

THE RECOGNITION OF GHEORGHE BILAȘCU'S CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE ROMANIAN HISTORY OF DENTISTRY

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Abstract

Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Bilașcu (1863-1926) was one of the founders of the Romanian Faculty of Medicine in Cluj. At this Faculty, in 1919/1920 he created the department and the clinic of dentistry. These two achievements were accomplished for the first time in Romania. Normally, his contribution should have been appreciated both during his life and after his death. Also, his name would be expected to be present in the large majority of Romanian medico-historians dictionaries, treatises, papers etc. Unfortunately, his posthumous appreciation was not as Bilașcu would have deserved.

In our paper we present the recognition of Gh. Bilașcu's contributions in the Romanian history of dentistry between 1926-2013. We divided this period into three intervals: from 1926 to 1948, the communist era, and after the anticommunist revolution (1990-present). In the first interval the achievements of Bilașcu in the field of dentistry were very much appreciated and they were mentioned in a correct way in different medico-historical sources of information. During the communist era the name of Bilașcu was omitted in some dictionaries, courses etc. After 1990, the important role of Bilașcu in Romanian dentistry was put into its important place in the majority of Romanian history of medicine sources of information.

Keywords: Gheorghe Bilașcu, Department of Dentistry in Cluj, recognition of the priority.

Professor Gheorghe Bilașcu (1863-1926) was one of the most significant Romanian physicians of the XXth century. He was one of the founders of the Romanian Faculty of Medicine in Cluj. In 1919/1920 he created the department and the clinic of dentistry at this Faculty. These achievements were a first in Romania. Even having such an important contribution, the evolution of the perception and understanding of his role in Romanian dentistry was differently perceived in different periods of the XXth century.

Our paper – elaborated to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Bilașcu – presents different ways in which his personality and his career were perceived and mentioned in the Romanian History of Medicine from 1926 until 2013. Being a large amount of data, we selected only some important ones for this article.

The first period of the posthumous recognition of Bilașcu's importance for the Romanian dentistry started

in 1926, immediately after his death. At this moment the young medico-historian Valeriu Bologa (1892-1971) – who afterwards became the first Romanian professor of the History of Medicine – pointed out in his allocution at Bilașcu's funerals that he “was the first professor of dentistry in Romanian lands”. Bologa predicted that “when a scientific history of the medical art will be written in Romania, the chapter «Romanian learning of dentistry» will begin with Gheorghe Bilașcu's name” [1].

Few months after Bilașcu death, the “Dental Review” („Revista Stomatologică”), founded by Gh. Bilașcu himself, published in no. 1/1927 the article entitled “With the same love of work” („Cu aceeași dragoste de muncă”). Because the author's name was not mentioned, we can suppose that his name was either Ioan Aleman (1891-1948) or Zoltan Vass (1898-1970). At that time both of them were the editors of this publication. After Bilașcu's death, I. Aleman became director of the Cluj Dental Clinic. The following fragment of this article is very significant: “the unexpected loss of the dear and unforgettable Prof. Dr. Bilașcu left a gap for all of us and our attentions and energies are focused for fulfilling it. Only now, being partially settled after the

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very intense pain in which we all participated, at the death of the regretful Prof. Bilaşco, we consider a duty for all of us, as a respect for Prof. Bilaşco's memory, to continue his mind-set with fidelity and truth, for the dignity and progress of our society" [2]. It is necessary to mention that the form of name "Bilasco" was also used during his life.

Five years after the death of Bilaşcu, in the dictionary entitled "Universal Historical and Geographical Dictionary" („Dicţionarul istoric și geografic universal") Gheorghe Adamescu mentioned only briefly Bilaşcu's contribution to Romanian medicine. Even brief, this mention has two errors. The first error is Bilaşcu's surname. Adamescu mentioned „George" instead of Gheorghe. The second mistake is the year in which Bilaşcu came to the Cluj University, to be appointed professor of dentistry. Adamescu wrote 1918 instead of 1919 [3]. Reading only this final element and having no other information about Bilaşcu, there is the risk to come to a wrong conclusion: there existed in Cluj a dentistry department before Bilaşcu's arrival, so he only developed its activity.

