: „Nu există, după părerea mea nici un alt rumegetor, care să fie așa de interesant, atât prin caracterele sale anatomice cât și prin extrema sa raritate în stare fosilă ca genul *Camelus*. Cămila nu a fost găsită în stare fosilă, decât în ramurile meridionale ale Munților Himalaia... Dar nici o rămășiță de cămilă fosilă, nu s-a găsit, după câte știu eu, în stratele geologice din Europa”. (“On my opinion, there is not other interesting ruminant, both by his anatomical features and its scarceness in a fossil state, than the genus *Camelus*. The camel was found as fossil only in southern areas of Himalayas ...But, as far as I know, no piece of fossil camel was found in the geological strata of Europe”.)

In the Pontic sands from Mânzați, Gregoriu Ștefănescu discovered enough fossils for the reconstruction of a young female entire skeleton of *Deinotherium gigantissimum*. Since 1891, he informed the International Congress of Geology, held in Washington, D.C., that it was about a new species whose the best name would be the superlative of *giganteum*, i.e. *gigantissimum*.

Referring to the distribution of the Quaternary in Romania, he asserted that the deposits of this geological period covered all plains, from the Olt Valley, to Prut River and Sfântul Gheorghe, arm of the Danube river to the East.

„Pe câmpiile și prin largele văi cuaternare ale României, pășteau turme de cerbi, de capre, de rinoceri, de elefanți ca *Elephas primigenius* – mamutul, *E. anticus*, antilope, oi, boi ca *Bos priscus*, *Bos primigenius* etc., ale căror rămășițe se găsesc oriunde se dărâmă un mal, ori unde se sapă o groapă de nisip sau de pământ (löss); gropile de nisip, de la porțile Bucureștiului, săparea canalelor de scurgere de pe stratele sale și rectificarea Dâmboviței, ne-a procurat numeroase măsele și oase din aceste diferite animale stinse”. (“On the Quaternary plains and the wide valleys of Romania, flocks of stags, goats, rhinoceros, elephants as *Elephas primigenius* - mammoth, *E. anticus*, antelopes, sheep, oxen (*Bos priscus*, *Bos primigenius*), etc., whose remains were found anywhere a shore crushed, or a hollow was dug, in sand or soil (löss), had been grazing; sand hollows from the gates of Bucharest, sewer

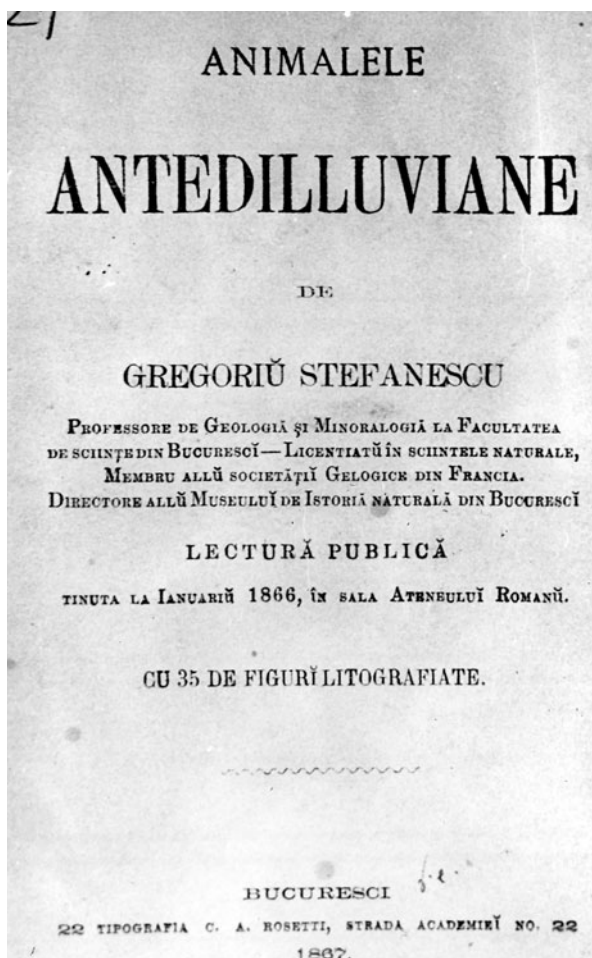


Fig. 1 – Front cover of Gregoriu Ștefănescu's printed lecture about the prediluvial animals.

canal digging and the correction of the Dâmbovița flow gave us numerous teeth and bones of these extinct animals”).

Founder of the first Geological Institute of Romania, Gregoriu Ștefănescu raised the interest in the minute study of the soil, opened the way to the field studies, contributed to the printing of the first geological map of the country, published the results of his research in geology and paleontology, organized numerous collections and he was a very good promoter of the scientific discoveries. He talked and wrote about the huge reptiles, adapted to swimming (1871 – 1872), about the basaltic rocks, about the proves of the existence of the fossil man (1872, 1876), about the eruption of Vesuvius, about floodings (1870) and “boiling wells” (geysers) (1870), public conferences on natural history (1875) or the interesting „Conferință despre harta geologică a României” (“Conference on the geological map of Romania”) (1877), then „Asupra excursiunii din Buzău” (“On a trip in Buzău”) (1880), „Geologia și legenda” (“Geology and Legend”) (1877), „Când a început viața pe pământ?” (“When did life on Earth started?”) (1905) (Fig. 2), etc.

