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Some Landmarks in the Romanian history of medicine

I. Preliminary aspects

I.1. Writings about Thracian-Scythian-Dacian medicine

Antiquity. Historically speaking, Romania was rooted in the ancient Thracian-Scythian-Dacian cultural space. Since immemorial times, data about medicine in this area already appeared in writings belonging, for instance, to Plato and Hippocrates, Dioscorides and Pseudo-Apuleius¹.

Middle Ages and Pre-Modern Era. Among Romanian born personalities, information concerning the healing art, sanitation, public health policies and their professionals were dealt with in medieval works authored by various national or foreign chroniclers, in the Church Laws and the first lay Codes of Laws issued in the Romanian Lands: in Moldavia, whose capital was Iasi, and Wallachia, whose capital was Bucharest. Such Codes of Laws were that of Moldavia's Ruling Prince, Vasile Lupu (Iasi, 1646), and that of Wallachia's Ruling Prince, Matei Basarab (Targoviste, 1652), respectively. News bearing upon epidemics, various diseases, therapies, common people's lifestyle, physicians, herbalists or pharmacists, barber-surgeons and midwives were included in indigenous Chronicles signed by Grigore Ureche (1590—1647), Miron Costin (1633—1691), Nicolae Costin (1660—1712), Ion Neculce (1672—1745), in texts collected by Enache Cogalniceanu (1729—1795), or presented by the well-known historian Mihail Kogalniceanu (1817—1891).

Dimitrie Cantemir (1673—1723), Prince of Moldavia in the early XVIIIth century (1693, 1710—1711) and member of The Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences in

Berlin (1714), tackled many aspects concerning medicine: illnesses, contagious diseases, empirical and magical treatments, habits, customs, medical terminology and its meaning. He did it in several books such as “The Divan” or “The Wise Man's Parley with the World” or “The Judgment of the Soul with the Body” (Iasi, 1698) — the first philosophical essay in the Romanian literature composed after Plato's “Dialogues”; “The Hieroglyphic History” (in Romanian, 1703—1705); “The Description of Moldavia” (in Latin — *Descriptio Moldaviae*, 1714—1716, written on the request of The Royal Academy in Berlin (edited in Hamburg, 1769, and Leipzig, 1771)—the first physiography of Moldavia having the first map of the Prince's native country attached to it; «*The Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire*» (in Latin — *Historia incrementorum atque decrementorum Aulae Othomanicae, a manuscript first printed posthumously in London, in 1736*) — where the operation for groin hernia, such as practiced by Balkan itinerant barber-surgeons, was thoroughly described for the first time in world literature. Cantemir studied theoretical medicine at the Orthodox Patriarchal Academy in Constantinople, having Alexandros Mavrocordato the Exaporite as one of his teachers².

The Moldavian Prince was familiar with Jan Baptist Van Helmont's theories, too, translating and commenting some of the latter's works:

Sacrosanctæ scientiæ indepēgibilis imago, 1700; *Physices universalis doctrina et christianæ fidei congrua et necessaria philosophia*, cca 1699—1700; *Ioannis Baptistae Van Helmont encomium in autorem et virtutem doctrinae eius* (J. B. Van Helmont, *physices universalis doctrina*), 1701, are some of Cantemir's manuscripts identified

¹ Dana Baran, The first versions of the Hippocratic Aphorisms and Oath, Proceedings of the 16th Symposium of The Panhellenic Society for the Dissemination of the Hippocratic Spirit “The Hippocratic Doctor according to his Ethos and Deeds and the Pa-tients' Rights in the Age of High Medical Technology”, Athens, March 2020, pp: 102-116.

² Dana Baran, Date de interes medical în opera lui Dimitrie Cantemir, in Beatrice Balaur, Anca Dimitriu, Irina Iorga, Ana Tomorog (editors), Dimitrie Cantemir – Principe român și cărturar European, Iasi: Editura «Spiru Haret», 2013, pp: 139-146.

and published only much later³. Paracelsus' influence through the works of the two van Helmonts: Jean Baptiste and Franciscus Mercurius, was another medical idea in Cantemir's work⁴.

The «Encomium», e.g. integrated some Helmontian extracts, dealing with the substance of things while others expressed the Flemish scientist's iatrochemical ideas.

Iatrosophia. In the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, the first Princely Academies were created in Iasi (The Vasilian College, 1639) and Bucharest (The «St. Sabbas» College, 1694). In both Schools *iatrosophia*, i.e. theoretical medicine, was taught, Hippocratic aphorisms and Galenic principles of medicine being debated upon. Possibly, Avicenna's concepts were discussed in their turn, since Ibn Sina adopted and redimensioned ideas of Galen and Aristotle. The Greek physician and monk Nicolaos Kerameus was an outstanding professor who taught *iatrosophia* in Bucharest and in Iasi⁵.

