

# ION POPESCU VOITEȘTI (1876 -1944) - BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL PORTRAIT

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author briefly presents the life and activity of Ion Popescu-Voitești (1876-1944), subjecting the reader's attention to both his childhood and years of study, his participation in the First World War (1916-1918), and the didactic and scientific activity that he carried out in secondary and university education in Romania, in various schools (1899-1910) and the Universities of Cluj (1919-1936) and Bucharest (1936-1943), as well as the activity in within the Geological Institute of Romania (1909-1919; 1930-1931).

**Keywords:** Ion Popescu-Voitești, geologist, researcher and professor, Romanian Geological Institute, University of Cluj, University of Bucharest.

Ion Popescu-Voitești was born on November 18, 1876 in the village of Voiteștii in Deal, Bălănești commune, Gorj county, being the son of Ana Popescu (née Băluță) and Ion Popescu.<sup>1</sup>

For his children, but also for the children of the village, Ion Popescu (the father), together with the local people, built a large school, with two classes, right across the road from their house,<sup>2</sup> school in which, for the primary cycle, not even six years old, in September 1882 Ion Popescu-Voitești was also enrolled,<sup>3</sup> under the teaching and direct supervision of teacher Alboiu.<sup>4</sup>

He completed this cycle of primary studies in 1887, but because he was not of the required age to enroll in secondary education, his file was rejected. As a result, his father had to enroll him in the public primary school for boys in Târgu-Jiu to repeat the 5th grade, a school he graduated in 1888.<sup>5</sup>

The reason of his age would create problems for the young student in the autumn of the same year, when, in order to enroll in high school (he was not yet 12 years old) he managed to obtain a two-month dispensation, thus enrolling in "Carol I" High School " from Craiova, which, although he was not an eminent student, he managed to finish, as a scholarship holder, in June 1895. A month later, in July 1895, he took the Baccalaureate exam at the University of Bucharest, being and

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Stanciu, *Viața și opera prof. I. P. Voitești*, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Ardealul”, Cluj, 1936, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *Geologul Ion Popescu-Voitești*, Editura „Măiastra”, Târgu-Jiu, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Stanciu, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

issued in September of the same year "Baccalaureate Diploma in Letters and Sciences". In the autumn of 1895, Ion Popescu-Voitești enrolled at the Medico-Legal Institute in Bucharest, but, seeing that he had no inclination towards this branch of medicine, he transferred (after only a few months of "dissections") to the Faculty of Sciences, The "Natural Sciences" section of the University of Bucharest, studies that he completed in 1898 following the license exam, thus becoming a "graduate in natural sciences". During the period in which he attended the courses of the University of Bucharest (1895-1898), Ion Popescu Voitești also attended the courses of the Higher Normal School in Bucharest.<sup>6</sup>

He started his teaching activity in 1899, the year in which he entered secondary education, as a substitute teacher at the High School in Slatina, transferring after a month to the High School in Târgu Jiu, where he would remain until 1903. Between September 1903-September 1904, he transferred to the high school in Tulcea, and following the aptitude exam he took in 1904, Ion Popescu-Voitești became a full professor at the Normal School in Câmpulung Muscel, where he will teach until in the year 1907.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to his teaching career, Ion Popescu-Voitești also dedicated himself to scientific research and published in 1904, the work entitled "Geological study of the Argeș Valley, starting a little below Boteni, until a little above Nămăești," a work after which, in 1905, the University of Bucharest awarded him the "Hillel" prize worth 1000 lei.<sup>8</sup>

As he himself showed, with the amount obtained from that prize offered by the University of Bucharest, he was able to continue his studies in Vienna (1907-1908) and Paris (1908-1910), in the capital of France, obtaining the title of Doctor of Natural Sciences, in 1910: "With this amount of 1000 lei, I went to Vienna in 1907 to deepen my study of geology and paleontology, where I studied (...) under the direction of professors Uhling, the best connoisseur of Carpathian geology, and Diener, one of the greatest paleontologists of the time, part of the geological and paleontological material collected from the Muscele region of Dâmbovița and Olt. In the fall of 1908, I moved to Paris, where I completed the geological and paleontological study of the region of the Hills between Dâmbovița and Olt, under the direction of Professor Haug, with which I obtained my state doctorate in July 1910."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 45-60.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>8</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Apud *Ibidem*.



