

TESTIMONIALS ABOUT THE LIFE OF PROF. ION MANTA (1900-1979)  
A VICTIM OF THE COMMUNIST REGIM

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*Summary*

*Ion Manta was the first Romanian professor and director of the Department of Biochemistry in the Cluj Faculty of Medicine and one of the most endowed biochemists in Romania. He was considered one of the founders of didactic medical biochemistry in our country. His scientific activity, his teaching talent, capacity of work, his character and personal charm were much appreciated by his colleagues, by different scientists and students.*

*Our paper presents some important testimonials about the life and achievements of Ion Manta.*

*The paper contains also some testimonials which put into evidence the fact that at the beginning of the '50 he was an innocent victim of the communist regime.*

**Keywords:** Ion Manta, biochemistry, appreciations for Manta's prestige, victim of the communist regime.

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One of the most prestigious professors of the second generation of mentors of the Cluj School of Medicine and Pharmacy was Ion Manta (1900-1979). A complex personality, author of over 200 papers, of which nearly 160 published and 8 books and treatises, Manta was an example to his contemporaries. He was the successor of the French professor Pierre Thomas (1876-1963), as chief of the Biological Chemistry Department of the Romanian Faculty of Medicine from Cluj. In 1922 Thomas founded this Department and directed it between 1922 and 1936. Ion Manta was its director in two different periods. The first period was from 1936 until 1949 and then, for the second time, between 1954 and 1969.

An aspect which is not sufficient investigate in his biography is the fact that during the beginning of the communist regime in our country he was one of the first victims of this regime. Almost three years (1949-1951) he was imprisoned, without any real motivation. After having been released from prison, though he wished to continue his didactic activity, the communist authorities have prevented him to do it.

In 1952 the dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Cluj Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy – Prof. Dr. Erwin Popper (1906-1974) – had the courage to accept Manta as professor in this Faculty of Pharmacy. Only in the following year, in 1953 he was transferred to the Faculty of Medicine (where he activated before). During this period and also in the following years, the authorities from Cluj asked some colleagues of Manta for references about him. Many of them were from the Faculty of Medicine from Cluj, other were

from Iași, București and Timișoara universities. They had to describe various aspects of Manta's life and carrier. Most of these testimonials became important sources for a correct understanding of his ethical conception. In this paper we present only some aspects mentioned in a part of significant testimonials about Manta.

An interesting testimonial deals with his youth. He graduated chemistry in 1922, at the Faculty of Sciences in Iași. Being student one of his colleagues was Marie Sibi (1896-1991). Later she became professor of biochemistry at the Faculty of Medicine from the same city. In the characterization written in 1963, Marie Sibi mentioned that Manta "was considered by everyone as a very good student, being very diligent. He had a special affinity for chemistry, since he was a young pupil, when he assisted his chemistry teacher at school [...]. In fact his graduation marks [...] were among the highest. That was the well deserved result of his diligence and seriousness in learning, Manta being strictly involved in the scientific activity" [1]. Indeed, his passion for chemistry determined him to participate at postgraduate studies at the University of Nancy, between 1925 and 1927.

Manta's career reached a very important moment in 1929, when he became senior lecturer at the Pharmacological Institute of the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj. Its director was Prof. Dr. Gheorghe P. Pamfil (1883-1965), who had founded it in 1920. In 1933 Manta graduated the pharmaceutical courses at the same Faculty. In 1934 the Pharmaceutical Section of the Cluj Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy ceased its activity, because the pharmaceutical learning was concentrated at the București Faculty of Pharmacy. But Manta did not want to continue his didactic career in București. For this reason he was transferred, in the same year, to the Department of Biological Chemistry in the Faculty of Medicine from Cluj.

