

## A DOCTORAL THESIS ABOUT CAROL DAVILA WRITTEN IN PARIS IN 1936

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### Abstract:

*Carol Davila, the father of the Romanian modern medicine, made decisive contributions to the development of health sciences in the Romanian Principalities in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The merit of his scientific work was recognized beyond the borders of his country.*

*His life (not devoid of anecdotic instances and unknown episodes) and especially his work have aroused considerable interest among numerous medical historians. This paper presents a historical study elaborated in France, but until recently ignored, dedicated to the biography of Carol Davila.*

*It concerns the medical doctoral thesis (State Diploma) elaborated by Joseph Adler (born 1910 in Botoșani, Romania) under the supervision of professor Maxime Laignel-Lavastine, whose interest in Romania is well-known.*

*Professor Laignel-Lavastine held the office of Secretary General of the International Society of History of Medicine (ISHM), founded in 1921, (replaced in this position by another French professor with links to Romania: Jules Guiart).*

*The thesis comprises 48 pages and an exhaustive bibliography. It represents a token of the appreciation given to Davila's achievements by Europe's medical community.*

**Keywords:** history of medicine, Carol Davila, Maxime Laignel-Lavastine, Joseph Adler, doctoral thesis, Europe's medical community

### Introduction

In the Romanian Principalities, the mid-nineteenth century was a period of great social and political effervescence, characterized by major historical events and convulsions, that not only marked the moment of formation of a modern and unitary state, but also the assertion of national independence and identity within the broader context of the formation of modern European states.

At that time, the Romanian Principalities were undergoing a process of profound restructuration and development. It was a period of economic flourishing induced by the Peace of Adrianople that had opened the commercial sea route through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus to the merchant vessels. Despite the favourable historical context, the period is marked by major socio-economic problems of the pauper and working classes.

The development of Romanian medicine and of medical education in Romania during this period is associated with the name of Carol Davila, a scientist whose activity in the mid-nineteenth century resulted not only in the

recognition of Romanian medical education at Italy's and France's royal courts, but also in the establishment of medico-social institutions.

### The iatro-historical context of the evolution of the Davila "phenomenon"

The Davila phenomenon was not an isolated one during the considered period. The development and modernization of the Romanian society, like that of many other societies involved in a process of cultural and political emancipation was indissolubly related to the intellectual elites that benefited from university education in foreign universities from Italy, France or Germany.

Although much smaller, the number of foreign intellectuals who came to Romania is a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked, because it was significant, both in terms of the development of bilateral relations, as well as the formation of indigenous elites, marjng the socio-economic and cultural development of Romanian society in general.

Academic relations established with prestigious universities from all over Europe contributed significantly not only to the modernization of the existing Romanian institutions, but also to the creation and development of new institutions.

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### ***Foreign physicians involved in the development of Romanian medical education in the mid nineteenth century***

Beginning with the mid-nineteenth century, a number of foreign doctors coming from different European countries to the Romanian Principalities were notably involved in the organization of military medical services.

Among them, Georg Johan Grunau who studied in Göttingen and Vienna, a doctor of medicine of 1809, will contribute both to the development of the military medical service, as well to the training of military medical assistants and other military personnel with sanitary assignments in the Romanian army [1].

Johan Nepomuk Mayer, a physician since 1826, who had studied in Vienna, assumed the responsibility for the training of the military medical assistants and will contribute to the organization of medical system of the Romanian army in his capacity of Head of the Army Sanitary Service of Wallachia.

Carol Widmann a graduate from Vienna, principal of the Military School of Small Surgery, or Dimitrie Vartiadi, from Macedonia, also a graduate from Vienna, can be regarded as predecessors of Carol Davila due to their endeavours to outline the basic requirements of modern Romanian medical education.

