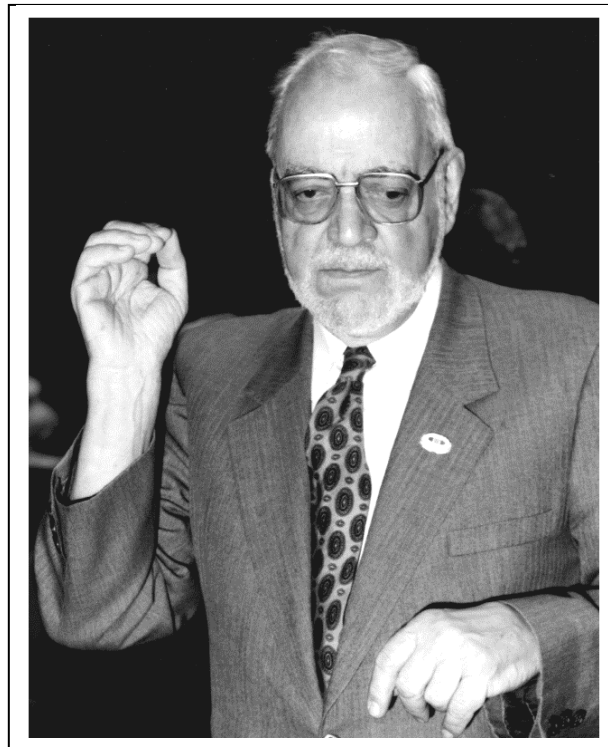


**MARCIAN D. BLEAHU**  
**1924–2019**



Next to Emil G. Racovitza, the great explorer, scholar and founder of biospeleology, the “second father” of Romanian speleology must necessarily be the geologist Marcian Bleahu, tireless researcher of the karst and promoter of the school of physical speleology and karstology. An altogether complex personality, endowed with an impressive scientific work, creative, rigorous and passionate in all his undertakings, Marcian Bleahu is the author or co-author of 31 books, 40 scientific papers, more than 400 articles on geology, geography, speleology, tourism, science, history of science, art history, music, environment and nature protection, civic and political issues, as well as scripts for scientific documentaries and over 500 public conferences, including on radio and TV.

Trav. Inst. Spéol. «Émile Racovitza», t. LVIII, p. 79–91, Bucharest, 2019

Equally important, he was a consummate teacher, an exceptional orator and flawless organizer, always ready to climb a mountain, to explore a cave, to visit a museum or to go to a concert. An open and refined personality, a charming partner in conversation, blessed with an almost childish curiosity so that, notwithstanding his position as professor, director, senator, minister or member of the Academy, he would gladly talk for hours with shepherds, old people, tourists met on mountain trails or in some mountain hut, with woodmen or miners, with students and young people passionate about nature or with people he simply met at some conference, at the bus station or coming out of a concert. No conversation or chance meeting was worthless to him and any person he came upon could become the source of novel or interesting information.

**Marcian David Bleahu** was born on 14 March 1924 in Braşov, in an educated family – his father was a notary public, while his mother descended from an old aristocratic family. He excelled in his studies at the “Dr. I. Meşotă” High school between 1933-43, while being equally fascinated with culture, scientific conferences, skiing and mountain hikes around his hometown. During the war, a difficult period, he attended briefly the courses of the Polytechnic and Law Schools, which he dropped upon being drafted and later, discharged for medical reasons, he became a volunteer on the front. In 1944, he entered the Science Faculty at the University of Bucharest to study Nature science and Geography. The courses were given by distinguished professors and the field work matched his passion for nature, as he declares in his autobiography *Confessions of an Undefeated* (Paideia Publishing House, 2006).