In 1938, more than ten years after Bilaşcu's death, the second volume of the "Romanian Encyclopedia" („Enciclopedia României") was published, written under the guidance of: the philosopher and sociologist Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955), the engineer and collector Constantin Orghidan (1874-1944), the philosopher and economist Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952) and Virgiliu Leonte. This volume presented the monographs of Romanian districts. In the chapter presenting Cluj district, the Dentistry Clinic is not mentioned. This omission can be explained by saying that the authors have not made a complete enumeration of the clinics from Cluj. The syntagm used was „Cluj university clinics". It is strange that some institutions dependent on the „King Ferdinand I" University, such as: the Institute of Anatomy, the Institute of Pathology etc. are referred, although they have not been first set up in Romania.

Two years later, in 1940, the historian, writer and publisher Lucian Predescu (1907-1983) edited the Encyclopedia „Cugetarea", having the subtitle „Romanian material, People and Achievements" (Enciclopedia „Cugetarea", „Material românesc. Oameni și înfăptuiri"). L. Predescu pointed out very correctly Bilaşcu's contribution to Romanian dentistry. Thus, Predescu specified that Bilaşcu „had the merit to organize the first Romanian dentistry education and to fight for clarification of the situation of dental physicians versus dental technicians". Predescu mentioned that Bilaşcu created and directed the Association of Dental Physicians from Romania and also that he founded the "Dental Review" in 1921 [4]. Moreover, Predescu noted that Bilaşcu's ancestors were Romanian peasants and also that he had a political career, being a senator.

A new period in Bilaşcu's posterity took place during the communist regime. Only in some medico-historians' articles and monographs was his prestigious carrier

analyzed correctly. In different volumes his contribution is only mentioned in passing. But, unfortunately, Bilaşcu's name is absent from different published history of medicine courses, monographs and history of science dictionaries. It is difficult to understand this situation. It should be normal to follow the example of the most important medico-historian of that time – Valeriu Bologna –, who pointed out very clearly and with arguments that Bilaşcu had been the founder of the first department of dentistry in Romania.

Regarding the most important Romanian dictionary of the sixties, entitled „Romanian Encyclopedic Dictionary" („Dicţionarul Enciclopedic Român") – in 4 volumes edited between 1962 and 1968, in the first volume, published in 1962, Bilaşcu's name is omitted. It is necessary to mention that this dictionary was elaborated by members of the Academy of the Popular Republic of Romania and of the Political Publishing House, under the coordination of the philosopher Anastasie Joja (1904-1972). In this circumstance, knowing that the Political Publishing House established the ideological directions of different projects, the absence of Bilaşcu is part of the political context in that time [5].

Another example of absence of Bilaşcu's name is the „ABC of Health – A Popular Medical Encyclopaedia" („ABC-ul Sănătăţii – Enciclopedie medicală populară"). It was published in 1963, editor being the urologist Prof. Dr. Theodor Burghel (1905-1977) – at that time rector of the Bucharest Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy. In the preface of this short encyclopaedia, Burghel recognised the fact that „being the first work of this type which appears in Romanian language, surely some errors and omissions will be found". In this situation Burghel hoped "that the reader will consider them [the errors and omissions] in a positively critical way, mentioning the observations, which will be considered for the future editions" [6]. Even if Bilaşcu was not a follower of the communist ideology (an aspect very important during the period in which this encyclopaedia was edited), it should have been normal to mention his name, as a recognition of his progressive contribution made in Romanian medicine. If some envious colleagues of Bilaşcu were still alive in the '60's, their attitude was not a criterion for disregarding Bilaşcu nearly 40 years after his death.

One of the rare books edited during the communist period of our country, in which the contribution of Bilaşcu in Romanian dentistry was put into evidence was entitled "The Medical and Pharmaceutical Education in Bucharest: From the beginning to the present" („Învăţământul Medical și Farmaceutic din Bucureşti. De la începuturi până în prezent"). The principal editor was the hygienist Prof. Dr. Theodor Ilea (1911-1971), in collaboration with three medico-historians: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iuliu Ghelerter (1903-1967), Dr. Benone Duţescu (n. 1926) and Constantin I. Bercuş (1908-1985). This book was published in 1963. The

presence of Bilaşcu in this book shows that his didactic contribution in Romanian dentistry was a landmark, appreciated by different dentists from Bucharest. The chapter „Dental Learning” was written by the maxillo-facial surgeon Prof. Dr. Valerian Popescu (1912-?), coauthors being I. Niculescu and C. I. Bercuş. They pointed out the fact that „the first dental learning in our country was founded after the First World War, in 1919, in Cluj, where we find a dental clinic, directed by Prof. George Bilaşcu”. Unfortunately, Bilaşcu’s surname is written incorrectly. Continuing the same quotation, it is significant to mention that “from the very beginning, Prof. Bilaşcu associated himself with the movement, led until that period by dr. Niculescu, for raising the quality of dentistry, for founding dental education in the other [medical] schools in [our] country and for the establishment of the practice of dentistry” [7].