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The chief of this Department was Prof. Pierre Thomas. In 1936 P. Thomas' labor contract with the Romanian Ministry of Education ceased and Manta became director of this Department. In the next year he was promoted professor. His career during the '30 was described by Prof. Dr. Ștefan Secăreanu (1893-1979) in 1953, in a characterization about Manta. It's useful to mention that Secăreanu was also a chemist and, at that time he was director of the Medical Chemistry Department in the same Faculty. Secăreanu wrote that he knew Manta for about 22 years "since Manta had been appointed senior lecturer at the Cluj Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy. [...] Manta demonstrated that he was one of the most important scientific and didactic fellows, because he was doctor in chemistry, but also because he graduated the pharmacy studies" [2]. Prof. Dr. Șt. Secăreanu continued his characterization mentioning data about the period when Manta was director of the Cluj Department of Biological Chemistry of the Faculty of Medicine. Secăreanu wrote the following: "as professor of biological chemistry, a position Manta held for many years, he had the important duty of the entire reorganization of one of the laboratories of the Department and he succeeded very well, providing it, with a great effort, with all that was absolutely necessary; so, today this laboratory functions very well and it is one of the most distinguished accomplishments in the Cluj Medico-Pharmaceutical Institute" [3].

The same period of Manta's career was mentioned in a document written in 1951 by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Virgil Galea (1904-1989), the founder of the Cluj School of Toxicology and director of the Toxicological Department of the Cluj Faculty of Pharmacy: "I knew Ion Manta before 1940, while he was professor at the Biochemical Department. I became better acquainted with him after 1940, in Sibiu. Although at that time I was only an assistant, Manta always had consideration for me, the same as for other subordinates. I know he was an expert in his activity and had a great capacity of organization. Having a great love for his work, he tried to provide everything for the department he directed [...]. Manta has a great technical knowledge in the practical aspects of drugs, moreover he was at that time a pharmacist" [4]. It's necessary to point out the fact that in 1951, after being released from prison, Manta was professionally reinstated and became department responsible in the Cluj Branch of the Chemico-Pharmaceutical Research Institute. Until 1955, when he retired from this job, he achieved very important and original proceedings in pharmaceutical practice, such as: Glicochol, Sorbita and Dechol. Also he improved the technology for Calcium Gluconicum and Hemostatin. Working at "Terapia" Drug Factory from Cluj, he produced some new drugs, such as Glutamicum Acid and Bilagnost.

Unfortunately, Manta's two trips made to Germany, during the Second World War, to procure laboratory equipment, technical and medical instruments etc. were misunderstood in 1949 by the Romanian communist

authorities. He was denounced by one of his colleagues as "Nazi sympathizer". It was a false motivation. The reality was different, but absolutely simple. In 1954 Manta himself declared to different colleagues and to some of his best students the situation which determined his detention: "My colleague, wanting to replace me [from the duty of head of department], accused me for being Nazi collaborationist, but I was not well received in Germany. I did not speak German and my studies done in France compromised me in their opinion. On the other hand, the technical and medical instruments, the hospital beds, the anesthesia masks I brought are still in use in all laboratories and clinics in Cluj" [5]. This aspect is very significant, because during the Second World War, when Cluj Faculty of Medicine was in refuge in Sibiu, the most important concern was to procure medical instruments and beds for patients. This situation occurred due to the fact that in September 1940, when the Faculty and the University Clinics from Cluj began their refuge it was not sufficient time to transfer the necessary endowment from Cluj to Sibiu. In addition, the qualities of German products were very much appreciated in different countries (also in Romania).

It's interesting to mention the fact that the investigations done in 1954 by few students discovered that the name of the colleague who denounced Manta was Elena Maftעי (1900-1985) (as Prof. Dr. Honorius Popescu wrote in his memories). At that time she was associate professor at the Biochemistry Department at the Cluj Faculty of Medicine. Prof. H. Popescu pointed out that in the period of detention, Manta recited daily for two hours his lectures. Thus he opposed to the psychic degradation caused by the dreadful detention conditions. The result of his effort was that "when he returned to the department he have unaltered the diction, the sense of rhythm in speech and all the qualities that, early in life, had placed him among the most gifted orators of the medical faculty" [6].

