

THE FRENCH GEOGRAPHER EMMANUEL DE MARTONNE AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT. – The French Geographer Emmanuel de Martonne and His Contribution to Romanian Geography. Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955) was a prominent geographer of the 20th century, recognized for his essential contributions to the development of geography as a scientific discipline, his interest in cultural diversity, and his balanced perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. His work is well known not only in France but also internationally. A significant portion of his research focused on the Romanian geographical space. During the interwar period, he played an important role in the delineation of the borders of Greater Romania. Moreover, he distinguished himself by conducting the first detailed analysis of the geography of Romania, with particular emphasis on the Făgăraș Mountains, which he referred to as the “Alps of Transylvania.”

Keywords: Emmanuel de Martonne, Romanian geography, Romanian Academy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Emmanuel de Martonne, born in Chabris, France, in 1873, is recognized as one of the founders of modern geography. “With an impressive body of work, he laid the foundations of general physical geography. He also made significant contributions to the development of human geography, being the founder of the French school of geopolitics. Part of his prestigious academic career was devoted to the study of the Romanian geographical space and to the advancement of academic geography in our country” (V. Loghin, 2018, p. 22).

Today, Emmanuel de Martonne’s ideas and approaches challenge us to reconsider the role of geography in shaping a fair and sustainable future, where interactions



Fig. 1. Emmanuel de Martonne (1873-1955).
Source: ***

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between humans and the environment are examined with responsibility and foresight. In this context, on the occasion “of the 150th anniversary of Emmanuel de Martonne’s birth, Romanian geographers pay tribute with gratitude to his scientific work, his dedication, and the life lessons he generously shared” (D. Petrea, 2015, p. 3).

2. LIFE AND ACADEMIC JOURNEY

Intelligent, diligent, passionate, and extremely disciplined in his scientific work, Emmanuel de Martonne completed his professional training under the guidance of his illustrious mentor, Paul Vidal de la Blache. He continued his education in Austria, studying under geologist Eduard Suess, and later in Germany with prominent geographers such as Ferdinand von Richthofen, Albrecht Penck, and Julius Hann (I. Gugiuman, 1973, p. 6).

His combined theoretical training and extensive field experience enabled him to hold a wide range of academic and institutional positions (J. Dresch, 1956, p. 626). Over nearly five decades, Emmanuel de Martonne had a major impact on university geography through both his teaching and his active involvement in national and international academic life. He held important academic positions at the universities of Rennes (1899–1905) and Lyon (1905–1909), and subsequently took over the Chair of Geography at the Sorbonne, becoming the successor to Paul Vidal de la Blache.

In this role, he trained numerous generations of geographers, placing particular emphasis on applied work: field excursions, map analysis, and graphic representations of landforms became central components of student preparation. De Martonne also made a significant scientific contribution, materialized in a vast number of publications that profoundly shaped the discipline.

He actively supported the establishment of a strong geographical school in France and played a key role in the international recognition and development of geography, especially in countries such as Romania, where his influence was particularly significant.

Thanks to these remarkable contributions, his recognition steadily grew. As M.D. David (1938, p. 56) stated: “From this moment on, De Martonne becomes the guiding light not only of the geographical movement in France but of all humanity”.

Emmanuel de Martonne’s life thus represents a remarkable fusion of scholarship, geographical exploration, and diplomatic engagement.

3. EMMANUEL DE MARTONNE’S CONTRIBUTION TO ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHY

De Martonne’s work extended beyond the realm of theoretical scientific research devoid of practical implications. His geographical explorations, characterized by a careful examination of the relationship between humans and their environment, naturally intersected with the historical and political realities of his time. This dimension is particularly evident in his deep and lasting connection with Romania, where his work held both scientific relevance and strategic significance.

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In fact, “De Martonne had shown interest in Romania as early as his university years at the Faculty of History at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris (1892–1895). This curiosity was sparked by his friendship with the Romanian student Pompiliu Eliade, a literary historian who later became a professor at the University of Bucharest and a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy. This explains his first visit to Romania in 1897, his decision to dedicate himself to the study of the Romanian space from various perspectives, and the choice of Romania as the subject of his two doctoral theses: a monographic study of Wallachia and a morphological analysis of the Southern Carpathians (the Transylvanian Alps)” (V. Loghin, 2018, p. 18), which brought a detailed and scientific perspective to the geography of Romania.