At the beginning of the ’70’s, in our country few important volumes regarding the history of higher education and the medical tradition were edited.

An interesting book in the same field was the compendium entitled “History of Learning in Romania” („Istoria învăţământului din România”). It was written by a group of authors, the first editor being the historian Constantin C. Giurescu (1901-1977). It was published in 1971. The chapter „Medical Learning” („Învăţământul medical”) was elaborated by the medico-historian Nicolae Vătămanu (1897-1977). He mentioned the name of Gh. Bilaşcu, in a simple enumeration of all the professors of the „new Faculty of Medicine in Cluj”. This enumeration, without pointing out the most prestigious contributions of each professor, is absolutely insufficient, because not all professors founded a new department, or a new clinic as Bilaşcu did.

A significant presentation of Bilaşcu’s achievements in Romanian dentistry was done in the first treatise of “Romanian History of Medicine” („Istoria Medicinii Româneşti”). It was edited by Valeriu Bologa, Gheorghe Brătescu (n. 1922), Benone Duţescu (n. 1926) and Ştefan Milcu (1903-1997) and was published in 1972. This presentation was written by B. Duţescu and Nicolae Marcu (n. 1938) and is part of the chapter about medicine during the interwar period. The authors pointed out that Bilaşcu participated at the first international congress of dentistry, which took place in Paris, in 1889. About the Dentistry Clinic of the Cluj Faculty of Medicine, the authors mentioned that dentistry „was included in the curricula in a compulsory way from the beginning [of the existence of this Faculty] and thus played an important role for the development of the dental education” [8]. Unfortunately, in this presentation Bilaşcu’s role as founder of the first department of dentistry in Romania is not emphasized.

In 1980, Benone Duţescu and Nicolae Marcu re-enumerated some interesting aspects about Bilaşcu’s career. These data are written in the chapter „Medical sciences

during the interwar period” (“Ştiinţele medicale în perioada interbelică”). It was published in the volume “Medicine”, which is part of the cycle entitled „History of Sciences in Romania” („Istoria Ştiinţelor în România”). This project was directed by the Romanian Committee for the History and Philosophy of Science. Editors of this volume were Prof. Dr. Ştefan M. Milcu and Prof. Dr. Benone Duţescu. Thus Duţescu and Marcu mentioned that: „being interested in the organizational problems of the dental education, he [Bilaşcu] paid a large attention to the scientific foundation of the dental practice. Thus, in 1922 he published the study «Banal and haemophilic haemorrhages and their treatment» («Hemoragii banale și hemofilice și tratamentul lor»), in which he brought an original contribution by introducing rectified turpentin oil as local haemostatic. This study was followed by the paper «Difficult eruption of the wisdom tooth» («Erupții dificile ale molarului de minte»), which presents the realisation and the application of Bilaşcu’s elevator for this kind of eruptions” [9]. Unfortunately, in this presentation it is not specified that Bilaşcu founded the department of dentistry in Cluj.

Another dictionary in which Bilaşcu’s name is omitted is the “Dictionary of Medicine and Pharmacy” („Dicţionarul cronologic de medicină și farmacie”), edited by Gheorghe Brătescu and published in 1975.

In the book entitled “The Romanian Learning System in Dates” („Învăţământul românesc în date”), written by Mihai Bordeianu and Petru Vladcovski and published in 1979, the name of Prof. Bilaşcu was not mentioned.

Regarding the various aspects of Bilaşcu’s career, we find interesting data in the volume entitled “From the past of ENT in Romania” („Din trecutul O.R.L. în România”), written by Pantelimon Miloşescu and Constantin I. Bercuş and edited in 1979. In the chapter “ENT Learning at the Cluj-Napoca Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute” („Învăţământul de ORL la I.M.F. Cluj-Napoca”) it is pointed out the fact that between 1920 and 1924 the ENT Clinic in Cluj had no director. Thus Professor Gh. Bilaşcu was a substitute for this position. During this period the material resources of the ENT Clinic were developed. The Clinic received the space for a patients’ ward in the same building with the Dentistry Clinic [10]. This is an example of the ethical orientation of Prof. Bilaşcu, who was interested in creating good conditions for all hospitalized patients, not only for the patients of the Dentistry department.