It would be worth mentioning that the Princely Academy in Iasi equally developed in close cooperation with the Kievan Academy, in a period when this geographical area — now representing Ukraine — was under Polish rule. Some teachers of the Kievan Academy, and mostly its energetic founder, the Moldavian born Prince and metropolitan Petru Movila (Peter Moghila/Mohyla) (1596—1646), often visited Iasi and The Vasilian College of «The Holy Three Hierarchs» Monastery. Moghila promoted Western (Latin) European academic concepts while emphasising Orthodox Christianity primacy and Church jurisdiction.

I.2. Modern era in the Romanian Lands of Moldavia and Wallachia

The first schools of medicine and the history of medicine. During the XIXth century, the first Schools of Medicine were founded in Bucharest (1839) and in Iasi (1852). In 1855, in Bucharest, General Dr. Carol Davila (1828—1884) created *The Surgery School*, transformed into the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy in 1857. The Surgery School syllabus comprised lectures on the History of Ancient Medicine, delivered by the military doctor Anton Costiescu.

In 1862, at the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy, the fourth year students could attend

courses of the History of Medicine, given by Gral. Dr. Zaharia Petrescu (1841—1901), professor of Pharmacology, Therapeutics, and Materia Medica, and corresponding member of the Romanian Academy.

In 1878, the historian Alexandru Papadopol-Calimach (1833—1898) wrote about Pedanius Dioscorides and his *Materia Medica*, and about Pseudo-Apuleius (Lucius Apuleius ?) and his *Herbarius*. Both authors yielded the first data on Geto-Dacian medicinal herbs and their original name in Dacian, Greek and Latin. Papadopol-Calimach was titular member and vicepresident of the Romanian Academy. (Fig.1)

Fig. 1. Alexandru Papadopol-Calimach

At the crossroads of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, several doctors dedicated themselves not only to medical practice, but to synthesing a more comprehensive perspective on the medical condition of the Romanian society, its medicalisation and professionalization of medical assistance.

Often they just focused on the history of their own specialty. This was the case of Dr. Iacob Felix, e.g., who published a *History of Hygiene in Romania* (three volumes) in 1901—1903. Other medical historical books were edited by the historian George I. Ionescu Gion in 1892—1894, Dr. Gheorghe Crainiceanu, an ophthalmologist, in 1907, and the famed historian, Professor and Academician Nicolae Iorga, in 1919.

Professor dr. Zaharia Petrescu's pioneering activity in medical history teaching was continued by his son, Gheorghe Z. Petrescu (1874—1954), doctor of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris (1901). (Fig.2.) He specialised in Dermatology and Syphiligraphy, but in parallel he gave free lectures of the History of Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine of Bucharest in 1921. In 1925 Professor Ion Cantacuzino proposed a chair of the History of Medicine to be created and Dr. Gh. Z. Petrescu became associate professor of this short lived academic discipline. Petrescu

Fig. 2. Gheorghe Z. Petrescu

³ Doru Todericiu, Prolongements méconnus de la philosophie chimique de Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont (1578-1644) en Europe centrale et orientale. L'Éloge à Van Helmont du savant roumain Démètre Cantémir (1701), Bull Acad Roy Belg — Classe des Sciences, 1979,t.65; pp:228-238; Dragos Popescu, Dimitrie Cantemir si „Izvoditoriul” Van Helmont, Bucuresti: Rev Filos, 2017, 64;1:40–50.

⁴ Tomita Ciulei, Profile of an East-European Thinker. Dimitrie Cantemir's Humanism, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2014, 149:189-194.

⁵ Valeriu L. Bologa, Gh. Brătescu, B. Dușescu, Șt. M. Milcu, Istoria Mediciniei Românești. București: Ed. Medicală, 1972, p.111; Nicolae Marcu, Le manuscrit médical de N. Kerameos-Iassy 1670. Signification médico-historique. Proceedings of the 38th International Congress on the History of Medicine-Actes du 38e Congrès International d'Histoire de la Médecine. Eds Nil Sari, AliHaydar Bayat, Yeşim Ülman, Mary Işın, Ankara, 2005, pp:1039-1041; Dana Baran, The first versions of the Hippocratic Aphorisms and Oath,...loc cit.

authored several papers on the history of medicine: a presentation of the Salerno medical school associated with the first translation into Romanian of the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* (1926), different synthetic monographs on the history of Romanian syphilography and dentistry, biographies of remarkable medical personalities.

