GREEK PHYSICIANS AND MEDICAL EMANCIPATION OF THE ROMANIAN LANDS

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Abstract: Constantinople, the second Rome, its orthodox Patriarchate and Academy, represented a model for the Romanian Lands. After the Byzantine Empire fall, Greek families settled in or travelling to Wallachia and Moldavia contributed to local society emancipation. In the Romanian Principalities, Phanariot rulers initiated «Early Enlightenment», strengthened Balkan “koinonia” and encouraged both national and western European values. «Homo Balcanicus» was becoming European. Italian, French and English contacts were frequent. Medicine was privileged. Nicolae Mavrocordat, the first Phanariot prince, the humanist owner of a famous library including medical books, wrote against tobacco. His wife preceded Lady Montague in variolating her children. Timoni, the Ghika princely family’s doctor, described variolation at the London Royal Society. Pylarino published in Venice the first scientific approach to variolation, a method he also presented to the British „Philosophical Transactions”, and which Romanians performed, too. While a Court physician, Pylarino encouraged medical education and hospital building in Wallachia.

Key words: Early Enlightenment, Phanariot rulers, variolation.

Greek and Roman Confluences

From ancient times, the ancestors of present day Romanians lived and forged their own cultural background mixing original ideas to strong Greek and Roman influences. This is true for Romania as a whole, but particularly for Dobrogea, Transylvania and Banat. The archaeological discoveries on the Black Sea shore, in Tomis-Constanța, Callatis-Mangalia, Histria or Herakleia Pontike are in keeping with the vestiges in Apullum-Alba Iulia, Germisara-Geoagiu Spa, Aquae-Călan and Herculaneum-Herculane Spa, Apollo, Artemis and the nympha, Asklepios and Hygieia, Telesphoros and Glykon are always there next to Bendis, Darzos or the Thracian Rider, assisting the environmental macrocosmic and the human microcosmic nature, providing health and mastering disease. Through the centuries Romanian history continued to evolve along these two coordinates of the „first and second Rome”.

Medical European Renaissance in Moldavia

In the XVI-th century, an intelligent, violent and ambitious Greek adventurer challenged Moldavia’s destiny. Jacob Basilides the Heraklid (1511–1563), a highly cultivated humanist, was born in Crete or, more probably, in Samos. Between 1548 and 1552 he studied...
medicine in Montpellier at the renowned Faculty founded there in 1220. [11] However, he soon proved fighting skills and followed a successful military career in the service of Carol Quintus. In 1561, Jacob became a short-lived Prince of Moldavia (1561-1563) and in 1562 founded a Latin School (Schola Latina) at Cotnari, not far from Iași. As a fervent adept of Reformation, the Heraklid appointed protestant teachers, the first of them chosen among those in the city of Brașov, at the boundaries between Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia. Biological concepts were probably taught in this ante letteram Academy, whereas medical lectures were seemingly envisaged by Jacob Basilides to be also given, in a future that never came for him. [15] Historians surmise that the precious library of the Cotnari School included medical books, too. [1, 15]

**Early Enlightenment in Moldavia and Wallachia**

In the XVII-th century, once again, the Romanian Lands were reborn to a new life under the conjoint impact of Greece and Rome. On the one hand, Greek intellectuals fleeing the Turkish oppression potentiated the existence of a „Byzance after Byzance”, trying to maintain and further develop Greek values and culture. On the other hand, Italians were fulfilling diplomatic, religious and scientific missions in the vicinity of the “Sublime Porte” of Constantinople. Noble Greek families settling down in or travelling to the Romanian Countries of Wallachia and Moldavia contributed to local society emancipation and cultural flourishing. Phanariot rulers marked the «Early Enlightenment» period, opened these Lands towards both Western European horizons and ethnic ideals, stimulated national awakening. [4, 5] The Greeks mediated cultural contacts mainly with Italy, England and France, encouraging medical practice and teaching to develop, as they tried to restore their identity within this diasporas of a «historic exile».