It’s strange to observe that Bilaşcu’s name is absent from two textbooks of the history of medicine written by two well-known pupils of Prof. Dr. Valeriu Bologa: Prof. Dr. Jozsef Spielmann (1917-1986) and Prof. Dr. Constantin Romanescu (n. 1926). Both books were edited in the same year, in 1981. This situation can be partially explained by the intention of Romanescu and Spielmann not to enumerate too many names of important physicians of the XXth century.

Forgetting the important role played by Bilaşcu into

the founding of Romanian dentistry, some articles about the history of this domain have come to incorrect conclusions. An example is the study entitled “Concerns regarding the founding and the development of dentistry learning in Jassy” („Preocupări privind înființarea și dezvoltarea învățământului stomatologic ieșean”), written by: Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Timoșca (1922-2011), Prof. Dr. Mihai Rusu, Prof. Dr. Mirela Andrei and Conf. Dr. Angela Haimovici, from the Jassy Dentistry Faculty. This study was part of the first volume dedicated to the 100 anniversary of the Jassy Medical Faculty. The volume was coordinated by Gheorghe Crețeanu and co. and was edited in 1979. Omitting the name of Bilașcu, these authors elaborated a wrong conclusion about the evolution of the dentistry until 1947: „until after the Second World War in our country dentistry was regarded as a minor specialty, being frequently mixed with dental practice and odontology, which determined an unsuitable development and an insufficient assistance in stomatology in the whole country” [11]. The conclusion was changed in time and Prof. Timoșca mentioned in 2004, in an interview with the author of this article, that Bilașcu had a significant contribution in founding dentistry in Romania.

Bilașcu’s memory was cultivated at Cluj over decades. In 1980, in the first volume of the cycle entitled „Remarkable Figures of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj” („Figuri reprezentative ale Medicinii și Farmaciei Clujene”) – initiated by Prof. Dr. Ioan Simiti (1928-1997), who was vice-rector of the Cluj-Napoca Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy – there is a complex presentation of Bilașcu’s career, elaborated by Prof. Dr. Hugo Rațiu (1927-2004). The only problem concerning this volume is that it was multiplied into a very limited number, thus it is not present in many Romanian libraries.

The third period in Bilașcu’s posterity started in 1990. Though it was at the beginning of a democratic period in our country, it is strange that in some Romanian dictionaries his name is not present. An example is „The Encyclopaedia of Great Personalities from Romanian History, Science and Culture in the course of time” („Enciclopedia marilor personalități din istoria, știința și cultura românească de-a lungul timpului”), edited by Ion Văduva-Poenaru. In its first volume, published in 1999, Bilașcu is not mentioned. It is possible that because of insufficient funding, the number of personalities in this volume was limited.

Another dictionary in which Bilașcu’s name is omitted is the “Dentistry Dictionary” („Dicționar de Stomatologie”) having as subtitle “Terms, symptoms and syndromes” („Termeni, simptome și sindroame”). It was published in 2000 by Ioan Lixandru. It would have been normal to find in this volume some data about „Bilașcu’s elevator”. It is possible that I. Lixandru aimed at including in this book only medical terms from the actual terminology. It would be desirable that in the next edition of this

book, some terms of the history of dentistry be added, for example from the XXth century.

However, in the many Romanian medico-historical texts published after 1990 the name of Bilașcu is present. A significant example is the volume entitled “Remembrances and Reflections” („Amintiri și reflexiuni”), written by Prof. Dr. Iuliu Moldovan (1882-1966) – the founder of the Cluj School of Hygiene and Social Hygiene – and published in 1996. Moldovan mentioned that Gheorghe Bilașcu was an exception in the group of founders of the Romanian Faculty of Medicine in Cluj, being the older professor. The author underlined the fact that Bilașcu was not an exception from the point of view of „energy and vigor” [12]. Moldovan pointed out that Bilașcu left in Budapest a splendid personal situation and came to Cluj, for helping the establishment of Romanian medical learning.