At the same time, L. Badea (2006–2008, p. 183) argued that, “If one were to examine carefully the geographical bibliographic heritage to assess which works were most frequently used and cited during the formative and consolidating period of the Romanian geographical school, certainly De Martonne’s two works would be at the forefront...” (mentioned above).

The publication of *La Valachie* “can be regarded, in the field of Geography, as an epoch-making event, as it represents the most eloquent embodiment of the Monographic School as envisioned by the brilliant Vidal de la Blache. This major work dedicated to Romania was followed a few years later by *Recherches sur l'évolution morphologique des Alpes de Transylvanie* (Southern Carpathians). This research marked a new direction in the study of relief forms and stood as a tribute to the teachings of the genius Suess” (M.D. David, 1938, p. 57).

In other words, both works drew the attention of the international academic community and became landmarks in geographical research. The accolades received from prestigious institutions in France confirmed their scientific value, and in the following years, the ties between De Martonne and Romanian geographical research grew stronger, paving the way for increasingly active collaboration.

Before the researcher turned his attention to the Romanian mountain regions, existing geographical writings on the subject were sparse and lacked structured information. He thus discovered a fertile and largely unexplored field of research. To deepen his investigations, he devoted nearly one-third of his scholarly work to this area. His understanding of the Romanian geographical space was achieved in a subtle and profound manner through direct contact with both the natural environment and local communities, ultimately resulting in a strong bond between the geographer and the landscape he explored.

Possessing thorough knowledge of Romania’s geographical and human realities, Emmanuel de Martonne identified striking similarities between “the structure of settlements in the sub-Carpathian zones of Oltenia, Muntenia, and Moldavia and those in Transylvania, located at the foothills of mountainous massifs. He interpreted these as specifically Romanian settlement patterns, formed within ‘țări’ (“countries”) - regions with an ancient population” (1902a) (D. P. Idu, 1974, p. 4). Furthermore, “during his expeditions in the high Carpathian region, in a natural environment far more inaccessible than today, he observed that ‘[the frontier] everywhere separated populations speaking the same language and having the same origin’” (Emm. de Martonne, 1921; cited by D. Petrea, 2015, p. 2).

Reviewing his extensive scientific output—published in Romanian, French, or British academic contexts—we find works that interpret the Romanian environment in a characteristically geographical manner. These include general studies in geomorphology and human geography that address Romania as a whole, as well as more focused works dealing with specific, homogeneous regions such as Transylvania and the Carpathian space. His body of work, the result of long journeys throughout the country, was presented and appreciated in academic conferences and published works, offering invaluable contributions to both national and international geographic scholarship.

According to V. Loghin (2018, p. 23), de Martonne's writings on Romania can be grouped into the following thematic categories (table 1):