After defending his dissertation in 1949, he was appointed geologist at the Geological Institute and teaching assistant at the University of Bucharest, Geography Faculty. At the Institute, he embarked on an extensive series of geological campaigns during which he took part in mapping and stratigraphic, structural and tectonic studies of the Maramureş Mountains and the Apuseni Mountains, both less known at the time. In northern Maramureş he proceeded to a serious revision of the formations and ages described by his predecessors, establishing a new succession of tectonic units and nappes. His research in the Apuseni Mountains and the new geological maps, which he completed alongside other specialists and some former students, are hugely satisfying: he identified the stratigraphy of the Bihor Nappe Complex (Bihor Autochthonous) and the complicated system of cover nappes, he established structural and tectonic correlations between the Bihor Mountains, the Codrului Mountains and the Metaliferi Mountains, and, most importantly, embarked on a passionate study of a vast collection of karstic phenomena and formations. Regarding the study of the Apuseni Mountains, one is bound to mention the prestigious geological synthesis that he co-authored (*The Geology of the Apuseni Mountains* by V. Ianovici *et al.*, Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, 1976) and the other ten volumes and over fifty scientific papers published on the same topic.

Starting in 1969, in order to explain the presence of ophiolite crust and the formation of cover nappes in the Apuseni Mountains, Marcian Bleahu studied the new theories regarding world tectonics, based on which he began to illustrate the process of subduction and translation of the continental plates that happened in some areas in the Carpathians, as well as in the neighboring regions. Collaborations with foreign specialists, diligent documentation and countless conferences on plate tectonics allowed him to publish two monumental volumes on this subject – *Global Tectonics* (Scientific Publishing House, vol. I, 624 p., 1983, vol. II, 500 pp., 1989). His interest in the structure and dynamics of the Earth's crust triggered, following the earthquake on 4 March 1977, his involvement together with other specialists in the study of the propagation of seismic waves and their effects on the buildings and monuments of Bucharest.

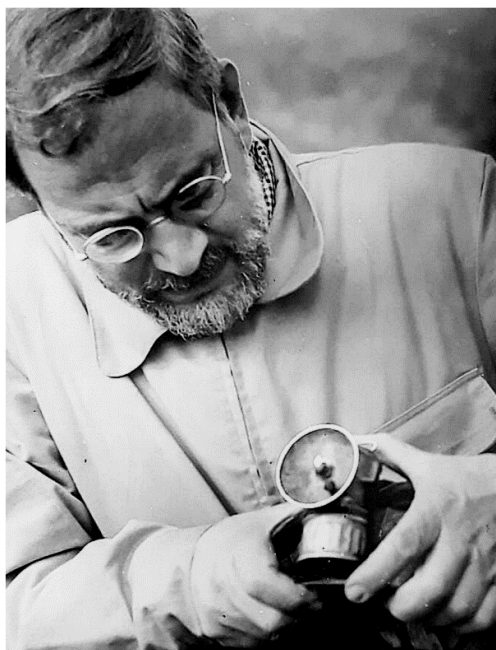
The national geological heritage is not neglected, either. In 1976 he published a systematic presentation of the geological reserves (*Geological Natural Reserves in Romania*, 1976, collab. with V. Brădescu and F. Marinescu, Technical Publishing House, 230 pp.) and later he co-authored a photographic album on mineral and crystal collections (*Crystals of Romania*, collab. with I. Miclea, Sport-Tourism Publishing House, 50 pp., 89 photos, 1977). After 1985 he took over the organization and display of the collections of the Museum of the Geological Institute.

Alongside his studies and geological syntheses, in 1972 he defended his Ph.D. paper in geography at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The paper was called *Karstic Morphology – The Geographical and Geological Conditioning of the Process of Karst Formation* (865 pp., 246 fig.). Fragments of the thesis were published over the following years in the volumes *Karst Morphology* and *Karst Landforms*. Together with the rest of the books and articles on karst science and speleology, the two volumes represent an essential theoretical and methodological basis for the understanding and study of the karstic and speleologic heritage in Romania. Bleahu's scientific endeavours and exploration of hundreds of caves were doubled by various other activities: the coordination of speleological clubs and the organization of recreational speleology at national level (*The Central Committee for Sportive Speleology*), as well as by constant lobbying by all available means – publications, conferences, radio and TV shows – for the protection of caves, karst landscape and especially the Apuseni Mountains.

