THE MEDICAL-SURGICAL JOURNAL IS 120 ”VOLUMES” OLD

In his celebrated work, The Structure of Scientific Revolution (1962), Samuel Thomas Kuhn challenged the idea of cumulative unidirectional scientific progress. His theory of paradigms as sets of related concepts which compete for acceptance in times of rapid scientific change or revolution might be significant even for someone interested in understanding the development of Romanian science. The case of the Medical-Surgical Journal is a resourceful field in this respect.

In 1830, on 11 January, dr. Michael Zotta and dr. Iacob Czihac started The Reading Circle (Cercul de Cetire) with its 21 members. Three years later the Circle turned into Societatea de Medici și Naturaliști (The Iasi Society of Physicians and Naturalists) (henceforth SMN), the first modern scientific society in Eastern Europe, similar to institutions of the same kind in Western Europe. From the today perspective this society (SMN) may be considered the oldest scientific institution in Eastern Europe that introduced the scientific spirit of the age (1).

SMN was compared to a diamond in the crown of Moldavia that was later set into the great crown of modern Romania as its unionist members, assembled at its headquarters, in the very heart of the city of Iași, nominated and then elected Al. I. Cuza, prince of the united modern Romania, on January 5, 1859. The nomination and election of Al. I. Cuza in Wallachia too, on January 24, 1859 was a confirmation of the right decision taken by the Moldavian unionists, members of SMN: "Nothing worthier of respect, admiration and imitation than the successful aspiration to our country’s prosperity of those great men and scholars who planted the first tree to start an oasis of science in the wasteland of thought and culture that overwhelmed our beautiful Moldavia then, because of the difficult times it passed through. The foundation of SMN in Iasi was the first spark that illuminated the dark horizon of the Romanians’ future prospects, who at the time enjoyed more freedom. From the deep and fertile furrow made by this scientific society, the Museum of Natural History, the Academy of Prince Michael Sturdza and finally the University of Iași were born "(C. I. Istrati 1887) (cit 2).

Obviously a scientific society cannot long exist without a periodical that should aim at spreading the results of its members’ research. Consequently, on the 1st of January 1844, C. Vârnav published an Adviser Journal for a Healthy and Economical life, a Periodical for the Romanian People, (Povățuitorul sănătății și economiei, foaie periodică pentru poporul românesc), similar to Franklin’s almanac, that later on became the leaflet of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists from the Principality of Moldavia. As the scientific activity enhanced, in 1887 the leaflet was turned into the Bulletin of Society of the Physicians and Naturalists (Buletinul Societății de Medici și Naturaliști) (2). From 1924 on, the title of the periodical became The Medical-Surgical Journal (Revista Medico-Chirurgicală) (henceforth MSJ). The SMN members founded the Faculty of Medicine.
(1879), "which though recently initiated and in the process of development pioneered several research projects" (2), making possible the emergence of one of the first genuine scientific publication in Romanian. The MSJ journal and the Faculty of Medicine have always lived in a happy symbiosis, symbolized by the image on the seal of SMN that is still in use: a snake and a cup, symbols of healing.

On January 1st 2016, 129 years since the publication of the first issue of MSJ was celebrated. In spite of this, because of the difficulties encountered during the two world wars, the 100th volume was issued only in 1996. It follows the MSJ appeared only 120 years out of 129. The 120 volumes are carefully preserved in the library of SMN, one of the oldest in Eastern Europe. Flipping through the 120 volumes of the Journal (MSJ) one lives a deep emotion that makes him/her aware that you are not only in front of a historical treasure in which you may identify the essential hallmarks in the development of medicine in Moldavia, via the research papers published here, but also an encounter with the outstanding personalities of the Iasi School of Medicine and of the other national medical schools (3).

Three main periods may be identified in the history of the MSJ: the first period, 1887-1923; the second period between 1924-1948; and the third: 1956 till our time which is also the most prolific period if we take into account the number of papers published in the issues of MSJ. A glance at the contents of the 120 volumes of MSJ allows us to assess that all the chief editors did their best to offer the MSJ readers highly original scientific papers. Moreover, "this journal had from the inception a European level, and its publication was possible owing to the high scientific and cultural level reached by a multicultural Iasi" (4).

The first issue of 1887 of MSJ was published in Romanian and French, the two versions being placed side by side on the same page. The editors stated in their editorial that "As science enjoys the attribute of universality, those who work in this field should meet the requirements of this characteristic. It follows that MSJ could have been far from reaching its final goal if the papers published in MSJ had not been presented to the international readers in a form that could allow them to quickly inform themselves about the content of the papers they were interested in and easily guiding them to a correct assessment of their scientific value" (3). In a period when the Romanian medical discourse was still in a process of formation and consolidation, MSJ played a major role in the development of the language of medicine in particular and the scientific discourse in Romanian in general. In this respect it is worth mentioning that the philologists SMN’s may find the Journal a rich source for their scientific research. So far, some researchers wrote about the role of phonetic adaptability of neologisms from French in the formation of the language of medicine (4).