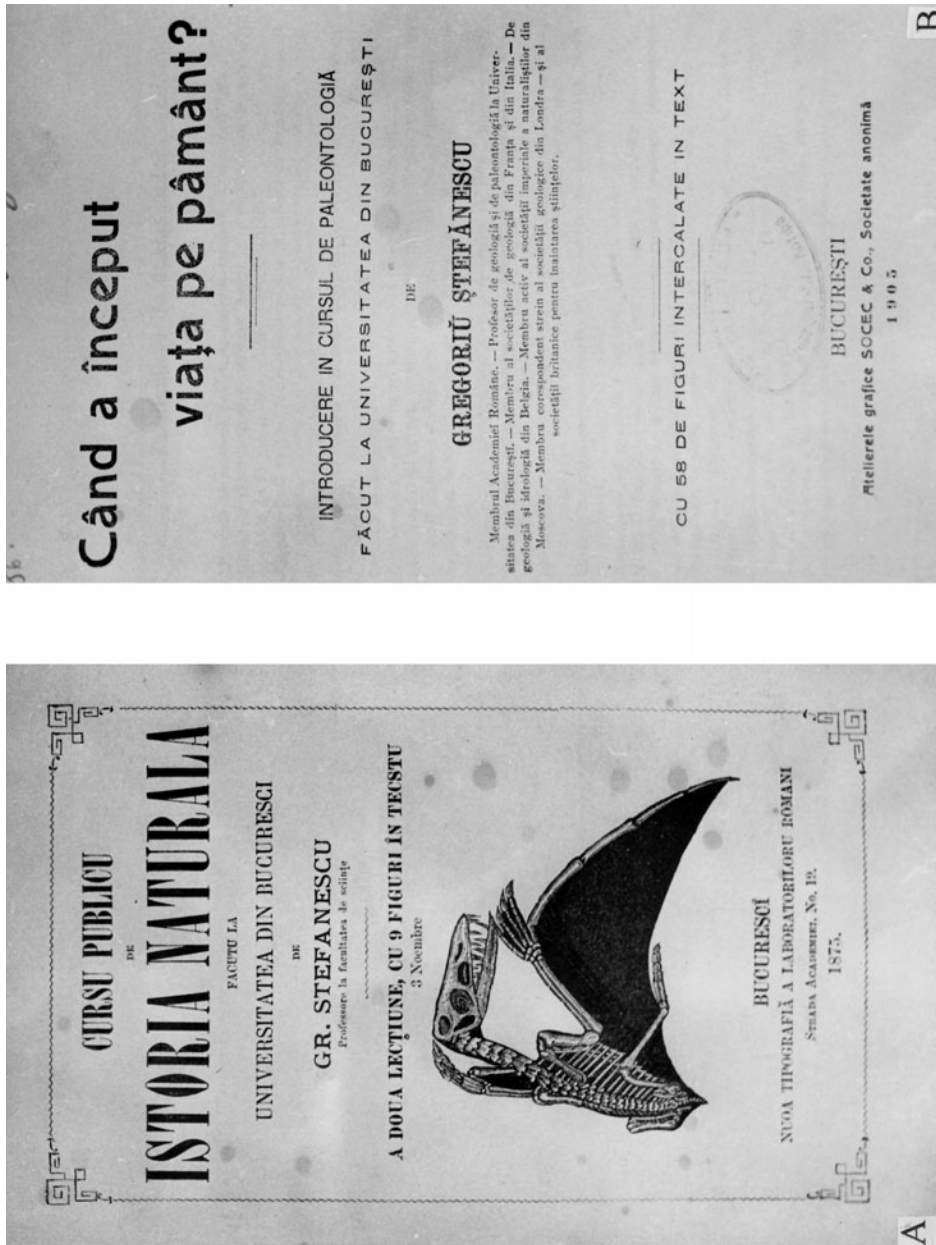


Fig. 2 – A, Public lecture about Natural History (1875); B, Paleontological lecture about the beginning of the life on Earth (1905).

With so many kind of activities as professor, researcher, geology expert, museologist and promoter of science, Gregoriu Ștefănescu gained a deserved place among the great people of Romania, to whom we pay homage.

GREGORIU ȘTEFĂNESCU (1838 – 1911) – AL TREILEA DIRECTOR AL MUZEULUI NAȚIONAL DE ISTORIE NATURALĂ DIN BUCUREȘTI

REZUMAT

După o scurtă trecere în revistă a istoricului Muzeului Național de Istorie Naturală și Antichități (fondat din 1834) este subliniată personalitatea complexă (didactică, științifică și managerială) a primului profesor universitar de geologie și paleontologie, numit din anul 1867 și director al colecțiilor Muzeului Național de Istorie Naturală, când respectivele colecții au și fost mutate de la Colegiul Național “Sfântul Sava” în noua clădire a Universității din București. Îmbogățirea colecțiilor de geologie și paleontologie în perioada 1867–1893 și descoperirea scheletului întreg de *Deinotherium gigantissimum* reprezintă meritele deosebite adăugate la prodigioasele activități didactice și de cercetare științifică ale lui Gregoriu Ștefănescu.

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