After 1989 his efforts to popularize science and his lobby for nature protection got to an entirely new level once he entered politics and got involved in the foundation of the Ecological University. He was elected senator, minister for the environment, represented Romania at international summits and conferences, but not for a moment did he give up his civic duty to promote the scientific, ecological and social importance of the nature reserves and protected areas of Romania. Through a whole series of publications he offered extensive descriptions of natural and national parks, put forward concrete solutions for their conservation and management and insisted on the application of ecological norms in society and in political decisions. For the

ideas, foresight and recommendations included in the volume *Look Back in Anger... Look Forward in Fear. Faces of Political Ecology* (Economic Publishing House, 326 pp., 2001) he was rightfully regarded as the main architect of the ideology and doctrine of political ecology in Romania.

Marcian Bleahu died on 30 July 2019, only three days after submitting the final editing for his last book, *Protected Areas and the Protection of Nature*, an impressive 875 page, beautifully illustrated testament and a manifesto on nature preservation printed by Paideia Publishing House.



#### MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS TO KARSTOLOGY AND SPELEOLOGY

Shortly after starting the geological campaigns in the Bihor Mountains, Marcian Bleahu became aware of the scientific importance of the karst formations and phenomena of the area and began a lasting collaboration with the speleology team of the University of Cluj-Napoca. Together with Mihai Șerban, Dan Coman, Iosif Viehmann, Emilian Cristea and relying on his own experience as a climber, he took part in the exploration of karst systems with a number of extremely difficult caves and avens – the Barsa Hole, Cetățile Ponorului, Căpuț Cave, the Lost World system, Șesuri Aven etc. Shortly after, he published together with some of the team members the descriptions and maps of these caves as well as explanations as to their formation (1945–1957), while paying equal attention to the processes and

mechanisms of cave genesis and to overall characterizations of karst systems in Romania. Works on karst captures (1957), subterranean confluences (1965), periglacial origin of alluvial deposit in the karst system of the Bihor Mountains (1966), the role of climatic fluctuations in the formation of meanders (1966), hall formation (1969) were original topics discussed for the first time in scientific literature.

Special mention is due to the originality of the concept of antithetic scarp, by means of which he explained the evolution of a talweg upstream from a karst capture (1957). Also present among his preoccupations were the overall characterizations and classifications of the karst regions of Romania (1964, 1965, 1969, 1972) and those related to the formation of distribution of karstplains in the Romanian Carpathians (1971).

Between 1962 and 1967 he collaborated with Anca and Vasile Decu from the Institute of Speleology in Bucharest to research the karst system of western Oltenia and they produced a first paper on the captures, the functioning and the caves in the Zăton–Bulba karst system (1963). In the same region, he took part in the exploration and mapping of the Topolnița Cave, the largest known cave in Romania at the time. The results of his explorations in the Oltenia region and the cave descriptions were published in Paris in a prestigious monography (1967).

A first part of his Ph.D. thesis was published in the volume entitled *Karst Morphology* (1974), a genuine treatise of introduction in karstology which included – based on impressive research and readings (around nine hundred titles) – a critical analysis of the physical, chemical, lithological, mechanical-tectonic and hydrogeological factors that affect the process of karstification. The author intended to publish the entire Ph.D. thesis in a series of three volumes, where the second and the third were to deal with the morphology of karst and karst formations in Romania. Due to the preoccupation with global tectonics and other probably more attractive topics, the following two volumes no longer had the same scholarly format as the first one.

In order to avoid a publishing fiasco that might have resulted from printing a book on the caves of Romania signed by someone less involved in cave exploration and research, Bleahu decided to take on the book himself, together with a larger team (V. Decu, Șt. Negrea, C. Pleșa, I. Povară, I. Viehmann) and to actually write the chapters on karst geology and geography and on the caves of the Apuseni Mountains. The volume *Caves of Romania* (1976) included the monography of 141 of the most important caves, detailed maps and accurate data on location, access and progress through the caves. With the help of such an expert but easily available tourist guide, many of the caves described therein were quickly and irreversibly destroyed.

During the same period, he published an interesting and fascinating history of the discovery and exploration of some of the great caves around the world (*Conquerors of the Dark*, 1976), as well as a decimal classification and an up-to-date inventory of caves for the use of recreational speleologists (*Catalogue of Caves in Romania*, collab. with I. Povară, 1976) and he co-authored the *Speleological Inventory of the Bihor Mountains* (1977).