The first issue of SMN’s journal, MSJ was published by an Editorial Board, that included dr. Aristide Peride, professor dr. Grigore Căbălcescu, Prof. Gustav Otremba, dr. Eugen Rizu, dr. Constantin Bottez, dr. Samoil Konya (although the first supporters of the idea were Anastasie Fătu and Ion Ciurea), who identified themselves with the SMN’s board of directors. From 1888 on, the journal was published with an accompanying note: "published under the direc-
tion of dr. George Bogdan", the first outstanding personality from among the members of the editorial board. In this form the journal (MSJ) was published regularly until 1900. At the time, the journal (MSJ) was well known among European scholars as prof. George Bogdan took great care to provide "a variety of printed materials that could interest both physicians and biologists". It is amazing for us, even today, that a society (SMN) made up of 49 ordinary members, in 1896, managed to support the publication of an important European journal. The proof of its popularity was the fact that 92 foreign scientific journals favoured exchanges with this outstanding scientific journal.

Between 1912 and 1916 MSJ was published exclusively in French under the title "Bulletin et Memoires de la Societe des Medecins et Naturalistes de Iassy". The issues published in French strictly adhered to the high academic standards that had always characterized the Journal (MSJ). The contents of the issues published in the first period included medical studies, case studies, medical morbidity studies, reviews of the specialized journals of Europe, book and textbook reviews etc. (5).

At the beginning of the 20th century, until Romania became one of the belligerent countries, the Journal (MSJ) was co-ordinated by an editorial team that gradually became more and more dynamic. The editorial board included famous personalities of Iași school of medicine: C. Bacaloglu, N. Hortolomei, I. Mironescu, V. Rășcanu, A. Slătineanu, Elena Pușcariu, C. Ionescu Mihăești, M. Ciucă, I. Tanăsescu, I. Enescu; the secretary of the editorial board was I. Alexa. During that period, the structure of the Journal (MSJ) was improved. The articles were grouped into: original papers, book reviews, review of reviews, aspects from the scientific life of SMN, in particular, and medical life, in general. Nobody can state that between the two world wars there were no other possibilities for publication, mainly abroad, but obviously the members of the teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine preferred to publish the results of their research in MSJ aiming at the same time to achieve everybody’s dream: to offer the medical communities a journal that could rival other European publications.

Unfortunately, in the period 1916 - 1923 the publication of the journal (MSJ) was discontinued obviously because of the difficulties the editors encountered during the Great War when Iasi became the capital of unoccupied Romania. From 1924 on the bulletin was published with the title "The Medical- Surgical Journal" (MSJ) , with a subtitle of "transition" which reminded readers of the old title Bulletin of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists. This time the journal became mainly medical in its content and aimed at concentrating Iasi medical creativity and spreading the new gains in the field at the international level.

In 1925, the MSJ was published in 6 issues. The editorial board consisted of outstanding members of Iasi school of medicine: C. Bacaloglu, N. Hortolomei, I. Mironescu, V. Rășcanu, A. Slătineanu, Elena Pușcariu, C. Ionescu Mihăești, M. Ciucă, I. Tanăsescu, I. Enescu; the secretary of the editorial board was I. Alexa. During that period, the structure of the Journal (MSJ) was improved. The articles were grouped into: original papers, book reviews, review of reviews, aspects from the scientific life of SMN, in particular, and medical life, in general. Nobody can state that between the two world wars there were no other possibilities for publication, mainly abroad, but obviously the members of the teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine preferred to publish the results of their research in MSJ aiming at the same time to achieve everybody’s dream: to offer the medical communities a journal that could rival other European publications.
from the same field. No wonder that news about the latest discoveries in physics and chemistry that could have an impact on the medical science was always present (4).

During MSJ’s second period, the most productive years were 1926-1931, as in other spheres of life, each volume had more than 600 pages. The topics of the papers published during that period reflected in fact the interests of the epoch mirrored in the main research projects. After 1940 celebrated professors from the Iasi School of Medicine were included in the editorial board. Unfortunately that glorious period in the history of SMN and MSJ came soon to an end. Among the new names of the editorial board it is worth mentioning the names of: L. Ballif, I. Nicolau, O. Franche, Gh. Tudoranu, J. Nițulescu, A. Moruzzi, Gh. Nastase, Gh Plăcițeanu, N. Balan, L. Wasseman.

Although the Journal (MSJ) encountered countless difficulties during the Second World War, the enthusiastic editors succeeded in publishing the journal regularly until 1943: "The printed materials for the last 1943 issues of MSJ were destroyed before their publication. The building of SMN was badly damaged by 11 bombs, 4 of which fully hit the building, and almost demolished it. It was no surprise to see that the medical collections gathered with so much hard work and displayed with so much care were lost for ever. In spite of this, after so much material loss, to say nothing of the spiritual and social waste, our predecessors found enough energy to gather all forces so that the publication of the MSJ could continue. Everybody dreamed of calmer and better times ... "(vol. 57, 1946). (cit 4). But the hope was futile. In 1949 MSJ ceased to be published as the new communist authorities were obsessed of the idea of having an absolute control of everything that was published. All publications were supposed to be censured and distributed from Bucharest.