**Constantin Cantacuzino**

Constantin Cantacuzino (1650-1716), high steward of Wallachia, studied medicine in Padua, travelled to Venice, and possessed an impressive library including updated medical works. (16) Part of them ended up in Nicolae Mavrocordatos’ library. [2, 3]

He drew the first map of Wallachia with the aid of Ioan Comnen (Ioannis Comnenos), a Greek-born theologian and physician who graduated at the same famous University of Padua. [2, 3] It was Hrysant Notara (Chrysanthos Nottaras), patriarch of Jerusalem, who corrected and edited it in Padua in 1700. Born at Trikkala in Peloponnese, Notara studied medicine in Padua, spent many years in Wallachia and contributed to the flourishing of the Princely Academy in Bucharest and of its library. He probably promoted medical studies there.

**Nicolae Mavrocordat**

Nicolae Mavrocordat (Nicolaos Mavrocordatos, 1680-1730) of Chios, the first Phanariot prince, was the humanist owner of “the richest library in Oriental Europe” with medical treatises. He wrote a satire against tobacco “A Word against Nicotine” - and about life and death. (4,5,14) Prince of both Moldavia (1709-1710; 1711–1715) and Wallachia (1715–
1716; 1719–1730), this “authentic citizen of the cosmopolitan «republic of letters»”, also interested, for instance, in the writings of Hobbes and Locke, introduced, reorganized and stimulated education and schools’ activity.

He used to practice medicine within his family and medically assisted his close friends. Among them Hrisant Notara was a remarkable personality. He suffered from “reumatika” and Mavrocordatos would have treated him from 1715 to 1731, as mentioned by chronicler Nicolae Costin. In 1714, Notara donated books to the Academy of Iaşi and helped its reorganization.

Alexander Mavrocordatos, the Exaporite

Alexander Mavrocordatos (Alexandru Mavrocordat, 1641-1709), father to Prince Nicolaos Mavrocordatos, had married Princess Sultana, descending from the princely family of Alexandru Ilieş, who ruled over Wallachia (1616-1618; 1627-1629) and Moldavia (1620-1622; 1631-1633). Physician, philosopher and physiologist, Alexandros Mavrocordatos studied in Padua and Bologna, where he graduated in medicine.

He was professor at the Constantinopolitan Academy of the Orthodox Patriarchate and, in 1644, he wrote a book on blood flow entitled “The Pneumatic Instrument of Blood Circulation” which disseminated information about Harvey’s discovery in this part of the world. Even though not directly involved in the history of Romanian medicine, Mavrocordatos’ destiny was undoubtedly a representative example of “Balkan koinonia” which also included the Romanian Lands.

Pulcheria, a “Lady Montagu” of Moldavia

On February 19th, 1713, Nicolae Mavrocordatos’ second wife, Pulcheria Tzoukis (?-1716), variolated her two healthy children in Constantinople, after another one already got small-pox.

As it comes out from a letter addressed to Hrisant Nottara, patriarch of Jerusalem, she could have done this herself since she had medical knowledge and skills. Pulcheria anticipated by several years the similar initiative of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), who only in 1718 had her son inoculated in Constantinople, probably by Dr. Timoni, and her daughter in 1721, in London.

Emanuel Timonis

Emanuel Timonis (Emmanouel Timonis,1669-1720) of Chios described variolation in Royal Society’s Philosophical Transactions, in 1714-1716, no. 29, pg. 72-82, in an article titled “An account, or history, of the procuring of the smallpox by incision or inoculation, as it has for some time been practiced at Constantinople, being the Extract of a Letter from Emanuel Timonius, Oxon. & Patav. M.D.SR.S. dated at Constantinople,
December, 1713. Communicated to the Royal Society by John Woodward, M.D. Profes. Md. Gresh. and S.R.S". [6] Timonis was Ghika princely family’s doctor, in Moldavia (1680-1700). [8] He was even accused of involvement in Grigore I Ghica’s death in 1678 and plotting with the rival Cantacuzino family. In Padua, Timoni studied medicine, at the reputed Faculty whose pro-rector he became in 1691. [6] In 1703 he was doctor of the Oxford University and member of the Royal Society. In 1713, Timoni published in Constantinople “Historia variolarum quae per incisionem excitantur”, whereas, in 1721, in Leiden, appeared his “Tractatus de nova variolas per transmutationem excitanti methodo”. Better known than Pylarino, his contribution to immunology and vaccinology has been more frequently mentioned. [6]

**Jacob Pylarino**

Doctor Jacob Pylarino (Jakovos Pylarinos/ Giacomo Pilarino, 1659-1718) of Lixouri, Kefallonia, graduated in Padua. He learned in 1701 about “transplantation”, as a popular means to prevent smallpox, from a woman in Thessaly who inoculated 40000 people.

