

## PROFESSOR OVIDIU N. DRAGASTAN: A CAREER IN GEOLOGY AND PALEONTOLOGY

Professor Ovidiu N. Dragastan was born in Bucharest in 1939, the same year the French Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) was founded, raised and educated in Bucharest, in a city he witnessed in a troubled time interval for the whole Eastern Europe, that of the communist rule. To understand his career and his professional achievements, such a difficult time period has to be taken in consideration, when ideology, suspicion and reversed values ruled, and when human quality was quite a burden. Only after 1989 his achievements began to be acknowledged in his native country, and his place among valuable, senior Romanian geologists could be found. Certainly, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to outline such an outstanding career, but I think that a series of remarkable traits should be underlined about the career of Professor Ovidiu Dragastan. First, his contributions in fossil algae and carbonate microfacies were the result of a pioneering, deep scientific activity, in the pursuit of a profound passion for these fields, as they are witnessed by a long, substantial list of seminal publications. Secondly, he managed to organize and to express in publications such a scientific career in a hermetically sealed country, such as communist and later savagely stalinistic Romania was during the Ceausescu's regime, gaining an international status even before 1989, a rare performance for Romanian geologists. And last but not least, he loved teaching, and he always gave memorable courses and talks, as all of his students, me included, can easily acknowledge.

Professor Dragastan was a student of "Ion Neculce" highschool, and since 1957 an undergraduate and respectively a graduate student in 1962 of University of Bucharest in Geology (then Faculty of Geology and Geography, School of Geology). Professor Dragastan received his PhD title in 1971, with a thesis on Jurassic and Cretaceous calcareous algae from Bicz Valley, in the Eastern Carpathians. He received his full professorship in 1993, as a recognition of his academic activity that encompassed all university levels, from Demonstrator (1962-1968), Assistant Professor (1968-1975), Lecturer (1975-1990), and Associate Professor (1990-1993). He retired in 2004, but today he continues his research activity as usual, in fields he soon became a classic: Paleoalgology and carbonate microfacies.

Professor Dragastan's scientific contributions are expressed in more than 140 research papers and 11 books, covering mainly fossil calcareous algae and carbonate microfacies, as well as Paleobotany and Paleozoology, published since 1963 until today. Actually, his first paper, on Jurassic and Cretaceous nannoplankton was published together with Acad. Miltiade Filipescu, mentor and supervisor for his early works. His interest was first drawn by Tintinids and nannoplankton but soon and without leaving these topics, his attention shifted to Jurassic and Cretaceous calcareous algae of the Romanian Carpathians. This is how his first contributions on fossil calcareous algae of Chlorophyta (Dasycladales, Bryopsidales), Rhodophyta and Charophyta (Charales) were produced, describing and defining key associations of such organisms for the Upper Jurassic – Lower

Cretaceous carbonate platforms of the Carpathians, Moesian Platform, Central and Southern Dobrogea. In the same time with his studies on the fossil calcareous algae, Professor Dragastan always kept an attentive look to carbonate microfacies, as a powerful tool for deciphering the reef environments and paleoecology of all structural units of Romania. He always correlated microfacies with biofacies, as undisputable tools for increasing the stratigraphic resolution and for paleoecological reconstructions. He also began to identify the lithostratigraphical and biostratigraphic units which will be refined during his later studies, for the special benefit of the oil, limestone and bauxite industry. All these fields of research were pioneered in Romania as well as abroad in that period of time. His early papers covered such topics in Apuseni Mountains, East Carpathians, South Carpathians and central Dobrogea, while the Moesian Platform followed quickly in investigations. Selected areas for his research were especially the Bicz Gorges, the Haghimas Mountains, East Carpathians (subject for his PhD thesis defended in 1971 and published in English in 1975), Padurea Craiului (Apuseni Mountains), Bucegi (South Carpathians), and Central Dobrogea. Since the seventies, he began correlating carbonate platforms of Romania with those of Czech Republic and Slovakia, Spain, and Pakistan, as the Romanian carbonate platforms proved to be key sections for understanding the Tethyan paleobiogeography and evolution. As the number of research papers increased, and as their topics diversified, so was his national and international status, and by 1989, a fundamental year in Romanian recent history, Professor Dragastan had published already more than 75 research papers and books. Fortunately, until 1989 his papers were published predominantly in English and French, also in international periodicals, so their impact was substantial in his research fields, a rare ability and a rare outcome during those times of intellectual isolation and communist ideological pressure. His scientific productivity and his major contributions until 1989 should be understood in this precise historical and ideological context, in a country which would appear surrealistic and incomprehensible by today's social and democratic standards. Those were years of isolation, with short if inexistent literature exchange and access to mainstream scientific information. A positive role was played by the Alexander von Humboldt scholarship awarded yearly to Professor Ovidiu Dragastan between 1980-1990 with scientific help of Professor Erik Flugel from Erlangen University, enabling him to contact the western scientists and to become familiar with their science and with their literature. Apart of this scholarship, the scientific results of Professor Dragastan in such a difficult environment can only be explained by his dedication and abilities for the subjects he researched, keys for success in any intellectual environment and in any type of society.

