
P R O F I L E

**Ioan A. Vătăşescu,
General Secretary of King
Ferdinand I University
of Cluj**
Bio-Bibliographic Clarifications

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IOAN A. VĂTĂŞESCU
(1897–1980)

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IT IS a well-known fact that Romanians do not seem to value enough the preservation and celebration of the memory of their ancestors; this often comes as a rather fragmented effort, since in the case of many personalities that distinguished themselves and left a mark in the life of their communities and the institutions they worked in, at a local, regional and even national level, oral history and evidence were the only sources we could use in building their profiles and completing their bio-bibliographical data. There is a (far too) long series of outstanding personalities who are waiting for their contribution to the prosperity of the community and/or of the institution they were part of, as the case may be, to be at least known, if not recognized—the latter would mean much more, and rightly so. It is true that in “the decade of collapses (1940–1950)”¹—the phrase belongs to Mihai

Pelin—and in the one that followed, under the new ideological conditions promoted by proletkultism, the authorities of that time did everything to erase, ridicule, and render anonymous the contribution of the forerunners, who have therefore long been disregarded and overlooked.

After 1990, when we regained our right to memory, it has been incumbent on us, as a holy duty, to recover and reinstate the bio-bibliographical profiles of these illustrious forefathers. Ioan A. Vătășescu² is part of this gallery of “forgot-



FIG. 1. IOAN A. VĂTĂȘESCU, general secretary of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj (first on the left, top row), in a group portrait of the members of the University Senate, dressed in ceremonial robes, in the inner courtyard of the Academic College before the inauguration visit of King CAROL II, 13 June 1937.

Bottom row, from left to right: Prof. DUMITRU MICHAÏL, dean of the Faculty of Medicine; Prof. EMIL HAȚIEGANU, dean of the Faculty of Law; Prof. FLORIAN ȘTEFĂNESCU-GOANGĂ, rector of the University; Prof. NICOLAE DRĂGANU, vice-rector and dean of the Faculty of Letters; Prof. ALEXANDRU BORZA, dean of the Faculty of Sciences.

Top row, from left to right: Dr. IOAN A. VĂTĂȘESCU, general secretary of the University; Prof. IULIU MOLDOVAN, dean of the Faculty of Medicine; Prof. IACOB LAZĂR, deputy dean of the Faculty of Law; Prof. THEODOR CAPIDAN, dean of the Faculty of Letters; Prof. VICTOR STANCIU, dean of the Faculty of Sciences.

SOURCE: The Museum of Babeș-Bolyai University History, courtesy of Dr. ANA-MARIA STAN, scientific researcher, to whom I also take this opportunity to express my thanks.

ten” personalities. He was the last democratically elected general secretary of the University of Cluj, when it was still called King Ferdinand I University. He held the office of general secretary from 1937 until he was abusively removed in May 1947, during the loathsome Stalinist purges.

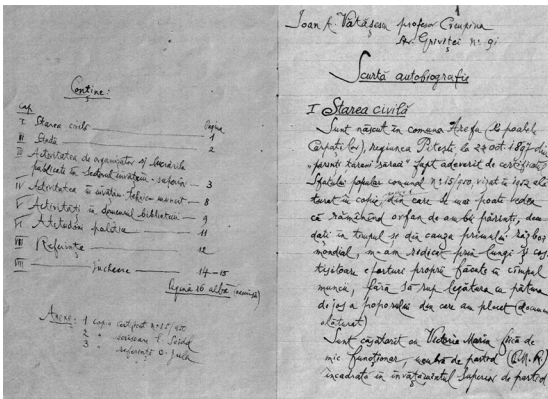
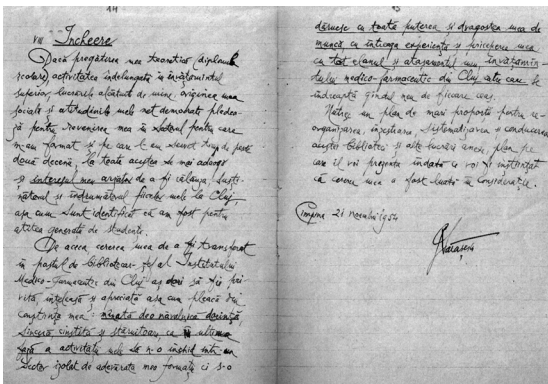
His abusive removal from the University at the request of the Union of Public Employees of Cluj City and Cluj County, as well as the suspicious and disgraceful rush—not to mention the servile attitude—with which Rector Emil Petrovici put into practice the official letter issued by the “union” on 28 May 1947, are all sensitive topics worth being investigated by researchers.

