

Medical Information in the Cultural Weekly *Tribuna*, 1957

When Ideology Influences the Presentation of Scientific Data

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Introduction

TRIBUNA IS one of the most important cultural journals of Transylvania. It was founded in Sibiu in 1884 as a daily journal, issued for almost 20 years, until 1903 (1). Its publication continued with interruptions and changes of the name (*Tribuna Poporului*) and of its printing location (from Sibiu to Arad) till before World War I (2). Nowadays it is issued again in a new series, after several years of discontinuation caused by the post-communist turmoil affecting Romanian society.

In 1957 a new series of *Tribuna* was born, in the socio-cultural context of the so-called revolutionary transformation following the change of the political regime and after the worst Stalinist years of the 5th decade of the 20th century. The editorial office and publisher were located in Cluj, the main cultural center in Transylvania.

Medical Topics in *Tribuna*, 1957

THE NEW series now celebrates 60 years of publication and it indeed reflects the cultural life of that epoch, not only from Romania, but also from the Iron Curtain countries (sister countries, as they were called) and from other countries. Many articles are also dedicated to pro-communist cultural events and personalities.

The journal was printed on poor quality paper, and therefore now the pages are yellowish. The large format pages (of the same size as the nowadays copies) are filled with small letters, allowing the inclusion of much information, distributed on 4 columns per page. Almost every page features small black-and-white vignettes, and many illustrations by Cluj visual artists of those days.

Unlike the contemporary series of *Tribuna*, the issues of that time also included scientific information (notices, interviews). This practice of also including scientific elements in a cultural periodical also continued in the series of *Tribuna* of the '70s and '80s, when doctors were in the editorial board of the journal.

We looked at the way in which medical life was reflected in the pages of *Tribuna* 60 years ago (1957–2017), considering that two generations turned in this interval and few people may now recollect or speak about the papers of those days. Therefore we undertook a manual page by page search of medical content in all the issues of the year 1957, the first year of the 2nd series of *Tribuna*. We shall further present all the pieces on medicine and the related fields featured in *Tribuna* during that year. We should mention that issue no. 1 came out not right after the New Year, but only on February 10. Probably the initiative needed approval from the authorities of the time and the approval arrived late, as it usually happened in totalitarian countries. Therefore the journal had only 50 issues in that year, but almost all include medical news, giving the flavor of a magazine to this really good cultural journal.

In the first issue of *Tribuna*, No. 1/10 February 1957, on page 9 is a text dedicated to the memory of Doctor Pavel Vasici by Ion Breazu. The author of the short article reports on the commemoration of this pioneer of medical books, 150 years after his birth and 75 years after his death, organized by Victor Babeş and Janos Bolyai Universities of Cluj. Pavel Vasici, also called Ungureanu, published in the 3rd decade of the 19th century several books in Cyrillic script, in an archaic medical language, with many Latin names. The text is illustrated with an image of the cover of his book, *Macrobiotica*. Other books by him are *Antropologia* (1930) and *Dietetica* (1931).

In the next issue, also on page 9, is a very useful paper by the famous historian of medicine Valeriu L. Bologa, dedicated to “Ion Piurariu-Molnar: The first Romanian university professor.” He was really a famous personality: an ophthalmologist but also a national militant, who supported the struggle of the Romanians in Transylvania for equal rights. The paper is illustrated with the title page of his book, *Paraenesis ad auditores chyrurgiae*. On Piurariu-Molnar (or Molnar-Piurariu), we have now the second edition of the book by Mircea Popa (3), which demonstrates how important were the historical data from the time of this outstanding personality.

Beside this, we found an unsigned notice about the 10 years that had passed since the death of Paul Langevin, a great physician who dealt with ionization, radiation, and magnetism, many aspects thereof having medical applications.

In *Tribuna* no. 3, on the same page 9, we find a piece by the outstanding professor of biology and genetics at the medical school of Cluj, Victor Preda: “Archeological investigations around Cluj.” This is a work on anthropology, on the archeological research done by the team of Professor I.G. Russu, anatomist and anthropologist. He discovered that the inhabitants of the area around Cluj in the Bronze Age had a height of only 1.55 m (the so-called Criş Civilization, 1180 BC), with a smaller cranial volume, dolichocephalic, with a small face and strong muscles. Thus, the early inhabitants of our area belonged to the Mediterranean type of the white race.