The policy of absolute control of all publications that could publish subversive material lasted until 1956 when the 60th volume was published. The editorial published in that issue was signed on behalf of the editorial board by Vasile Rășcanu, member of the Romanian Academy, who did his best to demonstrate to the communist authorities the importance of resuming the publication on of this outstanding medical journal. The title of the editorial was telling: The Historical and Scientific Significance of MSJ of Iasi (pp. 1-4) (5).

The publication of the 60th volume of RMC marked the third period, also a productive one. The members of the editorial board included V. Rășcanu, member of the Romanian Academy (editor in charge), professors Ş. Brâteanu, Vl. Butureanu (deputy editor), T. Economu, reader Dr. I. Kleinstein, reader G. Popovici and E. Ungureanu (secretaries of the editorial board). Many consider that that was the gold age of RMC which culminated in the appointment professor Prof. Gregory Teodorovici as editorial secretary. Until 1966, all the published issues numbered almost 20 million pages. RMC had at the time 2,000 subscribers (3). Besides V. Rășcanu, member of the Romanian Academy, editor-in-chief between 1956–1974 to whom we owe our gratitude for the persuasive plea in favour of resuming the publication of RMC, two other personalities are worth mentioning: Gregory Teodorovici (1975 – 1992) and Valeriu Rusu (1995 – 2014) who dedicated much of their lifetime to this journal. They employed all their competence and editorial talent to the prosperity
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of MSJ. During that period the RMC was indexed in PUB MED and INDEX MEDICUS.

The scientific level of MSJ which celebrated the publication of its 120th volume was highly appreciated by similar journals and societies, among them the Society of Hygiene of the United Nations that ranked MSJ among the important medical publications, its history mirroring the ups and downs of Romanian medicine. In 2008, 1160 pages were published in the four issues. More than 1,000 medical specialists subscribed to this outstanding journal. Since 2012, MSJ has been published only in English. At the same time MSJ is currently being monitored to be included in the new database ISI Thompson.

The late editor-in-chief who was extremely devoted to MSJ was Valeriu Rusu. He was aware of the steps that had to be taken in order to overcome difficulties that MSJ encountered during the long period of transition that followed the 1989 events which more or less destroyed consciously or unconsciously some of the good achievements of the past: "first of all we need a coherent editorial board that fully accepts the responsibility and obligations encountered by this position. Such a board of editors should be motivated to get rid of the sometimes exacerbated individualism if they were ready to offer their time and intelligence to this medical journal of Iasi that fully deserved that sacrifice. We should be aware that MSJ can "coexist" with similar publication that had been published under more favourable conditions if everybody accepts the idea that the journal (MSJ) means, after all, an important tradition that has to be defended and continued. This awareness should be developed in the collaborators who should be conscious of the exigencies of a journal indexed Index Medicus, PUB MED i.e. they should realize that their scientific contribution is signalled in the largest database in the world. Consequently, the editor should exercise a more rigorous assessment of all contributions, mainly by accepting the idea of the importance of external reviewers who could enhance the responsibility of the authors. Obviously the form of presentation is extremely important. The authors should strictly observe the presentation requirements of the journal".

A summary of the important contributions of MSJ is worth attempting. MSJ: encouraged the use of the Romanian language in science; contributed to the development of the medical discourse in Romanian; played a major role in foundation of the first institutions of high learning: Prince Michael's Academy (1835), the University of Iasi (1860), the Faculty of Medicine (1879); founded the first medical library as a result of exchanges with more than 150 periodical journals and of the book donations from the members of SMN; promoted scientific research, education and the spread of medical knowledge; made known the medical school of Iasi all over the world; took part in the main national events always on the side of the progressive forces (e.g. the Union); mirrored the world scientific trends of the age; contributed to the promotion of the academic staff of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi (a truth almost forgotten today by many members of the medical school); brought together scientists of various origins, a proof of the importance of positive multiculturalism; published outstanding original papers signed by many leading scientists from all over the world; promoted the movement towards education for
health, undergraduates’ instruction and teaching staff’s training.

This celebrated scientific society (SMN) and its journal (MSJ) passed through two world wars, the communist dictatorship, a long period of painful transition after 1989. In spite of all these difficulties they survived. It is once again a proof that "the great works of humanity are achieved by people who succeed in overcoming the infirmities of an age." (G. Scripcaru) (6). From the very beginning, MSJ had a distinct European personality, that aimed at strengthening and pursuing those values that embodied the scientific spirit of the age. This year we celebrate SMN’s 186 years of existence and its long-life journal (MSJ).

This brief presentation of the key events in the development of Romanian medicine is also an encounter with the great personalities that gave life to the two institutions. All this has been done with a deep reverence given to the words on the 183 years old seal of SMN that is still made use of: *Semper Altius.*

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Note: *Those who are interested in furthering the study of the history of SMN and RMC should read Dana Baran’s monograph, a formidable endeavour to cover thoroughly the ups and downs of this long – lived journal.*