II. The «heroic era»

II.1. Some representatives

Post-war globalisation of mankind. Immediately after World War I, the interest for the history of sciences increased all over the planet and many international societies emerged aiming at a deeper understanding of the common basis of European and universal culture and civilisation. This was also a post-war reaction intended to promote cooperation and peace, that derived from an improved common knowledge between peoples, fostering mutual tolerance and bridging gaps.

In this period national iatrohistorians started to treat history of Romanian medicine as a whole, in a more coherent and specific way. Several doctors got involved in analysing medical problems connected with the indigenous social and scientific life, characterising the general evolution, progress, and contributions, errors and failures of Romanian medicine. Biographies of noteworthy scientists were published, analysing their achievements along with various other medical concerns.

An excellent historian of medicine was Dr. Pompei Gh. Samarian (1879—1942) who wrote many valuable monographs on *Social Medicine, the History of Hospitals in Wallachia and Oltenia, An Epidemiological History of Plague*, and three impressive volumes dealing with «Medicine and Pharmacy in the Romanian Past (1382—1775)», that appeared between 1931—1936. (Fig. 3) For this encyclopedic approach Dr. Samarian was awarded the prize of the Romanian Academy.

Fig. 3. Pompei Gh. Samarian

II.2. The Royal Romanian Society for the History of Medicine, Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine and Medical Folklore

Against this stimulating background, on September 14th, 1929, Dr. Victor Gomoiu (1882—1960), a brilliant surgeon and humanist, founded in Bucharest *The Royal Romanian Society for the History of Medicine, Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine and Medical Folklore* (RRSHM). (Fig. 4) The headquarters of the Society was located within the Institute for the History of Medicine, belonging to «Her Royal Highness Princess Elena» Establishments, directed by Dr. Victor Gomoiu. Gomoiu wanted for him the position of RRSHM General Secretary, whereas he

asked Professor Dr. Constantin Dimitrescu-Severeanu, a pioneer of modern Romanian surgery, to accept the position of president. In fact, according to Gomoiu, Dimitrescu-Severeanu (1840—1930) embodied the history of academic Romanian medical education itself. (Fig. 5) Before long, a Museum and a Library of medical history and folklore started to be organised within the RRSHM Institute. Since its very beginning in 1929, the RRSHM was affiliated to the International Society for the History of Medicine (ISHM), founded in Paris in August 1921.

Fig. 4. Victor Gomoiu.
RRSHM founder

Fig. 5. Constantin Dimitrescu Se-
vereanu.
First RRSHM President

II.3. a. Dr. Victor Gomoiu and the International Society for the History of Medicine

Victor Gomoiu spoke more foreign languages, was very passionate about art and history and at the same time was a skilled surgeon who set up original operating techniques. His sympathectomy operation for treating angina pectoris, for instance, was highly appreciated by Professor René Leriche, a reputed French specialist in sympathetic surgery.

In 1923, Gomoiu published a valuable book «On the History of Medicine and Medical Education in Romania (before 1870)» that Professor Valeriu L. Bologa, another great Romanian historian of medicine, appreciated as «one of the foundations of modern Romanian historiography». Gomoiu sent this volume to Maxime Laignel-Lavastine, a famous French doctor and medical historian, who presented his work in one of the meetings of the French Society for the History of Medicine. Consequently, Gomoiu was unanimously elected member of this scientific society, he was invited to the VIth International Congress on the History of Medicine held in the Netherlands — in Leyda and Amsterdam, in 1927, and eventually he gained an international reputation as a historian of medicine.

Under Gomoiu's presidency, an exceptional event took place in Bucharest in September 1932: the IXth Congress of the International Society for the History of Medicine, attended by participants from thirty two countries. (Fig. 6.a, b) The worldwide known Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga supported the Congress, the renowned historian of religions Mircea Eliade was very enthusiastic about this amazing development of the history of medicine in his own country, and so was the skilled bacteriologist and fine humanist Ion Cantacuzino, RRSHM President in office.

As a consequence of his success and of the interest Western European and American scientists had in the history of medicine in Eastern Europe and the

Balkans, Professor Victor Gomoiu was unanimously elected ISHM vicepresident in Paris in 1933, and ISHM president, in 1936. The Royal Romanian Society for the History of Medicine appointed him as its honorary president in 1933. During Gomoiu's presidency, ISHM Executive Bureau included outstanding personalities: vicepresidents were Pietro Capparoni (Rome), Paul Diepgen (Leipzig/Berlin), Maxime Laignel-Lavastine (Paris) and Charles Singer (London); general secretary was Jules Guiart, the reputed French parasitologist and medical historian from Lyon.