Table 1. Thematic categories of Emmanuel de Martonne's works on Romania

Glacial Periods and Glacial Landforms in the Southern Carpathians	(„Sur la période glaciaire dans les Karpates méridionales”, 1899; „Recherches sur la période glaciaire dans les Karpates méridionales”, 1900; „Nouvelles observations sur la période glaciaire dans les Karpates méridionales”, 1901; „Sur les anciens glaciers dans les Karpates méridionales”, 1905);
Erosion platforms in the Carpathians	(„Sur la plate-forme des hauts sommets des Alpes de Transylvanie”, 1904; „Sur les plate-formes d'érosion des monts de Bihor (Roumanie)”, 1921; „Sur les plate-formes d'érosion des Monts Métalifères du Banat”, 1921; „Sur le massif de Poiana Rusca et la corrélation des cycles d'érosion des Karpates méridionales”, 1922);
Transverse valleys	(„Sur l'histoire de la vallée du Jiu/Karpates méridionales”, 1899);
Geomorphology of the Southern Carpathians and the Western Carpathians	(Recherches sur l'évolution morphologique des Alpes de Transylvanie / Karpates méridionales”, 1907; „Le massif du Bihor / Roumanie”, 1922);
Geography of the Carpathians as a whole	("The Carpathians", 1912; „Sur la position systématique de la chaîne des Karpates”, 1910; „The Carpathians: Physiographic features controlling human geography”, 1917; „Essai de synthèse morphologique des Carpates”, 1932);
Geography of the Subcarpathians	(„Sur les terrasses des rivières subkarpatiques en Roumanie”, 1904; „Sur l'évolution de la zone des dépressions subkarpatiques en Roumanie”, 1904; „Le village roumain subcarpatique”, 1933);
Geography of Transylvania	(„La Transylvanie”, 1922; „Transylvania. A Geographical Study”, 1924; „Colinele Transilvaniei”, 1929);
Human geography, ethnography, toponymy	(„Sur la toponymie naturelle des régions de haute montagne, en particulier dans les Karpates méridionales”, 1901; „Recherches sur la distribution de la population

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	en Valachie avec un étude critique sur les procédés de représentation de la répartition de la population", 1902; „La vie pastorale et la transhumance dans les Karpates méridionales; leur importance géographique et historique", 1904; „Viața pastorală în Carpații României", 1912; „Essai de carte ethnographique des pays roumains", 1920; „La répartition et le rôle des minorités nationales en Roumanie", 1929);
Geography of Romania as a whole	„La Roumanie. Géographie physique, Géologie, climat, Biogéographie, Géographie économique, Géographie politique" (in La Grande Encyclopédie, 1900); „La Valachie. Essai de monographie géographique", 1902; „La Roumanie et son rôle dans l'Europe Orientale", 1915; „La nouvelle Roumanie", 1921; „La nouvelle Roumanie dans la nouvelle Europe", 1922; „La Roumanie", in Géographie Universelle, vol. IV, Europe Centrale, 1931);
Works carried out within the Committee of Studies attached to the Paris Peace Conference (1918-1920)	„Travaux du Comité d'Études (La Transylvanie, la Bessarabie, la Dobroudja, La question du Banat)"; „Répartition des nationalités dans les pays où dominent les Roumains. Carte 1:1.000.000", 1919.

Source: V. Loghin (2018, p. 23)

Emmanuel de Martonne dedicated an important part of his activity to study the territory and population of Romania, publishing numerous works on the geography and people of this country - including his two doctoral theses, which cemented his scientific prestige. He also served "the cause of Greater Romania": first as a "border draftsman" at the Versailles Conference, then as a "missionary" of France, especially in "liberated" Transylvania, and as a defender of the new borders against Hungarian revisionism and German Geopolitik (G. Bowd, 2023, p. 10).

Between 1897 and 1937, he returned repeatedly to Romania, conducting research activities. His involvement also included the role of "visiting professor, teaching at the University of Cluj-Napoca or delivering lectures at the Geographical Society, the Academy, and various universities - occasions on which he was honoured with awards for scientific excellence (honorary member of the Geographical Society in 1915, Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Cluj-Napoca in 1929 and of Iași in 1938, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy in 1912, honorary foreign member of the Romanian Academy in 1919, honorary citizen of the city of Cluj-Napoca, etc.) (M. Ielenicz, Mariana Nae, 2013, p. 213).

De Martonne left a lasting mark on the way we understand the relationship between humans and the spaces they inhabit. His works continue to inspire generations of geographers, offering models of rigorous analysis and opening new perspectives on the complex dynamics between people, places, and environments. His name has become a reference point for the spirit of innovation and geographical thinking that significantly shaped the development of research in Romania.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As evidenced by his entire body of work, De Martonne's influence extends beyond his published writings, continuing through the ongoing interest of Romanian geography in the themes and methods he promoted.

Contemporary researchers and geographers continue to draw inspiration from his complex approach, which harmoniously integrated the physical and human dimensions of geographical space.

His perspective on cooperation between peoples—based on dialogue, understanding and mutual respect—remains relevant today, in a world where building open and balanced global relationships is more important than ever.

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