“THE SOCIETY OF PHYSICIANS AND NATURALISTS IAȘI” AND “THE MEDICAL-SURGICAL JOURNAL” IN THE ROMANIAN MEDICAL LIFE

The presence of physicians in Moldova was only occasionally mentioned for several centuries, and even then they existed only as court physicians. Medical life began to be organized and structured with the establishment in 1757 of St. Spiridon Hospital, by the St. Spiridon Monastery under Prince Constantin Cehan Racoviță. That was the tradition in Medieval Europe - including the Romanian Principalities - to set up healthcare establishments around monasteries according to the principle of simultaneous treatment of spiritual and body sufferings; such hospitals included Ospedale di San Lazzaro e Mendicanti in Venice, Hôtel-Dieu and Saint Louis in Paris, as well as Colțea Hospital in Bucharest (founded in 1704).

The foundation of the hospital is certified by the Decree issued by Prince Constantin Cehan Racoviță that set the first rules of hospital organization and operation. It also opened the St Spiridon Trustee (Epitropia Sf Spiridon), an institution which provided the hospital’s self-financing, being endowed by many rich local benefactors. This Trustee would provide later on for several related hospitals in Moldova: the Mavromati Hospital in Botoșani, the Beldiman Hospital in Bârlad, the Spiridonia Hospital in Galați, the Prophet Samoil Hospital in Focșani, the Gregorian Obstetrical Institute in Iași, the Slănic-Moldova Health Resort.

Ștefan Bosie, the founder of the St. Spiridon Church - became the first trustee and administrator of trustees, operating in this capacity for 31 years (1734-1765). In 1777, Prince Grigore Alexandru Ghica organized for the first time the Sanitary System in Iasi (the House of Doctors) and in 1785 - Alexandru Mavrocordat issued a Decree that promoted the Regulations of St. Spiridon House, an institution that provided the maintenance and functioning of the trustee’s hospitals until 1948, when the communist Government of Dr. Petru Groza abolished it, expropriating all its properties.

The next memorable event in the medical life of Iasi was the founding of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists in 1833; in fact, the first embodiment of a scientific association of physicians and the first nucleus of the future society was the Iasi Medical Reading Circle (Medizinische Iassyer Leseverein) set up in 1830, the stated goal of which was reading and debating scientific news in medicine and natural science.

This initiative belonged to two physicians: Dr Jacob Czihak, the Chief Physician of the Moldavian Army and Dr Mihail Zotta, the Chief Physician of Moldavia, both being "doctors in medicine and surgery". The Medical Reading Circle had 21 members: 11 medical doctors, 5 chemists and 7 members of other professions – among which Gh Asachi; the headoffice was the house of Dr Czihak. The fee of 3 silver roubles per quarter (4 gold ducats/year for the following year) was used for enduring initial subscriptions for 12 journals: 11 German (among which Salzburger medicinische-chirurgische Zeitung)
The foundation of the Society was widely commented upon in the press both in Moldavia ("Albina Românească" of 28 January 1934 – a newspaper founded by Gh. Asachi – in the supplement of which the Rules of the Society were published), and in Sankt Petersburg in "St Petersburgische Zeitung", No 257/3, November 1833 – a front-page article (presenting the activity of General Paul Kiseleff). Even though the presence of General Kiseleff as the Plenipotentiary President of the Valachia and Moldavia Counties (1829-1834) was the very image of the Russian Empire’s expansion (under the name of “protecting power”), his presence was beneficial, stimulating the Romanian principalities transition to modernity. His accomplishments, among others, were:

- the elaboration of the first Constitution common to both Romanian Principalities (Regulamentul Organic), which stipulated the separation of state powers (the King and the ministers - the executive power, the Public Assembly - the legislative power); the Common Constitution anticipated the Unification of the Romanian Principalities;
- the establishment of the State Archives in Bucharest and Iasi;
- the construction of roads and modern town buildings;
- the return of former rayas Brăila, Giurgiu and Turnu (to Valachia) and of the lake Brateş (to Moldavia);
- the trade liberalization on the Danube, so the two principalities’ boats being able to sail under their own national flag;
- the permission, in 1829, to print the first publications in Romanian: Curierul românesc” in Bucharest (Ion Heliade Radulescu) and “Albina Românească” in Iasi (Gh. Asachi) (1829);
- the approval and financing of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iasi;
- the approval of the opening of Academia Mihăileană.

In addition, as an Ambassador of Russia in Paris between 1856-1862, he would support the unification of the Romanian Principalities.

In the same context it should be reconsidered the personality of Prince Mihai Sturza, blamed by the revolutionaries of 1848, but the founder and supporter (also from a financial point of view) of many key institutions, such as Academia Mihăileană (the first institution for university studies in the principalities), the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iași, the School of Arts and Crafts. We also owe to him the foundation of the first National Theatre in the Principalities (directed by Vasile Al. ecsandri and Costache Caragiali), and the donation of his own houses in Copou to be used as the National Theatre headquarters.