### ***Romanian doctors who studied abroad and contributed to the development of Romanian medicine in the mid-nineteenth century***

One of the most fascinating personalities at the beginning of Romanian medicine Nicolae Kretzulescu, is acknowledged especially due to his activity in the political and social fields, but also due to his significant contribution to the medical field.

Nicolae Kretzulescu was deeply involved in the revolutionary movement of 1848 alongside with other personalities of the nineteenth century such as: Vasile Alecsandri, the Golescu brothers, Constantin Vârnăv, Ioan Sibiănu, Nicolae Bălcescu, Avram Iancu etc.

A graduate of the University of Paris, where he received a doctor's title in 1839, Nicolae Kretzulescu will contribute both to the elaboration of the first Romanian didactic manual, as well as to the establishment of the School of Small Surgery, a precursor of the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy of Bucharest.

Creator of the Romanian medical language, Nicolae Kretzulescu was not only one of the founders and organizers of the Romanian medical system and education but he also managed to overcome his own inherent vanities by recognizing the merit of Carol Davila and even supported Davila's dedicated participation in Romania's medical life [2,3].

### ***The role of Carol Davila in the development of Romanian medicine***

Within this socio-historical context characterized by

local political turmoil, Barbu Știrbei, ruler of Wallachia, decided to invite Carol Davila, a French doctor, who became known at the age of 25 due to his involvement in quelling the cholera epidemic from the Champagne and the Cher (1849).

A complex personality, Davila was encouraged in his intention to move to Wallachia by Prof. Dr. G. Castonet "I was pleased to find out about your appointment as chief physician at the Military hospital of Bucharest. I regard your activity in Wallachia as a scientific mission. The results of your medical and hygiene studies will be received with great interest by the French Academy of Medicine" [4].

Although he had initially planned to stay only a for short period, Davila will devote his entire energy and abnegation to the development of the country that was about to adopt him, qualities rarely found in his contemporaries, acting both as a sanitary organizer, as well as the founder of several institutions such as the Red Cross, the Botanic Garden, orphanages and asylums.

Like many of his activities, the contribution to the development of the Romanian medico-pharmaceutical and veterinary education will be an essential one, as Nicolae Kretzulescu writes in a letter addressed to Davila: "You sir, were happier than I was, because you achieved in this institution results above all my expectations; posterity will accordingly consider your accomplishments" [1].

As Nicolae Iorga noted: "Davila was invited, he came and performed the job for which they had invited him ten times better" [5].

A generous person, but at the same time cultivating generosity in others, Davila was a model for several generations of physicians, both in the military and civilian field, rising above the social conditions of his time.

Carol Davila considered that: the doctor of an „arrondissement", has, apart from his medical function, a moral, civilizing mission... he seeks to be the bearer of civilization to the rural settlements and, for this purpose, the doctor's behaviour must gain the peasant's confidence. A brutal and arrogant conduct would be the complete opposite of his mission. The doctor will convince the peasant that his home is unhealthy and will persuade him to improve it, according to his means, that his food is inadequate in terms of necessities and physical growth of the children, that their cattle are badly tended and their weakness and mortality are caused by this bad care, and will show him how to correct those mistakes. A doctor who believes himself destined for something better than to be a teacher to the peasant will never be a scrupulous doctor, a good civil servant [6].

Although scientific research was not his main field of activity, the cholera epidemic of 1854 will provide an opportunity to experiment and prove the efficiency of the anti-cholera drops known as the Davila tincture, a drug that was introduced into the Romanian Pharmacopoeia of 1892.

Due to the actions undertaken by Carol Davila, on the 23rd of November 1857, the French recognize the School of Bucharest, its students being given the possibility, under certain conditions, to obtain a doctor's degree in that country.

A year later, in 1858, a similar assimilation was recognized with the Italian medicine faculties; we might regard this recognition as the first official document, long before the creation of the Bologna system, which assures transnational recognition of studies.