In the characterization about Manta, mentioned above, Prof. Virgil Galea pointed out that during the Second World War Manta was the delegate of the Cluj-Sibiu University (officially named "King Ferdinand I" University) to purchase different materials from Germany: "With an intense effort he [Manta] supplied the University with technical instruments and laboratory equipment. In his role as delegate of the University, he ordered and brought the materials from Germany. I believe that he made himself some enemies on this occasion" [7]. It is very possible that V. Galea knew exactly some names of envious colleagues of I. Manta, but did not want to mention their names in this written document (because he was one of the most peaceful professors of the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy from Cluj).

During the refuge of the "King Ferdinand I" University (including the Faculty of Medicine) its rector was Prof. Dr. Iuliu Hațieganu (1885-1959). The following testimony written by him in 1953 about Manta's task to procure medical equipments from Germany is extremely

important to understand Manta's innocence: "I know Manta as a good professional professor of biochemistry, with numerous scientific papers and a solid pharmaceutical training [...]. Regarding the trip to Germany, he had the delegation from the Senat [of the University] and from the Professorial Council of the Cluj-Sibiu Faculty of Medicine and precise order of the Ministry of Instruction for making purchase of medical and scientific material, in a fixed amount of money set by the University. He answered very well to the task which has been assigned and to the order which has been given to him, purchasing material for the Faculty of Medicine from Cluj" [8]. This testimonial showed that Manta do not traveled for personal use, or for political purposes in Germany during the Second World War. He only had fulfilled a duty of service. Thus in 1949 his detention was absolutely undeserved and he was a victim of the communist regime. At that time this politic regime wanted to eliminate the most prestigious professors from different faculties from our country.

Other significant aspects about Manta's career were mentioned in a characterization wrote in 1953 by Prof. Erwin Popper – the first dean of the Cluj Faculty of Pharmacy and head of the Analytical Chemistry Department: "I knew him for almost 20 years, since he was a teacher at the Cluj Pedagogical Seminary. From the point of view of his profession, he is well prepared, he is a very good professional and very important educator [...]. I knew he was in prison for two years; I did not know the reason. On his return he was appointed – by a disposition of the Health Ministry – at the Chemico-Pharmaceutical Research Institute as responsible of a section. Here he worked for two years and had demonstrated a very conscientious and profitable activity" [9]. The fact that Manta worked two years at the Chemico-Pharmaceutical Research Institute is not an error in the characterization written by E. Popper, because until the moment when he wrote this characterization about Manta (in 1953) his activity in this institute was no longer than two years.

It is very important to know that after the reintegration of Manta as chief of the Biochemistry Department, he did not want to slow down his scientific activity and did not accept different medical information – the majority being from the Soviet Union scientists – without verifying them according to other scientists, some of them being from the Western Europe.

At the end of the '60 he participated with substantial conferences at the cycle of conferences entitled "Molecular Biology and Modern Medicine". This very modern projet was initiated by Prof. Dr. Octavian Fodor (1913-1976) – rector of the Cluj Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy. Details about Manta's role in this project were mentioned by Prof. Dr. George Simu (1926-2007) in a presentation held for the anniversary of 100 years since Manta's birth: "By his scientific dimension, his erudition and, not the last, by his

high-up-date knowledge in problem, Professor Manta was the main personality of this enterprise. He sustained, sometimes assisted by his coworkers Dan Bedeleanu, Octavian Bârză or Gheorghe Jebeleanu, the first four lectures, concerning the proteins structures and functions, the enzymes, the nucleic acids and their subtle function in heredity and proteins synthesis. The high scientific level of these four conferences decided the success of the cycle. The other lecturers tried to make the best. During two years, this cycle was the weekly pleasure of people passionate for a scientific medicine in Cluj, and, in that time, they were numerous enough. The conferences were an affirmation opportunity as well as a selection criterion for scientists within the school of medicine" [10].

As a conclusion of our paper, it's useful to quote Prof. Dr. Valeriu Bologa (1892-1971) - head of the History of Medicine Department of the Cluj Faculty of Medicine (between 1930 and 1962). In 1962 he wrote the following appreciation about Manta: "As taught, Prof. Manta's very methodical, clear, demanding, but weighted esteemed students, who strives to give them an education and citizenship. This quiet and thoughtful man is seen as a good colleague, honest, serious and often bringing useful contributions to his colleagues" [11].

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