After having performed this technique, Pylarino published in Venice, in 1715, the first approach to variolation, his paramount opus "Nova et tuta variolas excitandi per transolationem methodus, nuper inventa et in usum tracta qua rite per acta immunia in posterum praeservatur ab hujus modi contagio corpora: Per Jacobum Pylarinum, Venetum M.D. et Peripublicae Venetae apud Smyrnenses Nuper Consulem".

He also presented variolation in the British „Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society”, in 1714-1716, no. 29, pg. 393-399 as "Nova et tuta variolas excitandi per transolationem methodus, nuper inventa et in usum tracta: Per Jacobum Pylarinum, Venetum M.D. et Peripublicae Venetae apud Smyrnenses Nuper Consulem". [12] As a court physician, he travelled a lot to Germany and Russia, where he was the personal doctor of Tsar Peter the Great, Serbia and Moldo-Vlachia. [2, 6] In 1684 indeed, Pylarino came to Wallachia, as doctor to Prince Şerban Cantacuzino and remained in Bucharest until 1687. Between 1694 and 1708, when appointed Venetian councilor in Smirna, Pylarino was again in Wallachia, as physician to the Ruling Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. [3, 8] He encouraged medical lectures to be given at the “Saint Sava” Princely Academy in Bucharest, where teachers were usually Greek physicians and theologians. [2, 3] Among them: Markou Porphyrpoulou, Ioan Comnen, Nicolaos Kerameos (Nicolaos Kerameus). Remarkably, young Greeks living in Wallachia could get scholarships from Prince Brâncoveanu and study...
medicine abroad, as did Giorgos Hypomenas of Trabzon, who after graduating in Padua, became a practitioner in Bucharest. [3] Pylarino supported the achievement of the “Colțea” Hospital in Bucharest, in 1704, the first great hospital in the Romanian Lands.

Built at the expense of High Stewart Mihail Cantacuzino who studied humanist disciplines in Padua, the institution reproduced the model of the “San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti” («Saint Lazarus of the Beggars») Hospital in Venice.

Pylarino, who in his youth was a physician there, yielded the plan of the Venetian establishment. [3, 8]

**Variolation from Timoni and Pylarino to Jenner**

In 1722, convinced of the utility of inoculation or engrafting, Lady Montagu intervened to the College of Physicians of London for determining acceptation of variolation for anti-smallpox protection. In 1796, Timoni’s and Pylarino’s method of vaccination, i.e. variolation, of 1713, reemerged. It was modified by Dr. Edward Jenner, who took the vaccination liquid not from smallpox patients, as Timoni and Pylarino, but from cowpox vesicles. [3] Jenner’s method gave better results, also because it caused a decreased mortality. Romanian popular medicine did the same.

**Variolation in Romanian Popular Medicine**

Alexander the Good, Prince of Moldavia (1400-1432), mentioned in his Code of Laws («Pravila») of 1400 the «engrafting» technique of variolation. Doctor Andreas Wolf, who lived in Moldavia from 1780 to 1797, related that the country had been severely affected by smallpox for three-four years and variolation officially introduced since 1780. In 1803, vaccination was performed by dr. Hesse and dr. Fröhlich, without any fee, and was recommended by the Princely Court.

**Griselini**

Francesco Griselini (1717-1784), an Italian biologist and painter, agrarian economist and journalist illustrating the Venetian Enlightenment, visited Banat. It happened between 1774 and 1777, when both Venice and Banat were under Austrian authority.
In 1780, he published “Geschichte des Temeswarer Bannats” («History of Temesvarer Banat», Vienna, 1780). He described variolation, which only Romanians performed in various ways: pustular smallpox fluid from sick persons was inoculated to healthy children after scarifying or rubbing their arm skin; pustular fluid was directly placed on the arm skin previously strongly rubbed with a rugged cloth until it became inflamed or a superficial incision of the arm skin was performed into which smallpox pustular fluid was placed. [7] Griselini communicated his impressions about Banat in Letters addressed to outstanding personalities of his time, including Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799). As in the case of Spallanzani, Griselini benefitted from the patronage of Habsburg officials during his travel through Banat and Wallachia.