Professor Gh. Bilașcu has an interesting presentation in the volume entitled “The School of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj. Founders of its Prestige” („Școala Clujeană de Medicină și Farmacie. Ctitorii faimei”). The book was published in 1999, at the anniversary of 80 years since the Romanian Faculty of Medicine from Cluj was founded. The authors of this book are: Oliviu Pascu, Honorius Popescu and Cristian Bârsu.

In the dictionary “People from Cluj during the 20th century” („Clujeni ai secolului 20”), there is an article about Bilașcu, but omitting the fact that he founded in Cluj the department of dentistry. This book was published in 2000, without mentioning the name of its editor.

A well-done presentation of Bilașcu’s career is written in the first volume, entitled “The Precursors, the Founders” („Precursorii, întemeietorii”) of the cycle entitled “The Cluj Medical School” („Școala Medicală Clujeană”). The author is Florea Marin and this volume was published in 2000.

Bilașcu’s contribution in Romanian dentistry is also mentioned in Cristina Ionescu’s book entitled “History of Medicine” („Istoria Medicinii”). She pointed out that Bilașcu was a precursor in implantology [13].

A complex presentation of Bilașcu’s contribution in the dentistry of our country is written in the “Romanian Medical Encyclopaedia” („Enciclopedia Medicală Românească. Thus, in the section entitled “Dental Sciences” („Științe Stomatologice”) it is evidenced that „Prof. Bilașcu set the bases of the dentistry learning in Romania, founding in Cluj the first department of this kind for the students of the Faculty of Medicine [in Cluj]. At the beginning the discipline became compulsory for the students in the IV-th year, [...] having two semesters and an exam at the end of the year. In the following years the syllabus elaborated by Prof. Bilașcu was taken [as a model] at the faculties of medicine in Bucharest and in Jassy, [because] it had a high scientific level [...]. In 1923 [Bilașcu] founded in Cluj the first institute for specialization in dentistry, which began to

be attended by more and more graduates of the Faculty of Medicine. [...] [for this Institute] he elaborated a syllabus, which has been very modern at this time" [14].

For marking a century and a half since Gheorghe Bilașcu was born, in 2013 different articles were elaborated. We will enumerate only some examples. In no. 2/2013 of the "Informative Bulletin of the Dentistry Physicians" („Buletinul informativ al Medicilor Dentiști"), edited by Prof. Dr. Radu Septimiu Câmpian, Prof. Dr. Mihaela Băciuț, Prof. Dr. Liviu Mureșanu & Co. the following articles were published: Prof. Dr. Alexandru Rotaru – "Professor Doctor Gheorghe Bilașcu 1863-1926. The Founder of Dentistry Learning in Romania" („Profesor Doctor Gheorghe Bilașcu 1863-1926. Fondatorul Învățământului Stomatologic din România"), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cristian Bârsu – "The Founder of Dentistry Learning in Romania – Gheorghe Bilașcu – evoked by the First Romanian Professor of History of Medicine – Valeriu Bologa" („Întemeietorul învățământului de medicină dentară din România – Gheorghe Bilașcu – evocat de primul profesor român de istoria medicinei – Valeriu Bologa"), Ioan Petrovai – "Professor Doctor Gheorghe Bilașcu – Civic and Spiritual Model Worthy of Being Followed" („Profesor universitar doctor Gheorghe Bilașcu – model civic și spiritual demn de urmat"), Prof. Dr. Liviu Mureșanu – "The Beginning of Dentistry in Romania" („Începuturile stomatologiei în România"). The same review contains the ode entitled "Ode for Calling on the Sacrifice's Way to «The Golden Physician» Gheorghe Bilașcu" („Odă de chemare pe drumul jerfei «Doctorului de aur» Gheorghe Bilașcu"). It was written by Ioan de Petrova. This is the penname of Ioan Petrovai. In the review "Maramureșul Medical", published in March 2013, Felix Marian wrote the article "150 years since the birth of Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Bilașcu, the Founder of the Romanian Dental Learning" („150 de ani de la nașterea Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Bilașcu, fondatorul învățământului stomatologic românesc").

We do hope that the name of Gh. Bilașcu and his very important contribution to Romanian dentistry will be better known in the future, first of all in our country. Also, it will be necessary to promote Gheorghe Bilașcu achievements into the international context of history of dentistry.

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