Tribuna no. 9 features an article now considered peculiar in a cultural periodical: “The methods of marked atoms in biology,” written “for *Tribuna*” by E.G. Zinovieva, a researcher at the Institute of Animal Morphology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. It is a paper of general interest on the application of isotopes in biology. Amazingly, this scientific paper was written “especially” for *Tribuna*, in a political attempt to demonstrate de supremacy of Soviet science (at a time when Western science could hardly be cited).

Thus, we may consider that this paper reflects the policy of scientific education, according to the Marxist ideology, of the Romanian readership.

In the same issue, on page 8, we find an interesting article by the outstanding physiologist Academician Grigore Benetato (born in a part of Romania occupied by Soviets). He describes on a full page the International Congress of Physiology held in Brussels, which he had attended as a member of the Romanian delegation. The congress was organized in honor of Corneille Heymans, who received the Nobel Prize for studies on the carotid sinus and the regulation of respiration and circulation. We could hardly conceive nowadays such a generous publication space dedicated to a subject not related to culture but to science (maybe for as long as we also consider science as part of culture). Benetato presents the title of the Romanian presentations and mentions his colleagues Nitulescu and Baciuc. The latter would also become a member of the Academy and would serve as the rector of the Cluj Medical Institute. The next congress is also announced, to be held in Buenos Aires in 1958. The author mentions that he was also invited to Paris for one week, to demonstrate an experimental method. This week in Paris gave him the opportunity to recall the presence in Paris of Enescu and Brancusi, as representatives of Romanian culture. This was the year when Brancusi died, and the request to repatriate the creations from his workshop was officially refused. In light of this article, we can understand today how the scientists were officially delegated by the authorities, probably being trusted by the regime. Three decades later such participation became even scarcer, under the control of the communist rulers.

The next issue of *Tribuna* is no. 10 and here we find a consequential contributor, the Academician Victor Preda, biologist and geneticist, writing on “The actuality of Darwin” on page 9.

In *Tribuna* no. 15, right on the cover, beside the obituary of the Academy of the People’s Republic of Romania on death of the writer Camil Petrescu, we find an interview with the leading figure of Cluj medicine, Iuliu Hațieganu, by Radu Enescu, continued on page 8. The interview is dedicated to the participation of Cluj physicians in the Congress of Internal Medicine held in Bucharest. Several important professors attended: Aurel Moga, Ioan Goia, and Octavian Fodor. The interview ends with the famous words of Hațieganu, now frequently cited: *Above all else, science is conscience.*

Another piece on nuclear medicine is featured on page 9, regarding the use of radioactive isotopes in medicine. Once again, it is a paper written especially for *Tribuna* by Dr. A.S. Ivanova, head of radiology at Medical Institute No. 1 of Moscow. The paper is a correct vulgarization of radioisotope applications in biology and medicine, with emphasis on the diagnosis of thyroid diseases and the therapy of hematological diseases. One might wonder why this interest in isotopes in a journal like *Tribuna*. Was this related to the fear of atomic bombs?

In no. 22, on page 8 there is a “scientific book note” where Iulian Helgiu describes the thermal threshold and the temperatures of the bodies and the environment. One can guess the interest of the cultural world in such a topic!

One issue later, the great professor of the history of medicine Valeriu Bologa presents his participation at the Congress for the History of Medicine in Warsaw. He mentions that this meeting had methodological value, given the intention of Polish histori-

ans to reform the curriculum of the history of medicine. Beside Bologa, the meeting was also attended by Associate Professor Iosif Spielmann from Tg. Mureș. The education in the history of medicine has a long tradition in Poland, beginning in 1810 in Krakow with Prof. Kostecki. Bologa salutes the participation of many doctors from smaller centers, which are nevertheless very interested in the history of medicine. As in the case of the interviews with Benetato and Hatieganu, it seems that *Tribuna* wanted to update the readers on new topics arising from international and national medical meetings, inviting outstanding local professors to disseminate the experience.

In *Tribuna* no. 25 we find again on page 8 a scientific book note, now with information from the journal *Ars Medici*, dedicated to hibernation and to cardiovascular surgery.

The next medical piece is featured in no. 30. On the cover, according to the editorial policy, a longer paper continued on page 8 by Alexandru Roșca and dedicated to the Congress of Psychology held in Berlin. The main subjects of the meeting were pedagogy, work psychology or general psychology. The meeting brought together 1000 psychologists from 40 countries, and included 250 presentations. The Romanian delegation included, beside Alexandru Roșca, Academician Mihai Ralea from Bucharest, Professor Pavelcu from Iasi and two associate professors from Bucharest. Reading this we may get the impression that Romania was an open country and its scientists could travel to meetings (before the Berlin Wall), but we also feel that only Nomenklatura members succeeded to get visas and travel abroad.