In our research, a complex series of archival records allowed us to partially reconstruct the life and activity of Ioan A. Vătășescu; additionally, after the telephone call we had with Mrs. Liana-Dacia Sabo-Vătășescu, M.D., his youngest daughter, other issues were clarified as well.³

Ioan A. Vătășescu was born on 22 October 1897 in the village of Arefu, close to the “foothills of the Carpathians,” in the administrative subdivision Curtea de Argeș, in a family of “poor peasants who worked hard to earn a living throughout their entire lives”⁴; he passed away on 10 January 1980, in Bucharest. By 1909, while still living with his family, he had attended and graduated five primary school grades, “being ranked top of his class”⁵ in the 5th grade, from among all pupils attending the schools of Corbeni village. Due to family hardships and difficulties, he had to drop out of school in order to help his parents maintain their household. After the outbreak of World War I and Romania’s entry into the war, he lost both his parents and his home was totally destroyed during the battle of Arefu: “His home village was the theater of fierce military campaigns,”⁶ as he remembered years later in his “Short Autobiography.” Young Vătășescu showed a “strong desire for enlightenment and progress,”⁷ and thus, with the elation and enthusiasm of youth, he “began the difficult undertaking of great effort and long-lasting work”⁸ as he himself declared, with the long term aim of overcoming his condition and “becoming a spiritually evolved man.”⁹ Besides his strong determination and iron will, he also benefited from the support of the Romanian society of those times, when a very complex institutional network was implemented to help the tens of thousands of war orphans. After attending and graduating high school in Romania, he took the classic baccalaureate (in letters and philosophy) at the University of Nancy (France), “acknowledged and validated by the Ministry.”¹⁰

He subsequently studied letters at the universities of Grenoble, Nancy, Strasbourg, and Paris, completed by a bachelor degree in letters at Sorbonne University in Paris, with a major in French and a minor in Romanian language and philosophy. These degrees were subsequently recognized by the Faculty of Letters of Cluj, and then also “endorsed and recognized by the Ministry.”¹¹

Ioan A. Vătășescu also graduated from the Pedagogic Seminary in 1934; he claims to have gained “three other higher education degrees from French Educational Institutes in order to be able to master the teaching profession.”¹² On 17 December 1934 he obtained his doctorate at the University of Paris, defending “L’Œuvre de Victor Hugo en Roumanie”¹³ as his main thesis and “Bibliographie critique des traductions en roumain de Victor Hugo”¹⁴ as the second thesis. With regard to this latter aspect, he mentions in his “Short Autobiography” that: “The two doctoral theses recorded under my name in the ‘Annales de l’Université de Paris’ (1938, p. 447) are numbered 938 and 939”¹⁵ (sic!, when in fact, the actual numbering was 987 and 988).¹⁶



FIGS. 2.–3. The first and last pages of the “Short Autobiography,” a handwritten document by IOAN A. VĂTĂȘESCU, former general secretary of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj (1 April 1937–30 May 1947).

SOURCE: Archives Services, Department of Cultural Heritage of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

In the source quoted above by Ioan A. Vătășescu, namely *Annales de l’Université de Paris*,¹⁷ on page 447, under the category “Relations littéraires franco-roumaines et franco-hongroises,” his name is mentioned under headings 987 and 988; surely, his memory had tricked him, given the fact that his “Short Autobiography” was written more than twenty years later.