### Ion Popescu-Voitești studies in Vienna (1908)<sup>10</sup>

During the period in which he was studying abroad (1907-1910), Ion Popescu-Voitești was the titular teacher of several schools in Romania (the Normal School in Câmpulung Muscel - September 1, 1904 - October 1, 1908, the High School in Buzău - 1 October 1908 - September 1, 1909), "Lazar" High School in Bucharest - September 1, 1909 - September 1, 1910), also benefiting from leave for studies.<sup>11</sup> We remind here that in parallel with his teaching activity and the completion of his studies abroad (1907-1910), but also during the First World War (1914-1918), Ion Popescu-Voitești was also a geologist at the Geological Institute of Romania in the period 1908-1919 .

În urma absolvirii studiilor superioare, Ion Popescu-Voitești a satisfăcut (fără abateri) și stagiul militar în cadrul „școlii ofițerilor de rezervă a tinerilor bacalaureați” la Regimentul 21 Infanterie și Regimentul 6 Mihai Viteazul, între anii 1898-1899,<sup>12</sup> actively participating in the Romanian campaigns of the Second Balkan War in Bulgaria (June-July 1913), as well as those of the First World War (1916-1918).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, with the end of Romania's period of neutrality (1914-1916) and its entry into the war alongside the Entente on August 14/27, 1916,<sup>14</sup> Ion Popescu-Voitești was mobilized within the 76th Infantry Regiment, where he would be wounded <sup>15</sup> in the "shameful defeat at Turtucaia" (August 24/September 6, 1916).<sup>16</sup>

In February 1917, the Geological Institute of Romania tasked Voitești with "the geological research necessary to find an exploitable massif of salt in the counties of Iași, Bacău, Botoșani, Neamț, Vaslui and Suceava",<sup>17</sup> but due to the epidemic of exanthematic typhus, in Bacău, researching and exploiting the salt masses

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, *Ion Popescu-Voitești*, Editura „Spicon”, Târgu-Jiu, 2002, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Stanciu, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Ediția a IV-a revăzută și adăugită, Editura „Univers Enciclopedic”, București, 2008, pp. 269, 271.

<sup>15</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *Geologul Ion Popescu-Voitești...*, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *op.cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>17</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

necessary for the army and the population, he also fell ill, being hospitalized in Iasi.<sup>18</sup>

The following year, by order of the General Staff, Ion Popescu-Voitești was sent to the same region, in view of the oil exploitations in Solonț and Moinești, where, following the research done by him, the wells in Moinești increased the daily production from one in ten wagons.<sup>19</sup>

The recognition of his contribution as a soldier and a scientist was rewarded with honor by the Romanian state, conferring on him the "Military Degree of Merit" in 1919, the "Commemorative Cross of the War 1916-1919 with the Turtucaia Bars" (in the year 1922), respectively the Order "Crown of Romania in officer rank" in the same year.<sup>20</sup>

After 1919, Ion Popescu-Voitești began a new stage of his life by becoming a university professor at the University of Cluj. We recall here that between December 1918 and April 1920, the first Romanian "executive" (provisional) that operated in Transylvania, Banat and in the Romanian areas as well as in all the lands of the former Hungary, approved by the Great National Council<sup>21</sup> which will have the duty "to carry out the decisions of the National Assembly, to take over and direct the life of the state, to take care of the public services, and for this purpose, to order and take all the measures that he would find necessary", was Governing Board,<sup>22</sup> led by Iuliu Maniu.<sup>23</sup>

Both the experience that Ion Popescu-Voitești acquired as a geologist within the Geological Institute of Romania in the period 1908-1919 made Professor Ludovic Mrazec from the University of Bucharest, who at that time was the Director of the Geological Institute of Romania, but also a member of the Proposal Commission, to recommend his student and collaborator, from Bucharest, to the University of Cluj, for the department of geology and paleontology.<sup>24</sup> Along with his appointment as full professor at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Cluj, Ion Popescu-Voitești also took over the management of the Geological-Paleontological Institute in Cluj and that of the Mineralogical-Geological Museum, affiliated to this institute.<sup>25</sup>

As a professor at the University of Cluj, Ion Popescu-Voitești was recognized as the organizer of geological education in Transylvania, and the appearance of the first geology book in Romanian "Elements of general geology with a general look

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<sup>18</sup> Victor Stanciu, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> *Istoria Românilor*, vol. II., Tom. II., De la Independență la Marea Unire (1878-1918), coordonator Gheorghe Platon, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2003, p. 523.

<sup>22</sup> *Unirea Ardealului evocată de Iuliu Maniu*. Conferință ținută la Radio București în 24 ianuarie 1934, Tipografia Națională S.A, Cluj, 1934, pp. 25-26.