The links with France and the French medical world became even stronger in the years following Davila's arrival in Romania, especially through sending to Paris of a number of graduates from the Romanian medical school. Among these we mention: Zaharia Petrescu, Nicolae Măldărescu, C. Dimitrescu Severeanu or Dimitrie Grecescu, who, apart from honouring their school of origin, would return to their country in order to participate – like its founding father- in the development of the indigenous medical system.

A Frenchman by birth, Davila will prove to be a good citizen of his adoptive country, which he served for many years: Doctor Davila, gentlemen, if we were to recognize only his merit of discovering the Romanian's intelligence, the confidence in the latter's future as cultivable being, educable in medical science, if I may use this expression, it would be sufficient to assure him our eternal gratitude [7].

#### **The medical doctoral thesis about Carol Davila elaborated in Paris**

The elaboration of a medical doctoral thesis about Carol Davila in Paris in 1936 was possible due to the existence of a great number of Romanian students in Paris (in the 1930' about 18% of the foreign students were Romanians), but also due to the favourable attitude of the French professors toward Romanian students. Joseph Adler and Maxime Laignel-Lavastine – the author of the thesis and his supervisor, will bring Carol Davila's personality to the attention of the public opinion – a Frenchman by birth, but a Romanian by adoption.

##### **Joseph Adler and Maxime Laignel-Lavastine**

The medical doctoral thesis about Carol Davila elaborated by Joseph Adler and supervised by professor Laignel-Lavastine provides further evidence of the strong ties between Romanian medicine and its French counterpart, created by this doctor

Although little is known about Joseph Adler, we know that he was born in Botoșani, on the 23rd of July 1910 (as mentioned on the thesis cover) and that he defended his thesis in 1936. More information exists about Maxime Laignel-Lavastine, professor at the Medical College of Paris. He is known as a remarkable personality in the field of the history of medicine. He occupied the position of General Secretary of ISHM between 1921 and 1936, and held the presidency of this institution between 1946 and 1953. Author of works like: „La syphilis dans l'art”, „L'histoire de différents voyages médicaux dans les stations hydrominérales”, „Paracelse” (1906), „La médecine française sous la Révolution” (1935), „L'histoire de la chirurgie antique” (1925), or „Les Juifs et la fondation des écoles médicales dans le Midi de la France” (1936), he will contribute, alongside with Landouzy, Paul Bourget, Victorien

Sardou, Gilbert Ballet and Cabanes to the foundation of the *Société médico-historique, littéraire et artistique*.

The supervision by Maxime Laignel-Lavastine of a doctoral thesis about Romanian medicine is not a surprise to us, considering that in the same year he abandoned his candidacy for the International Society of History of Medicine, whose presidency was won by Victor Gomoiu.

##### **The doctoral thesis, bibliographical landmarks**

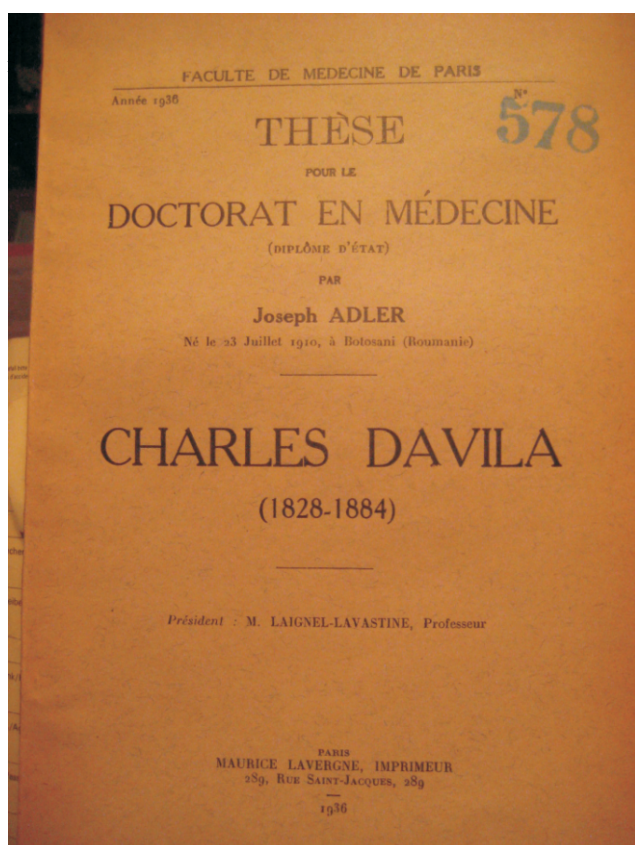
The thesis elaborated by Joseph Adler, entitled “Charles Davila (1828-1884)” edited in 1936 and comprising 48 pages, was published in printed format of 242 by 170 mm, after a typewritten text, with a spacing of 1.5 lines.