As his passion for speleology was doubled by a constant love of photography (his personal photo archive numbers around 40,000 images from around the world), he published photo albums and a presentation of two extremely important speleological reserves (collab. with C. Lascu) – *Topolnița Cave* (1975) and *Bulba Cave* (1985). His interest in promoting the history of speleology and the importance of caves throughout history prompted the writing of one of his most beautiful books on caves: *Of Men and Caves* (1978). Shaped as an essay and benefitting from extensive illustrations, the book tells the history of man's relationship with the cave, from the mystical shrines and unwelcoming shelters of the Paleolithic world to the labs, natural science museums and concert halls of the modern world.

Equally interesting and well received was *Karst Landforms* (1982). The book came out as part of a collection for high school students – a continuation of the chapters in his Ph.D. thesis – and is one of the most complete genetic and morphologic systematizations of exo- and endokarst, full of examples taken from various caves in Romania, advice and interesting anecdotes and with exceptional graphic illustration. It is no exaggeration to say that a whole generation of young speleologists and nature lovers was educated, over the course of forty or fifty years, by Marcian Bleahu's books, by his over 100 public presentations on various speleological topics and more than 250 radio and TV shows (*Memorandum of activity*, Bucharest, 119 pp., 2019).

By the mission he pursued through his scientific publications, his papers, conferences, public and managerial activity, Marcian Bleahu was both an example to follow and the undisputed theoretician who laid the groundwork for research in physical speleology and karstology. The role he played in advancing speleology in Romania was fully acknowledged by the various distinctions and titles conferred upon him and especially by his election as Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy.

#### **Teaching activity**

- Teaching assistant, lecturer, senior lecturer and associate professor, Geology Chair, University of Bucharest (1949–1961);
- Visiting professor, Rome and Skopje: courses on the hazards of geology on historical monuments (1986);
- Visiting professor, Basel: courses on global tectonics and the structure of the Carpathian Mountains (1987);
- Visiting professor, Greifswald and Potsdam: courses on global tectonics and the structure of the Carpathian Mountains (1988);
- Dean of the Faculty of Ecological Sciences, Ecological University, Bucharest. Tenure on the courses on Dynamic Geology, The Physical Geography of Romania, The Geology of Romania, Nature Protection and Protected Areas (1990–2001).

#### **Professional activity in the Geological Institute of Romania**

- Geologist, senior geologist (1949–1960)
- Head of unit (1960–1965), Scientific secretary (1965–1966);
- Deputy director (1966–1969), Director general delegate (1969–1972);

- Head of department (1982–1991);
- Editor in charge of the publications of the Geological Institute (1969–1999);
- Founder and organizer of the Geological Museum (1985–1994).

#### **Titles and affiliations**

- Member of the Bureau of the Romanian Tourism and Climbing Federation – FRTA (since 1960);
- President of the “Commission of Applied Speleology” within UIS (1973–1977);
- Member of Cave Research Foundation, USA (since 1977);
- President of the Central Commission of Sportive Speleology of the FRTA (1978–1988);
- President of the Romanian Tourism and Climbing Federation (1988–1994);
- Honorary President of the Romanian Speleology Federation (since 1966);
- Member of National Speleological Society, USA, (1987–1990);
- Honorary Member of the Swiss Science Society (since 1990);
- Representative of Romania to the Regional Environmental Bureau for Eastern Europe and the Balkans (1990–2001);
- Professor Honoris Causa of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences, “Babeş–Bolyai” University, Cluj–Napoca (2009);
- UN Conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro – *Vice-president for Eastern Europe and the Balkans* (1992);
- Honorary President of the “Romanian Boy Scouts” (1996–2000);
- Honorary member of the Academy of Romanian Scientists (since 2005);
- Honorary member of the Technical and Sciences Academy of Romania (since 2018);
- Honorary member of the Romanian Academy, Geonomical Sciences Branch (since 2018).

#### **Political activity**

- Vice-President of the Romanian Ecological Movement;
- Senator on behalf of the Romanian Ecological Movement (1990–1992);
- Minister for the Environment (1991–1992); a first Environment Law was drawn up during his office;
- Senator on behalf of the Ecological Federation of Romania (1996–2000);
- Honorary President of the Green Party (since 2006).