The aims of the Society, as stated in its Rules, translated into modern language are still valid:

- To facilitate update with the progress of modern medicine;
- To allow exchange of experience;
- To disseminate the achievements of Romanian medicine internationally;
- To limit medical errors;
- To stimulate the development of medical institutions.

The role of Dr Iacob Cristian Stanislau Czihak (1800-1887) was essential in the set up and development of the society. Born in Aschaffenburg, but of Czech origin, Doctor in Medicine from the University of Heidelberg, he moved to Iasi in 1831, being invited to organize the first army medical service in Moldavia and the Military Hospital.
in Iaşi. He set up together with Dr Mihai Zotta, a Romanian from Bucovina, the Chief Physician of Moldavia, the Society of Physicians and Naturalists in Iasi, becoming its first secretary. He was also involved in education, teaching Natural Science (at the Vasilian Gymnasium and at Academia Mihăileană) and publishing the first manual in Romanian of Natural History, thus contributing to the development of the Romanian scientific language. He had special merits in connecting the medicine of Iaşi (through the Society of Physicians and Naturalists) to the European scientific and medical world. In the first two years of the society existence, he was in touch with numerous academic personalities in Europe, the number of the correspondent members coming up to 81. He made special efforts to increase the visibility of the Romanian Principalities in Europe, as a delegate of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists at the Congress of Naturalists and Physicians of Freiburg am Breisgau (700 participants from states from all Europe), where he gave a speech on the progress of education, natural science and medicine in the Principality of Moldavia – a conference which he published and disseminated among the participants (Bericht über die Fortschritte der Zivilisation in dem Fürstenhom Moldau - Mitgetheilt der Versammlung Deutscher Naturforscher und Aerzte in Freiburg, 1838). He was elected the honorary member of the Romanian Academic Society in 1872.

The third important moment in the medical life of Iasi is the foundation of the Faculty of Medicine in 1879. Founded in 1860 by the Decree of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the University of Iasi was to function with 4 faculties: Law, Philosophy and Literature (from which the Science department developed later), Theology and Medicine; unfortunately, the Faculty of Medicine became functional 19 years afterwards, due to financial difficulties and lack of endowment and proper staff.

The Romanian university educational system was initially structured and organized after the French Educational System – the first centralized system under state control and implementing state’s objectives; later on was used the model of the German Educational System – which created the typology of the modern university, promoting the indissoluble relationship between theory and research (which explained the explosive development of industry and science in the German area), and maintaining a high level of universitary autonomy (due to the federal structure of the German Empire). The University, and also the Romanian School of Medicine and Pharmacy (especially in Moldavia) were initially under the influence of German and Austrian schools.

Reasons:

The preference for the German School of Medicine and Pharmacy was based on several reasons:

1) Physicians and professors from German-speaking areas (mainly because of Transylvania connections) were invited to work in the Principalities;

2) The young men of promise from the Principalities and Transylvania used to study in German universities;

3) The access to German journals and specialized books and manuals (German or translated to German) which were available in libraries and bookstores (Cuţba, 1999).

In Iasi, the influence of the French Medical School was dominant between 1890-1930; afterwards, the Internal Medicine School of Iasi, led by Professor Ion
Enescu, PhD (specialized in Berlin and Vienna) was mainly influenced by the German Medical School for almost three decades.

The fourth key moment which influenced the development of medical life in Iasi was the creation of the Journal of the Society in 1887, after 2 previous unsuccessful attempts:

- «Foia Soţietăţii de Medici şi Naturalişti din Prinţipatul Moldovei» (The Paper of the Society of the Physicians and Naturalists of the Moldova Principality) – which appeared in 1851 under the management of Dr. Vârnav, but which ceased its appearance the next year;

- «Arhivele Soţietăţii de Medici şi Naturalişti din Iaşi» (The Archives of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iaşi) – its publication being discussed repeatedly in the Society meetings of June and July 1851 when the Draft Regulation for the creation of a Scientific Publication was written and voted by the Society of Physicians and Naturalists (on the format, circulation, organization of the editorial team, financing, authorship rights (one copy outside subscription)), but the project was never put into practice.

The journal appeared in January 1887, under the title “Buletinul Societăţei de Medici şi Naturalişti din Iaşi” (The Bulletin of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iaşi) and has regularly and continuously appeared till today (with some exceptions during the world wars), being the first scientific journal in Romania. The first volume appeared both in French and Romanian (the president of the Society being Dr I. Ciurea), the name being changed later (in 1909, with the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists) into «Revista Medico-Chirurgicală» - the name the journal has kept even today (together with the English version of the title).