While completing his studies, Ioan A. Vătășescu was also working in the Romanian public service since 1 April 1922. Between 1 November 1924 and 31 December 1927, he worked as an archivist at the University of Cluj. Ioan A. Vătășescu served as a secretary in the Rector’s Office from 1 January 1928 to 31 March 1937, and on 1 April 1937 he was promoted and appointed general secretary of the University by High Royal Decree no. 1883/1937. He held office until 30 May 1947, when he was “discharged” from office, as a result of the “work” done by

the... Union of Public Employees of Cluj City and Cluj County. He was succeeded in office by Liviu Gomboș.¹⁸ The brief and vague decision of the Rector's Office states: "We hereby discontinue all of Mr. Ion A. Vătășescu's work duties and tasks he has so far undertaken as general secretary, only allowing him to remain in office as the director of the Academic College."¹⁹

This is all that Professor Emil Petrovici,²⁰ the rector in office at the time, could do, given that the so-called "union," in fact a mere annex of the NKVD, demanded the total removal of this outstanding official. This is our logical inference, since the Decision further states: "As regards the permanent dismissal of Mr. Vătășescu, as demanded by the Union through the aforementioned notice, we decline our competence by submitting their request to the Higher Competent Authorities."²¹ The text refers to notice no. 345 of 28 May 1947, of the so-called "union," which, among other things, announced the exclusion of Ioan A. Vătășescu from all union organizations. Therefore, we can infer that the influence and force of this "union" was similar to a legally binding law, for only two days later the rector finally dismissed the loyal high-ranking official from all offices he had previously held. As director of the Academic College, a position that he was allowed to continue to hold, and which was also referred to in the Decision, Vătășescu served for less than two months, since the powerful "union" eventually succeeded in removing him completely from the university's structures. All the substantial and high quality work that Ioan A. Vătășescu had carried out in his career as a senior official did not make any difference, although for his meritorious work at the University of Cluj he was decorated with the Order of the "Crown of Romania," being awarded the Order of Merit in the rank of knight, by High Royal Decree no. 1445/1942. He also received Les Palmes Académiques, which was a national order bestowed by the French Republic upon distinguished academics and figures in the world of culture and education. To sum it all up, he was the director of the Academic College between 1936 and 1940, as well as between July 1945 and 1947, when he was "removed" from office by the Ministry of Education.²²

The handwritten document called "Short Autobiography" we referred to and discovered in the Archives Services at the Department of Cultural Heritage of Babeș-Bolyai University outlines some of the outstanding achievements of the former general secretary,²³ such as reorganizing, restructuring and simplifying the central administrative services of the university, as well as organizing and running the Academic College, including the university canteen and the Foreign Guest Service Unit. For this "honorable" service, meaning unpaid, Vătășescu directs us to the University Yearbook of 1938/39, pp. 341–355, where reference is made to his work. The document reads as follows:

This institution being a distinct Department under the authority of the Rector's Office, its administration and leadership were entrusted to Mr. Ioan A. Vătășescu, general secretary of the University, who was assisted in this capacity by Mrs. Victoria I. Vătășescu, who dealt with the multiple activities of the College requiring feminine competences, all the elements pertaining to guest services such as: comfort and snacks, household provisions and the aesthetics of the building, banquets, the preparation and supply of buffet meals at academic gatherings and balls, ballroom decorations, canteen management (menu, staff, etc.).²⁴

As a result, “the Students’ Campus Committee . . . decided to express their thanks and gratitude to Mr. I. A. Vătășescu, for the beautiful work done and the wonderful results achieved during the first year of functioning of the Canteen within the premises of the Academic College.”²⁵

Ioan A. Vătășescu ensured the smooth coordination of the refuge of Cluj University to Sibiu and Timișoara, after the Vienna Dictate (30 August 1940), organizing the uninterrupted activity of the university (1940–1945) and the “restoration and return of the institution to Cluj” (1945–1946), an activity he describes as “exceptional and of major proportions in both time and space.”²⁶

He also published articles, studies, syntheses, books, as well as the *Thirteen Yearbooks of the University for 1926–1942*, which were large printed volumes “of 220–800 pages each.”²⁷ Regarding this latter aspect, the author modestly asserts that in order to ensure a better external visibility of the University of Cluj, “from 1932 onwards, I had the initiative to add an Analytical Summary in French”²⁸ (to each volume of the yearbooks). In 1928, Ioan A. Vătășescu published the *Guide de l'étudiant à Cluj*, comprising 263 pages and 1 chart, updated annually, which he refers to as being: “the first work of its kind in Romanian higher education, published independently. . . and widely disseminated in the coun-