After 1989, the career of Professor Dragastan took a natural and expected impetus, as the social and ideological barriers were lifted and a new Romanian

society was already on its own way. His contacts with the international researchers were intensified, as well as his abroad trips and collaborations. An important step was the Fulbright Scholarship awarded in 1993 by the US State Department, for researching fossil algae in Boston with Professor Stejtko Golubic. His American experience was continued later with new collaborations and projects, such as those with Dr. Diane S. Littler and Dr. Mark M. Littler (Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC and Fort Pierce, FL) on algae from Palau (Pacific Ocean), with Dr. Lwellya Hillis-Colinvaux (Woods Hole), Professor Paul Silva (Berkeley), among many others. Germany was also the place for fruitful collaborations with Professor Detlev Richter (Bochum University), Professor Jorg Trappe (Bonn University) and Professor H.G. Herbig (Köln University), Professor Felix Schlagintweit (München University), as well as Slovakia, with Professor Milan Misik (Comenius University) and with Dr. Jan Sotak (Slovakian Academy), Egypt, with Professor Hassan Soliman (Assiut University), Greece and Turkey, among many other countries. In all these countries, he undertook paleoalgal and microfacies studies, with significant publications regarding systematics, taxonomy, paleoecology and stratigraphy of fossil calcareous algae and microfacies environmental reconstructions. In 1997 and 2000 he introduced three new families, Pseudodoteaceae, Avrainvilleaceae and Rhipiliaceae, changing the status of the Mesozoic Porostromata algae, in peer-reviewed papers well received by the scientific community and recording a high number of citations.

His Romanian collaborators belong to universities of Bucharest, Iasi and Cluj-Napoca, as well as to research institutes, such as the Geological Institute of Romania. Professor Ioan Bucur, from Babes-Bolyai University was always a close collaborator in the field of microfacies and fossil calcareous algae, a true continuator of his work. Professor Theodor Neagu, member of the Romanian Academy, Professor Aurelia Barbulescu, Professor Ioana Pana are close collaborators and co-authors for an important monograph related to Central and Southern Dobrogea carbonates. Professor Justinian Petrescu, and Professor Razvan Givulescu, from Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, together with Professor Leonard Olaru,

from A.I. Cuza University in Iasi, were also close collaborators in various fields of Paleobotany, co-authoring both research papers and textbooks in Paleobotany. Professor Dragastan's contributions in mainstream Paleobotany are related mainly to plant compressions systematics and taxonomy, as well as to silicified plants.

Membership to highly significant professional organisations such as IOP and AAPG consolidated his status, as well as the prizes he received, such as the "Grigore Cobalcescu" Prize of the Romanian Academy. Lots of taxa are bearing today his name, as well as many taxa dedicated to him too. Undoubtedly, in Paleoalgal and carbonate microfacies, he succeeded to put Romania on the map and to receive international visibility and recognition.

Professor Dragastan enjoyed teaching, and I always remember his course in Paleobotany, as he would use not only up to date information, but teaching tools as well. In a time when the overhead projector was barely known, he managed to show us color slides with recent and fossil plants and algae. He taught a lot of disciplines, but his most beloved were always Paleobotany and Palynology. Today, although retired, he still gives a course in Microfacies and Biostratigraphy for graduates, for the great gain of his graduate students. His textbooks in Paleobotany, with Professor Justinian Petrescu, and in Palynology, with Professor Leonard Olaru and Professor Justinian Petrescu are still unequalled in Romanian language textbook landscape, and I only regret that the language barrier hindered their international acknowledgement they deserved.

For his 70th anniversary, I wish him a Happy Birthday!

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