The now more regular scientific book note on page 8 mentions that the history of medicine in Cluj began in 1821. Its library increased progressively, coming to have at the time of the notice 30.000 volumes and more than 3000 photographs and other illustrations. The notice is not signed but we could guess behind it the hand of Valeriu Bologa.

In no. 31 the scientific book note on page 8 is signed by the professor of infectious diseases Ion Gavrilă and it deals with influenza.

On the same page, in 3 columns, there is an important paper by Bogdan Stugren: “On the sins of contemporary biology.” Here, Stugren tackles a major biological problem of those days: the theory of Lisenko (later considered to be based on faked experiments) vs. the evolutionary theory of Darwin. The opinion of Victor Preda is presented: it is an ambiguous opinion, as it had to be during those days. Preda seems to approve the theory of Lisenko as compared to that of Darwin, but on the other hand he calls the theory of Lisenko flat evolutionism because it is incomplete and does not answer to all evolutionary questions. This was a clever way for the author of this paper to give satisfaction to the authorities without totally agreeing with the official theory.

In the next issue, *Tribuna* no. 32, in the scientific book note now on page 9, Victor Preda himself discusses in a column the necessity to use medicinal plants in clinical applications.

In no. 33, starting on page 3 and continued on page 6, once again we find a debate on the theories of Darwin and Lisenko written by N. Parvu, where the attitude of the great biologist Emil Racoviță was analyzed. This was the time when scientists had to declare their agreement with Soviet theories, even if not well demonstrated.

Then comes a very nice short article on page 9 by Valeriu Bologna: “Glimpses of Ovidian iatrosophy.” He analyzes those verses of the Latin poet Pubiu Ovidius Naso where he gave advice to women on how to protect the skin and to maintain their beauty.

A very provocative paper appears in issue no. 36, starting right on the cover and continued on page 6. Prof. Valeriu Bologna again writes on “The sedentary student and his cultural universe.” He states that students finish their studies in the same university where they started them. This pattern was considered deleterious from the intellectual and even patriotic point of view. He puts political emphasis on patriotism, as was mandatory at the time, but adopts a very modern point of view: students should seek change and move from one place to another, even to other countries, in order to broaden their horizons. This is a fantastic and courageous opinion, well hidden in the context of the paper, pleading for the need of students to benefit from mobilities. It is in fact the spirit of the European Commission’s Erasmus program of today.

In *Tribuna* no. 39 we find a politically well-oriented point of view by Academician Raluca Ripan: “On the progresses of the Soviet science.” She presents the now well-known medical advances owed to Pavlov and Michurin, beside progresses in physics and chemistry.

A very interesting article can be read in no. 40, on the cover and continuing on page 3. The vice-rector of the medical school, Professor Ion Pacurariu, an ophthalmologist, writes on the “Problems of our medical education.” The author analyzes the possibility to ensure the development of medical education in parallel with the progress of political (sic!), economic and social science. The newly adjusted courses that should be selected for students have to be useful for a complete education, to increase the capacity of clinical observation, of clinical thinking, the working method of the future doctors, and not to put the emphasis on quantitative accumulations of knowledge. The practical stages are important. The patients should be approached by students as a suffering subject, not as an interesting case to be studied. Students should be also instructed in scientific research. One can see in this consistent paper that, despite the adherence to the political and ideological dogma, the content is modern and the author indeed militates for the true needs of medical education.

In *Tribuna* no. 41, the great biologist Emil Racoviță is commemorated 10 years after his death. Racoviță is famous worldwide for his Arctic expeditions and his case studies on animals. He was also for short time the dean of the medical faculty of Cluj. Not surprisingly for the spirit of the fifties, the author of the paper, Ion Lungu, mentions that Racoviță was also a materialist thinker, i.e. a progressive scientist from the official point of view of those days. Alongside is another paper by Academician Emill Pop: “From the socialist activity of the student Emil Racoviță.” Reading that issue of *Tribuna* we could now believe that Racoviță was a Marxist philosopher! He, the descendant of an aristocratic Moldavian family (4). This looks like a mystification of history in a politically-controlled journal.