It must be emphasized that the Society of Physicians and Naturalists actually sponsored the creation of four institutions:

- The Medical Library of the Society (right from its foundation -1833);

- The Museum of Natural History of Iasi – the first museum of this type opened in the Principalities (1834), under the name The Cabinet of Natural History, which has been housed in the building of the Society since 1840;

- The Botanical Garden (the first botanical garden in the Principalities) founded by Dr. Anastasie Fătu (the President of the Society - 1872-1885), initially in his own garden in Str. Florilor (1856), later on the Garden of the Society (1873); in 1921 the garden was moved behind the University and, finally, at the outskirts of the city, on Copou Hill;

- The Editorship of the “Medical-Surgical Journal” (first medical journal in the Principalities)

The museum, the society and the Editorship of the Medical-Surgical Journal have functioned together since 1840 in Casa Roșet, on the Hagioaiei Street, (today the 16 Independentei Blvd). The building was erected at the end of the 18th century, in the neo-classical style, being one of the few architectural monuments of Iaşi with an arch to allow the passage of coaches and unique for having the ground floor with arch vaults. This building has a historical value as in one of the big rooms of the museum, the members of Parliament of the National Party, during the night of the 3/15th of January 1859, decided the nomination of colonel Alexandru Ioan Cuza to become the voievod of Moldavia, the decisive condition for the
unification of the Romanian principalities (initially accepted as a personal union, later on as an unitary state).

We believe that the venerable age of our Society and of the Journal itself justify keeping the names that have been used for more than 100 years, although it may seem obsolete. At the time, the choice of these names followed a European pattern. The creation of a Medical Reading Circle, then transformed into a Scientific Society, was a natural process in Europe: thus, the Medical Reading Society in Bristol (set up in 1807) was transformed in 1874 into the Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Society, and the Nottingham Medical Book Society (set up in 1817) was transformed in 1828 into Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society (both societies functioning even today under the same name).

Regarding the term Medical-Surgical, it is important to note that the title of Doctor in Medicine and Surgery was awarded at the graduation of the Faculty of Medicine (in Romania until in 1948), which gave the free practice license in both professions due to the unification of the status of physician – a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine, having the title of Physician and having a theoretical background and ability to give prescriptions but modest manual abilities (bleeding and clysters) and of the status of surgeon, more adequately Field surgeon / Feldchirurg (originally barbers) without theoretical university education, but having sound manual abilities for homeostasis, amputation, drainage of abscesses, all necessary mainly on the battle field.

The associated terms of physician and naturalist were common in the 19th century, and even earlier (for example, “Medizinisch-naturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zu Jena”). Batty Shaw pointed out: „the first of the existing societies in which medical matters have regularly been discussed and of which there have always been medical members is the Royal Society, founded in 1660; a high proportion of its early fellows were medical men but it was founded as a society for the study and interpretation of all the natural sciences”

The Society of Physicians and Naturalists and the Medical-Surgical Journal have always been present in medical life of Iasi from its beginning, interconnecting its existence with that of the Faculty of Medicine (later the University of Medicine and Pharmacy), the majority of great personalities of the Romanian medicine being members of the Board of the Society and of the Journal. In their 126 years of existence, with the efforts of generations of editors, the Society and the Journal have supported the development of the Romanian medicine, accompanying those who studied, and offering means for disseminating the results of research of the more experienced. It offered to everyone the opportunity to express their opinions and to learn, contributing to the development of the Romanian medicine.

It should be noticed that, in time, the profile of the Society and of the Journal has become exclusively medical or connected to medical fields, such as pharmacology or bioengineering.

In the post-war period, under the conditions of obstructing the free circulation of people and ideas, the Journal lessened the effects of lack of access to medical literature (especially during the hard times when subscriptions were cancelled), trying hard to satisfying the need for information by keeping its continuous publication and facilitating extensive international exchange. Thus, the Journal had maintained
its international character both through content and language (articles being published in Romanian, German, English or French, abstracts in English), and through its large distribution and journal exchange (with more than 200 other journals before the internet era).

The 180 years of existence of the Society and more than 125 years of the Journal existence are both an honor and a challenge for its contemporaries, challenging us to exist as a high - scientific guide for those who study and as a voice for the scientific community, maintaining also the ambitions which are today at least at European level.

Quick changes in the recent scientific medical field, the technological revolution in the delivering of information, the opportunity to publish on-line and the necessity of the Romanian medical research to be competitive on the European scientific market set new objectives for us:

- Setting new higher publication standards by publishing articles reviewed by competent and renown professionals;
- Avoiding the regionalization of the Journal by growing the number of collaborators (authors, Editorial Board members, peer-reviewers) from the rest of Romania and from abroad;
- Increasing the number of articles containing authentic research results;
- Abandoning the Romanian version, the entire Journal being published in English – the lingua franca of international scientific communication - in order to increase the international visibility of the Romanian medical research;
- Maintaining the use and development of the Romanian academic language by publishing on-line both versions (Romanian and English).

These ambitious objectives can be reached only with the constant support of peers (authors and readers), for the achievement of our common aims.

REFERENCES


Editor-in-Chief,
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