<sup>23</sup> Anton Rusal, *Universitari între Blaj și Cluj absolvenți ai școlii blăjene și profesori ai Universității Babeș-Bolyai*, Editura „Presa Universitară Clujană”, Cluj-Napoca, 2019, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Victor Stanciu, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

at geology" is linked to his name Romania" as well as the first color map that included all the united Romanian provinces.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the courses he held at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Cluj, the Polytechnic School of Timișoara asked Professor Ion Popescu-Voitești to teach geology and paleontology courses to its students, in two terms 1923-1926<sup>27</sup> and 1926 -1929.<sup>28</sup>

Having a vast scientific experience, Ion Popescu Voitești was part of the following scientific societies in Romania: Societatea Română de Geografie; The Bucharest Science Society; The Science Society of Cluj; Romanian Society of Geology;<sup>29</sup> Royal Romanian Geographical Society; Society of Naturalists from Bucharest; Association of Engineers and Technicians from the Mining Industry in Romania.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the country's borders, Voitești was a member of the following "scientific forums": the French Society of Geology; The Society "Geologische Grsellschaft" in Vienna; corresponding member of the Geological Society of Belgium; The "Limenne" Society of Lyon; delegate in the Steering Committee of the "Krassin" Scientific Society; American Association of Petroleum Geologists.<sup>31</sup>



**Ion Popescu-Voitești, professor at the University of Cluj<sup>32</sup>**

The beginning of the third decade of the last century was for Ion Popescu Voitești, one full of uproar, turmoil and anxieties. Although he never played politics, at the beginning of 1930, he found himself in a position to make one of the most important decisions in relation to the immense task that fell to him: taking over the management of the Geological Institute of Romania. At that time, the

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> *Anuarul Universității din Cluj, pe anii școlari 1925-1926 și 1926-1927*, întocmit de dr. Gheorghe Spacu și dr. Ioan Minea, rectorii anilor, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Ardealul”, Cluj, 1928, p.251.

<sup>28</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Ilie Huică, Ion Teotoi, *I.P.Voitești 100 de ani de la naștere*, Casa Corpului Didactic a Județului Gorj, Târgu-Jiu, 1976, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I Cluj, pe anul școlar 1933-1934*, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Ardealul”, Cluj, 1934, p. 297.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

director of the Institute was the renowned university professor and member of the Romanian Academy, Ludovic Mrazec.<sup>33</sup>

He had also held the position of Minister of Industry and Commerce in the liberal government led by Vintilă Brătianu,<sup>34</sup> but with the change of the liberal government to the national-peasant one (November 1928-April 1931),<sup>35</sup> in 1930 he was dismissed from the position of minister and replaced by Virgil Madgearu, remaining to lead, for a short period of time, only the Geological Institute of Romania until he was asked to "retire", because "a liberal and especially a man appreciated by Vintilă Brătianu, could no longer remain at the head of an institute",<sup>36</sup> minister Virgil Madgearu considering him "an administrative officer who at the age of 60, administrative officers are retired."<sup>37</sup>

During this period of the peasant government, following the recommendations received from the Transylvanian members of the ruling party, Iuliu Maniu appealed to Professor Ion Popescu Voitești to take over the management of the Geological Institute of Romania. Having hesitations, and at the same time trying to convince those in the government that "Professor Mrazec cannot be retired in this form," Ion Popescu Voitești received a blunt answer: "the retirement of Director Mrazec is an established fact, we only discuss the appointment of the new director, and if you don't want it, we will turn to someone else."<sup>38</sup>

Following address no. 18699 of February 24, 1930, Professor Ion Popescu-Voitești was notified by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce regarding the fact that on February 15 of the same year, by High Royal Decree no. 503/930, he was appointed "to the position of first-class director-geologist of the Geological Institute of Romania," inviting him "to take the statutory oath."<sup>39</sup> But on February 15, 1930, the professor supported, during the conferences that took place in Sibiu, the communication "The continents and the problem of their mobility".<sup>40</sup> That is why the installation of Voitești in the new position took place, almost a month later, on March 10, 1930.<sup>41</sup>

Ion Popescu-Voitești led the Geological Institute of Romania until November of the same year, when, due to political conflicts that started a long time ago between Nicolae Iorga and Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș<sup>42</sup>, regarding the accumulation of public positions, the Ministry of Public Instruction will officially ask him to resign

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<sup>33</sup> *Anuarul Institutului Geologic al României*, vol. XIV., 1929, Editura „Cartea Românească”, București, 1930, p. V.