Victor Preda appears again in *Tribuna* no. 42: on the cover and on page 3 he writes on “Progresses in Romanian biology,” mentioning Emil Racoviță, Emanoil Teodorescu, Grigore Antipa, and Victor Babeș.

In no. 44 on page 8 there is a short text titled “Medical colloquium” and signed in monogram D. Ghe (?). In the text the author describes what he calls the progress of medical sciences in Romania owed to the support of the party (the Romanian Workers’ Party) and of the state. But the anonymous author also regrets that Cluj does not receive medical equipment the way the capital, Bucharest, does; this equipment should be useful for clinical practice and clinical research. He also proposes the creation of a Cluj branch of the Medical Publishing House of Bucharest, in order to facilitate the publication of medical books by Cluj authors.

In *Tribuna* no. 45, on page 8, a new interview following the well-known pattern, given by Academician Aurel Moga, cardiologist, to Stefan Bitan: Romanian scientists abroad. Moga describes his visit to China, of course in an official delegation. The members of a medical Nomenclatura, including members of the academy like Aurel Moga, Ștefan Nicolau, Mihai Nasta, Ștefan Milcu, and Grigore Benetato, were able to travel to China at a time when normal people had to stay at home. Travel was very strictly controlled and only people who showed their fidelity to the ruling authorities obtained the permit to travel abroad, always in delegations which were easier to monitor.

In no. 46, on page 6, there is a brief piece titled “Landmarks in scientific research” by Prof. Salvator Cupcea, director of the Cluj Institute of Hygiene. He mentions the Cluj medical school for its achievements, beside the Statistical Institute, the Institute of Atomic Sciences and the Institute of History. Of course the author does not fail to mention the materialist-dialectic thinking and the role of the Pavlovian school in the development of the Cluj medical sciences. Those were the days...

The last issue of the year 1957 is no. 47 (28 December, the end of volume I that started on February 10). On page 3, we find a series of greetings for the 10th anniversary of the Romanian People’s Republic. Among the important professors of different specialties who send their greetings, there are two from the medical school: Valeriu Bologa, a frequent contributor to the journal, and Iuliu Hațieganu, the founder of medical teaching in Romanian in Cluj. He reiterates his opinion on science and conscience, adding a nuance to his aphorism: “In this new light, the sciences become indeed a higher conscience in the service of the working man...”

Conclusions

Reading now, after 60 years, the first volume of the new series of *Tribuna*, one can see that medicine was well represented in the pages of this journal during those days. In comparison, today’s *Tribuna* (5) has no medical contributors and does not publish medical articles or news. This is an important editorial change experienced by *Tribuna* along the decades.

Many of the pieces of that time with a medical content have the political flavor of the totalitarian era, which in the 5th decade reached its peak. However, most of the representatives of the Cluj medical school were able to dissimulate valuable and modern ideas between the lines impregnated by the ideologically-dictated language of that time.

One should emphasize the historical importance of this collection of *Tribuna* papers, which reflects in a cross-section the status of medical sciences between the progressive trend and the need to obey official imperatives.



Notes

1. Hangiu I. *Dicționarul presei literare românești: 1790-1990*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1996.
2. Popa M, Tascu V. *Istoria presei literare românești din Transilvania: de la începuturi pînă în 1918*, Editura Dacia, 1980.
3. Popa M. *Ion Molnar Piuariu*, 2nd Edition, Ed. Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2015.
4. Murariu D. “Grigore Antipa și Emil Racoviță – colegi, prieteni și proeminente personalități ale științei românești și mondiale,” *Rev. Studii Comunicări Acad. Rom.*, 2011, 4: 63-79.
5. Collection *Tribuna* 2017, Cluj-Napoca.

Abstract

Medical Information in the Cultural Weekly *Tribuna*, 1957: When Ideology Influences the Presentation of Scientific Data

Tribuna is a major cultural journal in Transylvania. Founded in 1884 by the important writer Ion Slavici, it discontinued publication before World War I. A new series started on 10 February 1957 in Cluj and it soon became one of the main cultural periodicals in Transylvania. It was the time of the proletarian dictatorship and culture was influenced by ideology. This weekly featured not only purely cultural articles but also scientific texts, including biomedical ones. The present paper is an analysis of all the medical articles published in 1957, namely, 60 years ago, the first year of the new *Tribuna* series. The analysis highlights the impact of medical knowledge in the non-medical media of the first post-Stalinist years in Transylvania.

Keywords

history of medicine, ideology, *Tribuna*