#### **Prizes and distinctions**

- Scientific medal for merit (1966);
- Work merit, 3rd Class (1977);
- “*Grigore Cobălcescu*” Prize of the Romanian Academy (1974);
- “*G.M. Murgoci*” Prize of the Romanian Academy (1976);
- “*Ștefan Hepites*” Prize of the Romanian Academy (1994).

### Participation in international reunions

- INQUA Congress, Madrid\*, 1957;
- 5<sup>th</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress, Kiev\*, 1958;
- International Colloquium for the Jurassic, Luxemburg\*, 1962;
- International Colloquium for the Carboniferous Period\*, Paris, 1963;
- 6<sup>th</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress, Bucharest, 1963;
- 7<sup>th</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress, Warsaw\*, 1967;
- 1<sup>st</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress for the Triassic, Bratislava, 1967;
- 23<sup>rd</sup> International Geology Congress, Prague, 1968;
- 5<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Stuttgart\*, 1969;
- Carpathian-Balkan Symposium on the Evolution of Karst Regions, Krakow, 1971;
- 6<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Olomouc, 1973;
- 8<sup>th</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress, Belgrade\*, 1974;
- 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress for the Carboniferous Period, Krefeld\*, 1975;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Colloquium for the Triassic, Bucharest, 1979 (*President*);
- 8<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Bowling Green, USA, 1981;
- International Commemorative Symposium, University of Krakow, 1985;
- 13<sup>th</sup> Carpathian-Balkan Congress, Krakow, 1985;
- 9<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Barcelona, 1989 (*guest of honor*);
- 10<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Budapest, 1989 (*guest of honor*);
- UN Conference on the protection of the Black Sea against pollution, Bucharest, 1992 (*President*);
- EU Colloquium on tourism and development and the protection of river deltas, Bucharest, 1992;
- UNEP Conference, Nairobi, 1992;
- UN Environment Conference on cross-border waters, Helsinki, 1992;
- UN World Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992 (*Vice-president for Eastern Europe and the Balkans*);
- 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the European Culture Society, Venice, 1993;
- Council of Europe Colloquium on the protection and accessibility of mountain areas, Banska Bistrica, 1993;
- Conference of the Union of European Ecological Parties, Istanbul, 1997;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> World Scout Parliamentary Union General Assembly, Manila, 1997;
- Congress of the Union of European Ecological Parties, Paris, 1999;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> World Scout Parliamentary Union General Assembly, Warsaw, Poland, 1999;
- Council Meeting of the European Greens, Bratislava, 2000;
- Council Meeting of the European Greens, Ljubljana, 2000;

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\* Scientific paper presented in the absence of the author.



- Council Meeting of the European Greens, Kiev, 2001;
- 10<sup>th</sup> European Greens council meeting, Stockholm, 2000.

### **Public conferences on speleological topics**

As a passionate photographer and excellent orator, Marcian Bleahu delivered more than 100 talks, conferences and slide projections on topics related to speleology and karstology, thus contributing to the education of young generations in universities and ecology and speleology clubs, as well as providing guidance to political decision-makers, technicians and designers interested in karst, to administrators and curators of protected areas. On his frequent trips abroad he never failed to include presentations on the caves and karst systems in Romania; back home, he always showed images from the congresses or thematic trips he participated to:

- conferences on Romanian Karstology and Speleology at universities and research institutes in Vienna (1982), Oxford (1985), Paris and Geneva (1987), and Liège (1988);
- Speleology, the science of underground spaces (series of 8 lectures at the Cultural-Scientific University, Bucharest);
- Karst and caves, an introduction in speleology;
- Caves of Romania;
- Karst and caves in Romania;
- The secret world of the Bihor Mountains;
- Speleology, a science of underground secrets;
- Unknown beauties – limestone pavements;
- 8<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Bowling Green, 1981;
- 9<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Barcelona, 1986;
- 10<sup>th</sup> International Speleology Congress, Budapest, 1989;
- Through the Yugoslavian Karst;
- Karst and caves of France: the Pyrenees and the Pre-Alps;
- Karst and caves of France: Massif Central;
- Caves of France: Paleolithic Art;
- E. G. Racovitza;
- Limestone pavements in the Karst of the Dolomites.

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