The first pages of the thesis are dedicated to a presentation of the executive staff of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris. Dean of faculty was Gustave Roussy. The complete list of the academic staff, including aggregate members, is also present and contains many names belonging to the history of medicine, who were professors in Paris at that time like, for instance: Ombredanne, Sergeant, Fissenger, Guillaïn, Tiffeneau, Gougerot, Bernard, Lian, Valéry-Radot etc. Of course the name of Laignel-Lavastine appears as professor for the History of medicine and surgery. Seeing this impressive list of teachers, now we recognize the significance of preparing and defending a doctoral thesis in Paris at that time! The thesis is dedicated to his mother, his father („whom I owe everything”), to his sister Amalia and to *meis amicis*; on the reverse he wrote a dedication to Miss Odette Brand (?) (“a testimony of profound acknowledgement and infinite gratitude”); the following page contains acknowledgements to the supervisor and the commission, as well as to his mentor (*maître*), Jules Tinel (*médecin des hopitaux*).

The foreword contains references to Bologna (outstanding professor for history of medicine in Cluj, simply mentioned by family name here), to Zaharia Petrescu (who had offered a copy of his book about Davila, to doctor Adler's father) as well as acknowledgements to Carol Davila's daughter, Mrs General Elena Perticari-Davila, who provided him with her father's correspondence.

The thesis is structured in 5 sections, Introduction, three chapters containing a monographic account of Carol Davila's life and Conclusions. It reproduces quotes in Romanian from Valeriu Bologna: “*prin Davila, cu Davila, în timpul lui Davila, cu elevii lui Davila se formează definitiv medicina științifică românească*” (“through Davila, with Davila, during the time of Davila, with Davila's students the scientific Romanian medicine was finally created”) [8]. The bibliography extends over 2 pages and comprises 35 titles, owing, among others, to Istrati, Severanu, Perticari-Davila, Grecescu, Labbe, Laignel-Lavastine etc.

The following words of Carol Davila should be remembered: Finding the new country, Romania, on the shores of the Danube, the France of the Orient, as far as traditional ideas and civilization aspirations of the bigger



**Figure 1.** The cover of the thesis on Carol Davila by Joseph Adler.

sister are concerned, I have become both with my heart and my action, a Romanian citizen [9]

Carol Davila represents not only the quintessence of the Romanian-French collaboration in the field of medicine, in the 19th century, but also an example about how a doctor must and can fulfil his duty regardless of his

place of birth or living.

The traces of Davila's presence are attested not only by a torso signed Constantin Brâncuși, by Theodor Aman's and Nicolae Grigorescu's paintings or by the photograph made by de Carol Popp de Szathmary, but also by Joseph Adler's thesis, which represents another iatrohistorical landmark, still insufficiently explored and known.

### Conclusions

Joseph Adler elaborated in 1936 a comprehensive doctoral thesis about Carol Davila, under the supervision of Professor Maxime Laignel Lavastine. This thesis, although it does not provide additional biographic information, represents a significant contribution to the popularity of Carol Davila's legendary personality in his country of origin.

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