<sup>34</sup> „Unirea Poporului”, nr. 26, 26 iunie 1927, Blaj, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, ediția a IV-a revăzută și adăugită, Editura „Univers Enciclopedic”, București, 2008, p. 328.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Stanciu, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 140, 146.

<sup>40</sup> *Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I Cluj, pe anul școlar 1930-1931*, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Ardealul”, Cluj, 1931, p. 287.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140.

<sup>42</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

either from the position of director of the institute, or from that of professor at the University of Cluj. Thus, on November 15, 1930, Voitești presented himself at the headquarters of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to which the geological institute belonged and submitted his resignation, opting to remain a tenured professor at the Faculty of Sciences in Cluj<sup>43</sup>, where he carried out his activity until 1936, when, following the "delayed retirement" of Professor Sava Atanasiu (1936), the Geology faculty chair at the University of Bucharest remained vacant.<sup>44</sup>

In order to occupy it, several names were circulated, including that of Ion Atanasiu (Sava Atanasiu's son), who was a university professor in Iasi since 1930, and that of Ion Popescu-Voitești, a professor at the University of Cluj since 1919. Although two supporting camps had been formed, the decision belonged to the Faculty Council, which, following a vote of the members, decided that Ion Popescu-Voitești would be the one to take over the leadership of the Department of Geology of the Faculty of Sciences of the University from Bucharest.<sup>45</sup>

Professor Voitești led this department between 1936-1941, during which courses and research, he also demonstrated his quality as a good organizer and leader, endowing the laboratory with new showcases for collections, with panels and panoplies for geology courses.<sup>46</sup>

On November 1, 1941, Voitești was "officially retired due to age limit", and he retired to his native village of Gorj which bore his name, laying the foundations of a new construction, this time a residential house which he christened -o with his wife's name "Vila Luna".

On October 4, 1944, while on a hunting trip, following a heart attack, the scientist's heart stopped beating, "the earth stopped it for good".<sup>47</sup>

Ion Popescu-Voitești was a personality of Romanian geology in the first half of the 20th century, along with Gheorghe Munteanu-Murgoci and Ludovic Mrazec.

A graduate of the University of Bucharest and a graduate of the Superior Normal School (1898), Ion Popescu-Voitești carried out an intense teaching activity from 1899 to 1910 as a substitute and tenured teacher in secondary education in Romania, at the Gymnaziul in Slatina, at the Gymnaziul from Târgu Jiu, at the High School in Tulcea, at the Normal School in Câmpulung Muscel, at the High School in Buzău and at the "Lazar" High School in Bucharest.

In addition to his teaching career, Ion Popescu-Voitești also dedicated himself to scientific research and published in 1904, the work entitled "Geological study of the Argeș Valley, starting a little below Boteni, until a little above Nămăești," a work after which, in 1905, the University of Bucharest awarded him the "Hillel" prize. This prize allowed him to continue his studies in Vienna and Paris (1907-1910), in the capital of France, obtaining the title of Doctor of Natural Sciences in 1910.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145.

<sup>44</sup> Ion Băncilă, *L-am cunoscut pe Ion Popescu-Voitești*, în Litua. Studii și cercetări, 1988, p. 225.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>46</sup> Ion Mocioi, Ilie Huică, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

Ion Popescu-Voitești participated in the Romanian campaigns of the Second Balkan War in Bulgaria (June-July 1913), as well as those of the First World War (1916-1918). He was decorated for his participation in the First World War campaigns as a soldier, but also as a scientist.

We remind here that in parallel with his teaching activity and the completion of his studies abroad (1907-1910), but also during the First World War (1914-1918), Ion Popescu-Voitești was also a geologist at the Geological Institute of Romania in the period 1908-1919 .

As a full professor at the University of Cluj (1919-1936), Voitești was recognized as the organizer of geological education in Transylvania. He led the Geological Institute of Cluj and founded the Geology-Mineralogy Museum of Cluj University, as well as the Geological Institute of Romania (1930-1931).

From 1936 until 1943, Ion Popescu-Voitești was a full professor at the geology department of the University of Bucharest.

For the efforts made in the service of Romanian education, for the socio-economic progress of the country, but also for the long and rich scientific activity he carried out, Professor Ion Popescu-Voitești was decorated with various insignia, his scientific work still remaining today on a pedestal of the desire for knowledge and research.



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