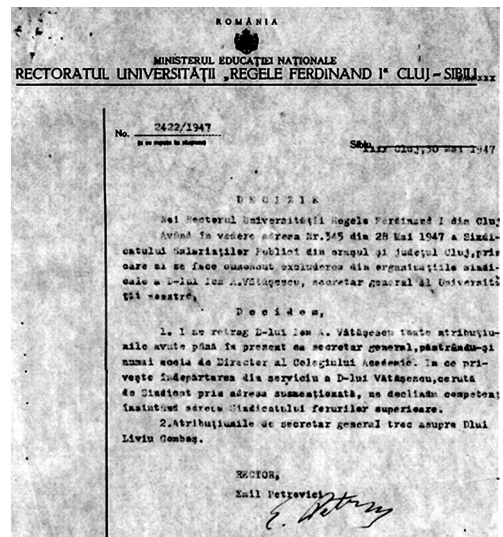


FIG. 4. The Cluj University Rector's Office decision to dismiss IOAN A. VĂTĂȘESCU from the position of general secretary of the university at the request of the Union of Public Employees of Cluj City and Cluj County.

SOURCE: Personal file of IOAN A. VĂTĂȘESCU, Archives Services, Department of Cultural Heritage of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

try, free of charge or below cost,” which he considers a “fruit of the experience acquired . . . on my own at notable universities abroad,” with the observation that in the countries he visited during his studies abroad, “such works are undertaken by a separate Secretarial office,” finally concluding that “this Guide has brought great services to the generations of students that succeeded one another from 1929 to 1940 . . . which contributed to the institution’s good reputation.”²⁹

In 1939, in order to increase the international visibility of the University of Cluj, he published a large documented article in French about the University of Cluj, in the *Latinitas* magazine of Paris.³⁰ Along similar lines, in January 1944, towards the end of the Second World War, Ioan A. Vătăşescu published in Sibiu *L’Université roumaine réfugiée de Cluj*,³¹ describing the challenges he had faced when coordinating the refuge and striving to organize the uninterrupted activity of the university in the new locations in Sibiu and Timișoara. The publication of this work was widely echoed abroad, as evidenced by the letter he received from Alf Lombard on 31 March 1944. The Swedish philologist specializing in Latin languages wrote to him, as a correspondent member (1947) and posthumous honorary member of the Romanian Academy (1992), as follows: “August 1940 was a great injustice that required this— hopefully temporary—move of the University. A revolting injustice, let it be told by a friend of your cause, a friend who, in the remote Sweden, does not miss any opportunity to give the proper explanations, to make the facts known and the simple truth shine.”³² Among the studies he published on his own, Ioan A. Vătăşescu also mentions “a work . . . for limited use” concerning the establishment, organization and achievements of the Romanian University of Cluj “between 12 May 1919 and 12 May 1933,”³³ drafted at the request of Nicolae Titulescu, royal minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, “for personal research and documentation in the famous process of the Hungarian counts in Geneva.”³⁴

“In the field of library and documentation science,” his “long-standing” experience³⁵ facilitated “a close and long-lasting contact with the Department for International Inter-university Exchanges of Publications” which was materialized in “the mutual exchange of theses and scientific works.”³⁶ He was also involved in the organization within the premises of the Rector’s Office of the Library Department for Information and Documentation³⁷ in the field of higher education, the initial core of the future University Office. He was also directly involved in organizing a library in the reading room of the Academic College, all these endeavors being “strongly appreciated and praised by the Rector of the University of Paris, Professor Sébastien Charléty,”³⁸ as well as by the University Senate. He ensured the yearly publication of a chapter on the Library of the University, in the University Yearbook, in which, according to the author, “every year, we have continued to support with orientation material” and assist

*the publications of the library's scientific staff, librarians' conferences, library works and advancements (the alphabetical catalogue, the topographic catalogue, the subject-oriented catalogue, the increase in scientific contributions, the circulation of documents and the affluence and frequency of readers, the historical archive, exhibitions, the popular library and so on).*³⁹

In July 1947, after being completely removed from the higher education structures, including from the office he held as director of the Academic College and almost literally thrown out in the street, Ioan A. Vătășescu managed to obtain a teaching position at the Girls' High School no. 3 in Cluj, for the 1947–1948 school year.