After the Great Union of Romania in December 1918, Guiart taught history of medicine at the Faculty of Medicine of the Romanian University of Cluj, chief town of Transylvania Province.

Dr. Gomoiu's mandate as ISHM President had positive results: he extended ISHM influence and presence in the Balkan region, performed comparative studies on medical folklore, efficiently supported by Professor and Academician Ion Cantacuzino (Jean Cantacuzène)⁶.

From 1936 to 1940, Victor Gomoiu edited in Romania, in French language, the first ISHM periodical: the «Archives of the International Society for the History of Medicine» («Archives de la Société Internationale d'Histoire de la Médecine. Paris»). (Fig. 7)

Due to his works and worthy initiatives he was awarded membership of about thirty prestigious international scientific societies of the history of medicine from Spain, France, Greece, Yugoslavia — Serbia, Belgium, Germany, Peru, England, Turkey, Ireland, Italy etc. (Fig.6.c)

II.3. b.Gomoiu and the Iron Curtain. No ISHM Congress took place during World War II. Indeed the ISHM Congress held in Yugoslavia in 1938 was followed by another one only in 1950, when it was organised in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam. However, afterwards, in 1952, 1954, 1956, due to his merits, Victor Gomoiu was elected ISHM honorary president until his death in 1960. This fact probably also reflected a sort of academic solidarity and support to Professor Gomoiu who suffered a lot after 1945 due to the new social and political order

a.

b.

Fig. 6. 1932-Bucharest. IXth ISHM Congress. a. Opening ceremony in the presence of King Carol II (left). ISHM President, Dr. Jean-Joseph Tricot-Royer delivering his speech after Victor Gomoiu (white arrowhead) welcomed the participants; b. Reception of the participants at the Patriarchate Palace.

c.

Fig. 6.c. Spain, Alcalá de Henares University. Xth ISHM Congress. Dr. Victor Gomoiu (white arrowhead) received a Doctor Honoris Causa degree, 1935.

Fig. 7. Archives de la Société Internationale d'Histoire de la Médecine. Paris. no. 3, 1937, Imprimerie „Presa”, Braila (journal cover).

⁶ Dana Baran, Dr. Victor Gomoiu, Balkan Paradigms and Lessons of a Lifetime, Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, 2009, vol. 2 (51), Series VI: Medical Sciences, (ISSN 2065-2224): pp: 137-144.

brutally imposed on Romania. The RRSHM interrupted its activity, the Institute, Museum and Library of Medical History were dismantled, the buildings of the institution he established and directed for so many years were nationalised.

Gomoiu tried in vain to cope with these unexpected events that occurred in his life. In May 1950 he was arrested and remained in prison for about five years until September 1954, without any trial or official explanation. Eventually he was released from prison and «rehabilitated». He was offered different honorary functions and positions, he obviously proudly declined. Gomoiu died in February 1960.

In 1969 the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine (RSHM) glorified its 40th anniversary and a medal was minted in his honour celebrating his major contribution.(Fig. 8)

III. Personalities and modern History of Medicine teaching in Romania

III.1. The first chair of the History of Medicine. In 1921 in Cluj, Professor Jules Guiart (1870—1965) organised and directed the first Chair of the History of Medicine in Romania. He worked there until 1930. (Fig. 9.a) In the meantime he set up an Institute for the History of Medicine, Pharmacy and Medical Folklore, a Museum and a precious Library for the History of Medicine. From 1936 to 1948, he was ISHM General Secretary. Guiart was Valeriu Bologna's mentor. (Fig.9.b) Professor Bologna, who also collaborated with Dr. Gomoiu, became a well-known Romanian historian of medicine in the post-World War II decennia.

Fig.8. 1969. Commemorative Medal of the 40th Anniversary of the RSHM Foundation. a.obverse: Asclepius. 40 years since the foundation of the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine 1929—1969; b.reverse: Dr. Victor Gomoiu (1881—1960), founder of the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine.

Fig. 9.a. Jules Guiart

Fig.9.b. Valeriu Bologna

Fig.10. Bucharest, 1970. Opening ceremony of the XXIInd ISHM Congress. Bologna's welcome message.

Following in Gomoiu's footsteps, Valeriu Bologna was elected president of the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine from 1952 to 1971. In 1970 he organized the XXIInd ISHM Congress in Bucharest and Constanta. (Fig.10) He was elected ISHM vice-president.

Professor Bologna authored many important books and scientific papers mainly concerning the indigenous medical history whereas some others bore on the history of universal medicine.