**Franz Joseph Sulzer**

In 1781-1782, Franz Joseph Sulzer published his “Geschichte der Transalpinischen Daciens” («History of Transalpinian Dacians») where he reported variolation of young ladies on the forehead or wrist, practiced by Romanian girls of Transylvania”to preserve their beauty”. [3, 10]

**Nyulas Ferenc**

In 1802, the Hungarian Physician Nyulas Ferenc wrote about “Kolozsvári tehénhimlő” («Vaccination in Cluj»). He reported that peasants from Someș and Făgărâș bathed their children in the milk of cows with cowpox, after washing with it the udder having cowpox vesicles. Other times, cowpox pustules were pricked with a fine needle which was then passed through the child’s ear lobe. In Ceanul Mare and Cicud, the Valach priests inoculated smallpox according a “mysterious” method known only by them. [3, 10]

**Famous Followers in Modern Times**

**Ioan Cantacuzino**

The particular «genetic design» of this continuous Greek-Romanian cohabitation generated towering medical specialists that continued to be involved in immunology and vaccinology.

Ioan Cantacuzino (1868-1934) came from a mixed Greek-Romanian family, descending from its first «Enlightened» representatives of the XVII-th century, already mentioned: Constantin, Mihail and Șerban. Ioan Cantacuzino studied in Paris, with Ilya Mechnikov (Nobel Prize, 1908).

A highly reputed microbiologist, he founded, in 1901, a laboratory of experimental medicine and in 1921, established the Institute for Sera and Vaccines in Bucharest, bearing now his name.

He distinguished himself during the II-nd Balkan War, when «the great Romanian experience» of 1912-1913 revealed the efficiency of his anticholeric mass vaccination performed in epidemic foci. [3]
The «contact immunity» was thus definitely proved. During World War I, Cantacuzino successfully fought epidemics by antityphic-paratyphic, anti-diphtheric and anticholeric vaccination. He efficiently set up antituberculosis and antimalaria strategies in Romania. Due to him, a close friend to Calmette, his country was the second one, after France, to introduce Calmette-Guérin bacillus-based antituberculosis vaccination.

At the Faculty of Sciences in Iaşi, Cantacuzino was professor of Animal Morphology (1894-1896).

In 1917, during World War I, he founded in Iaşi, along with Russian and French physicians, "The Medico-Surgical Society of the Russian-Romania Front".

At the end of the war, in 1920, Cantacuzino represented Romania in Paris at the peace treaty, a document he signed with Titulescu on behalf of their country.

**Constantin Levaditi**

Born at Galaţi as the son of a Romanian mother and a Macedo-Romanian (Vlach) father from the Pindos Mountains, Constantin Levaditi (1874-1953) studied medicine in Bucharest and was trained in Victor Babeş' school for five years, as an eminent research assistant. He then left for Paris, were he had a brilliant career at the „Pasteur” Institute. [9, 13]

Levaditi was nominated several times to the Nobel Prize for Medicine between 1930-1934.

Indirectly, he fathered microbiology in Romania, too, through his disciple, professor Ştefan S. Nicolau (1896-1967). [3]

They first met in 1921 in Cluj, where Levaditi was appointed professor and Nicolau graduated. Levaditi put a mark on Nicolau, who, in 1942, inaugurated in Bucharest the first Chair of Inframicrobiology in the world.

Nicolau contributed to the characterization of the Borna virus and virus replication in tumours.

In 1939, when he returned to Romania, Nicolau was initially appointed professor of Bacteriology at Iaşi, where he remained only for a short lapse of time.

**Homo Balcanicus**

«Balkan countries» result to be more than simply a geographical concept. This south-eastern European region shared common historical circumstances and challenges. Balkan peoples developed related features and adopted comparable behavioural patterns. At the crossroads of Orient and Occident, of three great
monotheistic religions - christianity, judaism and islam -, of three great empires - Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian, of three great ideologies - democracy, dictatorship, anarchy, and three great political systems - capitalism, communism and liberalism, the Balkan community seemed to display intertwined complementary faces. Paradoxically, the «powder barrel» of Europe enabled a transcultural melting pot to exist, living this diversity, revealing identities, transforming mentalities between health and disease, life and death. Medicine in the Romanian Lands evolved along both Western European and Balkan coordinates and its original contribution to the progress of science still awaits to be acknowledged and officially integrated to the universal history of the healing art. The peculiarities of Balkan medicine are in keeping with both homo balcanicus and homo europaeus and express the same aspirations of homo universalis.

References