Then, from 1948 until 1954, when he wrote his “Short Autobiography” which was a mandatory document for him to land a job as a librarian at the Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute in Cluj, he worked at the Technical Secondary School no. 1 in Câmpina. Referring to this last aspect, the former general secretary of the University of Cluj states:

*As I made my descent from Cluj to Câmpina, amid the great reform of 1948 in the field of education, I moved from higher education to lower education. Here, after making my own contributions to the organization and running of the extensive network of vocational schools and qualification schools belonging to the former Muntenia Oil Company (1948–1950), for which my work was appreciated and awarded, I continued to function as a Romanian language teacher at the vocational School no. 1 in Câmpina, up to the present.*⁴⁰

Apart from providing information about his organizational skills and subsequent career path, the text above conveys, first and foremost, the regret for his departure from Cluj, as he uses the expressions “As I made my descent from Cluj to Câmpina”—with subtle irony—“amid the great reform of 1948 in the field of education,” in fact a mere political “purge” in the purest Stalinist style, or “I moved from higher education to lower education.”

Ioan A. Vătășescu married teacher Victoria I. Marin, “the daughter of a petty clerk,”⁴¹ born on 5 January 1912 in Rotbav (Brașov). The couple had two daughters: Maria-Lorena (1936) and Liana-Dacia (born 1938) both graduates of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj, in connection to which the former general secretary of the King Ferdinand I University of Cluj wrote his letter of intent.

His eldest daughter, Maria-Lorena, went to live in Paris, France, where she practiced medicine, and the youngest daughter, Liana-Dacia, practiced medicine in Bucharest. After the death of her husband in 1980, Victoria Vătășescu joined her eldest daughter in France.

In addition to Ioan A. Vătășescu's qualities and skills highlighted above, we can consider those of a caring, loving father, as highlighted during his attempt to find employment at the Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute in Cluj, when he emphasized his "every thought,"⁴² as he himself declares, that he was mainly motivated by his "strong desire to guide, support and tutor my daughters in Cluj,"⁴³ modestly daring to demand it as compensation—"as I have always been viewed by so many generations of students."⁴⁴ With disarming honesty and youthful elation, the "petitioner" justifies his request by stating that he is "driven" by "a sincere, impetuous and earnest desire" to "give and pass forward" to the medical and pharmaceutical education system in Cluj the experience he had accumulated over the years. With respect to the Institute's Library, where he was hoping to be employed as a librarian, he stated that: "I have conceived a large-scale plan for the reorganization, the endowment with publications, the systematization and management of this library, as well as other secondary activities."⁴⁵

THIS IS, in brief, the profile of Ioan A. Vătășescu, a high-ranking state official who through merit and hard work managed to overcome his initial social condition and reach his goals in life. The Romanian society of his time, still driven by sound, solid bourgeois principles, rewarded him in the sense of ensuring his fair access to the positions he deserved. During its second decade of activity, King Ferdinand I University of Cluj made remarkable institutional and material progress and managed to create a beautiful heritage, as the whole country seemed to have experienced an exceptional development: the institutes of the university managed to erect their own buildings, the Botanical Garden grew and expanded beautifully, the Students' Sports Park was established and became operational, the modern building of the Academic College was erected, and still remains an emblematic edifice of the interwar period of Cluj.

Nonetheless, the beautiful and rapid development of the university was disrupted by shameful political games, and for a while the institution had to face the challenges of the refuge to Sibiu and Timișoara, and subsequently the return, but under particularly aggressive Soviet occupation conditions. These events and achievements are strongly linked to Ioan A. Vătășescu, and this is one of the main reasons why we consider him most deserving to enter the honorable gallery of the general secretaries of the university, joining "founders" such as Dr. Ștefan Jarda⁴⁶ and Dr. Constantin Jurcan⁴⁷ who worked hard to lay the institutional and material foundations and ensure the development of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj.

Our modest contribution to the clarification of various bio-bibliographic aspects of the life and activity of Ioan A. Vătășescu is part of a rehabilitation effort and an invitation to a thorough research of this personality of the University of

Cluj, who deserves an extensive monograph, especially since he is not mentioned at all in the dictionary of Cluj personalities,⁴⁸ which in itself is a regrettable act of omission.