Professor Victor Gomoiu and Professor Valeriu Bologna, together with other noteworthy Romanian scientists from Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi, got equally involved in the activity of the International Academy of the History of Sciences, cooperating with Professors Aldo Mieli from Italy and particularly Petru Sergescu (Pierre Sergesco), from Romania. Petru Sergescu, the great Romanian mathematician, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, was highly passionate about the history of science and was President (1947) and perpetual secretary (1950) of the International Academy of the History of Sciences based in Paris. Concurrently he was a founding member and general secretary of the International Union for the History of Sciences (IUHS) (1947). However, Dr.Victor Gomoiu insisted that the International Society for the History of Medicine should maintain its independence in relation to the emerging superstructures of International Societies and Unions for the History of Sciences, as a whole.

Particularly fascinated by the history of sciences himself, Mircea Eliade constantly encouraged Valeriu L. Bologna to follow in the pathway of medical history, too.

III.2. Present day status of medical history. As previously outlined, in tight connection with Medicine, the History of Pharmacy in Romania began to be more rigorously studied within Jules Guiart's Institute since 1921, and then, after 1929, in Victor Gomoiu's Institute and Society for the History of Medicine, as well.

These institutions were reshaped in 1952.

After the post-war reform of the Romanian education system that occurred in 1948, chairs of the History of Medicine were established in every Faculty of Medicine of the country. History of Pharmacy was also included in the curriculum of the Faculties of Pharmacy.

In 1972, the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine and Pharmacy was created in Bucarest. It was only on June 13th 1991, that a Romanian Society for the

History of Pharmacy (RSHP) was founded, maintaining full autonomy and independence with respect of the Society for the History of Medicine. RSHP is affiliated to the International Society for the History of Pharmacy.

A Research Center for the History of Medicine was created at the Institute of Public Health in Bucharest after World War II. Nowadays it only maintains its valuable library.

Excellent scientists worked in this field, such as Dr. Gheorghe Bratescu, Dr. Vasile Manoliu, Dr. Nicolae Vatamanu, Dr. Gabriel Barbu, the historians Ion Horatiu Crisan and Constantin I. Bercus, among many others who tried to place Romanian medicine within the framework of national and international history and civilization, linking generation to generation.

Professors Benone Dutescu, Nicolae Marcu, Iosif Spielmann, *Sámuel Izsák*, Atila Stoiacovici, Constantin Romanescu, Cristina Ionescu and Radu Iftimovici were in their turn prominent specialists and personalities that promoted History of Medicine and Pharmacy in different Romanian academic centers: Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj, Targu-Mures, Timisoara.

Professors Dutescu and Marcu succeeded Professor Bologa as presidents of the Romanian Society of the History of Medicine.

Currently, Professor Dr. Nicolae Marcu is RSHM President and National Delegate of Romania to ISHM. He has been participating in ISHM activities since 1964.

VI. Concluding remarks

Romania was among the European countries that developed modern History of Medicine quite early, at the beginning of the XXth century. An enthusiastic and

maybe romantic period ensued, illustrated by notable personalities and reliable research. Later medical historical investigations flourished between 1950—1990, when this domain equally acquired a mandatory academic status.

Unfortunately, after 1990, History of Medicine became an optional discipline in most Romanian Universities of Medicine. The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi retrieved this specialty as a compulsory field of study eventually.

On the other hand, contemporary medical students and young doctors do not seem particularly motivated to get involved in this scientific branch. As to historians, they achieve interesting syntheses; yet they could get better acquainted with both medical thinking and classic writings of medical historians.

Consequently, amateurs and professionals intermingle.

This trend is a quite understandable reality. Even though a valuable tradition is probably going to be lost, doctors have to be mainly committed to medicine, indeed.

Nevertheless, without a critical historical perspective, one will probably never properly appreciate what medicine, its opportunities, risks and ethical challenges really are.

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Mutatis mutandis, extrapolating Pierre Duhem's conclusion, one should keep in mind that «the history of science alone can keep [physicians, too] from the mad ambitions of dogmatism, as well as the despair of pyrrhonian scepticism.»

The very ongoing pandemic mankind is facing just now could possibly shed more light on the matter.

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The article provides an overview of the development of the history of medical science in Romania. The achievements of Romanian historians in the study of various areas of the history of medicine are presented.

Key Words: medicine, history, Romania.

Деякі пам'ятки в румунський історії медицини/

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У статті представлений огляд розвитку історії медичної науки в Румунії. Представлені досягнення румунських істориків у вивченні різних напрямків історії медицини.

Ключові слова: медицина, історія, Румунія.

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