Notes

1. Mihai Pelin, *Deceniul prăbușirilor (1940–1950): Viețile pictorilor, sculptorilor și arhitecților români între legionari și stalinisti* (Bucharest: Comania, 2005), 667.
2. We decided to use the form “Ioan” for Vătășescu’s first name, since in his “Short Autobiography,” he himself seems to prefer using this variant, although in Wallachia, Oltenia and Moldavia, the alternative form, “Ion,” was very well-established.
3. The data concerning civil status and other family-related aspects have been provided and confirmed by Mrs. Liana-Dacia Sabo-Vătășescu, M.D., to whom I also take this opportunity to express my thanks.
4. Ioan A. Vătășescu, “Scurtă autobiografie” (1954), 15-page manuscript, Archives Services, Department of Cultural Heritage of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. I want to take this opportunity to thank Professor Christian Germanaz of the University of La Réunion (France) who gave me access to the French bibliographic source cited herein.
17. *Annales de l’Université de Paris* 13, 1 (1938).
18. On 30 May 1947, Liviu Gomboș, J.D., succeeded Ioan A. Vătășescu in office as general secretary of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj.
19. Decision of the University Rector’s Office, Personal file of Ioan A. Vătășescu, Archives Services, Department of Cultural Heritage of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.
20. Emil Petrovici (1899–1968), linguist, university professor, rector of the University of Cluj (1945–1951), member of the Romanian Academy (1945).
21. Decision of the University Rector’s Office, Personal file of Ioan A. Vătășescu.
22. Vătășescu, “Scurtă autobiografie,” 4.
23. *Ibid.*, 4–8.

24. *Anuarul Universității Regele Ferdinand I din Cluj 1938–1939* (Cluj: Tipografia Cartea Românească, 1940): 351.
25. *Ibid.*, 354.
26. Vătășescu, “Scurtă autobiografie,” 5.
27. *Ibid.*, 7.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
30. *Ibid.*, 7.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
33. *Ibid.*, 6.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, 9.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, 10.
38. Sébastien Charléty (1867–1945), French historian and university professor, rector of the University of Paris (1927–1937). He visited King Ferdinand I University of Cluj on 26–27 November 1934.
39. Vătășescu, “Scurtă autobiografie,” 10–11.
40. *Ibid.*, 14.
41. *Ibid.*, 1.
42. *Ibid.*, 15.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, 14.
45. *Ibid.*, 14–15.
46. Dr. Ștefan Jarda (1883–1927), lawyer, the first general secretary of University of Cluj (1 October 1919–6 March 1927). See Alexandru Păcurar, “Dr. Ștefan Jarda, the First Secretary General of Dacia Superior University in Cluj,” *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* 1, 23 (2018): 73–92.
47. Dr. Constantin Jurcan, lawyer, the second general secretary of the University of Cluj (1 June 1927 until his retirement on 31 March 1937). Doctor of Laws of the Hungarian University in Cluj, after graduation he joined the public service (1 October 1898); towards the end of his career, he held the office of general secretary of the University of Cluj. See Alexandru Păcurar, *Lucrările Institutului de Geografie al Universității din Cluj/Travaux de l’Institut de Géographie de l’Université de Cluj (Roumanie): Monografie* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019), 648.
48. *Clujeni ai secolului 20: Dicționar esențial* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2000).

Abstract**Ioan A. Vătășescu, General Secretary of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj:
Bio-Bibliographic Clarifications**

Ioan A. Vătășescu (1897–1980) brilliantly completes a series of general secretaries of the University in Cluj, taking office after Dr. Ștefan Jarda (1919–1927) and Dr. Constantin Jurcan (1927–1937) and carrying out a most worthy and deserving activity for over a decade (between 1 April 1937 and 30 May 1947). Having lost both his parents in early childhood, Ioan A. Vătășescu proved to have a great thirst for knowledge, taking his baccalaureate in France and obtaining a university degree in letters in the same country. He subsequently defended his doctoral thesis in 1934 at Sorbonne University in Paris. As early as 1922 he joined the Romanian public service, succeeding by merit to take up the position of general secretary of King Ferdinand I University of Cluj. In the difficult moments of the university's refuge to Sibiu and Timișoara (September 1940) and of its return to Cluj (summer–autumn 1945), he took over the heavy responsibility of organizing these large-scale actions. In the context of the military occupation of the country by the Red Army and after Romanian society fell under communist rule, Ioan A. Vătășescu was abusively removed from the university's structures.

Keywords

Ioan A. Vătășescu, the University of Cluj, general secretary, higher education system, marginalization