Abstract: Thanks to the interacting efforts of the Belgian professor J. J. Tricot-Royer (1875 – 1951), founder-president of the International Society for the History of Medicine (I.S.H.M.) and of the Romanian professor V. Gomoiu (1882-1960), third president of this one, the study of medical folklore has been acquainted with huge development from the thirties of the XX Century on. During his whole life, prof. Gomoiu fully applied himself, not only to an exemplary surgical career and to the field of medical-social relief work (with the support of the Royal Family of his country) but also to the history of medicine. After having founded in 1929 the Romanian Society for History of Medicine and having organized in Bucharest in 1932 the IX congress of the I.S.H.M., prof. Gomoiu was elected in 1936 president of that society. During the whole fourth decade of the XX Century, medical folklore was one of the main issues of most of the congresses of the I.S.H.M. And so Gomoiu established in September 1935 a special international commission for the study of medical folklore: the Cantacuzene – Commission. The contribution of prof. Gomoiu to the study of Romanian medical folklore was very important. In this paper, reference will be made to a lot of unpublished documents: the letters sent by prof. Gomoiu and by the French prof. Guiart (his general secretary in the I.S.H.M.) to Prof. Tricot-Royer between 1934 and 1939. Prof. Gomoiu can be considered as an emblematic and exemplary figure into the study of History of Medicine and of medical folklore, as well on a national as on an international level.

Key words: Victor Gomoiu, Cantacuzène-Commission

On the 15th of April 1939, the report upon the proceedings of the Cantacuzene Commission for the study of Medical Folklore was submitted by the Belgian prof. Tricot – Royer at the yearly General Assembly of the International Society for the History of Medicine (I.S.H.M.), held in Paris under the presidency of the Romanian prof. V. Gomoiu.

Who was the third president of the I.S.H.M.?
How important was that Commission?

Short biography of Prof. Victor Gomoiu [1, 3]
Victor Gomoiu was born in 1882 in Vinju Mare (district of Mehenditi) in Romania. After ending his secondary studies at the Lyceum of Turnu Severin, he enrolled himself at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest, where he finished his university curriculum in 1906 and obtained afterwards in 1909 his PHD magna cum laude. The subject of his thesis was: “The Anasplasties of face and head.”

Between 1914 and 1942 he took up a successful surgical career and a lot of new procedures inherited his eponyme. He also invested himself within the field of medico-social assistance programs. He became Ephore of the public hospitals of Bucharest in 1920 and 1921 and thereafter from 1926 on he was appointed as trustee
of the “Princess Ileana” charitable fund (“Așezămintele A.S.R. Principesa Elena”) and also he became a relative of the Romanian Royal Family. After the Second World War he was blamed for it.

In 1927 Gomoiu founded in a poor neighbourhood in one of the suburbs of Bucharest, Bariera Virgului, a hospital complex, Princess Ileana, on behalf of the most unprovided patients. Shortly thereafter this establishment became the “Children Hospital Victor Gomoiu”, still in activity nowadays.

Gomoiu obtained plenty of official duties in the Ministry of Health and became at least Minister of Health from July to September 1940, but he resigned quickly to not undergo the military-fascist dictatorship. Between 1940 and 1950 he devoted himself only to his surgical and medical-historical activities. From 1950 to 1954 he was imprisoned during 60 months by the regime for political purposes. Nevertheless in 1956 the communist Minister of Health suggested him to accept a position at the Center for Health Organization and the History of Medicine, but he refused this offer [15]. He died in Bucharest in 1960, almost forgotten by everyone.

**Doctor Gomoiu and the History of Medicine**

Already as student Gomoiu disposed of an important personal library, where as well medical as philosophical and historical works were assembled. In 1923 he published a first important medico-historical book: “The History of Medicine and of Medical Teaching in Romania.” [4].

In 1927 he sent to the French prof. Laignel-Lavastine, secretary-general of the very young I.S.H.M. (founded in 1921) the abstract of a communication he wanted to represent at the VIth congress of this association in Leiden and Amsterdam: “The first traces of Physicians in Romania” [5]. That was his first connection with the I.S.H.M. In 1929 prof. Gomoiu founded the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine under the high protection of Princess Ileana [6].

Within the I.S.H.M. he shaved more and more ambition: he became national delegate of his country in 1928, attended the Congress of Oslo (1928) and Rome (1930) and organised his own congress in Bucharest from the 10th to the 18th of September 1932 [8, 18]: a successful manifestation with the participation of the most famous historians of that time like e.g. the doctors and the professors Sigerist, Singer, Diepgen, Rolleston, Neuburger, Süheyl, De Lint, Jeanselme, Tricot-Royer, Castiglioni, and so on. The wife of the congress president, Mrs. Viorica Gomoiu, acted as general secretary of it.

In 1933 prof. Gomoiu was elected vice-president of the I.S.H.M. and president in 1936, to the deep annoyance of the then acting Secretary General, prof. Maxime Laignel-Lavastine, who also competed for this position, but who statutory could not obtain it [16, 17]. In this connection Gomoiu would write in 1939 at the end of his mandate: “To believe to be hated by someone you love, is a more unendurable pain than mourning for his death”. [13].

Laignel-Lavastine resigned and was replaced by prof. Jules Guiart (7). This one had particular links with Romania. As professor of Parasitology and of History of Medicine at the University of Lyon, he concluded a special agreement as titular professor of History of Medicine, of Pharmacy and of Medical Folklore at the University of Cluj (23), founded in 1919, and within the professors were chosen by an University Commission with the representatives of the two Romanian universities, existing at that time: the one of Bucharest and the other of Iassy. Guiart was teaching at the medical faculty of Cluj between 1921 and 1930, the year within he was replaced by his assistant, prof. Valeriu Bologna (1892-
1971), originating from Brașov.

Within the I.S.H.M., prof. Gomoiu was not conspicuous by his sense of diplomacy, and he took a lot of initiatives without the approval of his bureau and of his administrative council.

Prof. Guiart confirmed there were sometimes troubles within the bureau. He wrote the following comments (14):

"I told him (= Gomoiu) firmly that the President has no rights to make some propositions without the preliminary approval of the Bureau. Otherwise he exposes himself to what happened to him: his proposals are not voted. He has no right to owe someone a grudge for it, because with having the right to vote, we got the duty to vote, not with the purpose to please him, but conscientiously!"

The mandate of Gomoiu ended normally at the beginning of 1940, but, due to the Second World War, his successor, prof. Laignel-Lavastine could only begin his term in 1946, because during the conflict, all activities of the I.S.H.M. were interrupted [16].

Medical folklore and the congresses of the I.S.H.M.

The proposal to create a commission with the purpose to study medical folklore was formulated by prof. Gomoiu in September 1935, during the X\textsuperscript{th} International Congress for the History of Medicine and has been approved unanimously. Previously during the VII\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the I.S.H.M. in Oslo in 1928, prof. Gomoiu showed his interest for this aspect of medical history, submitting a paper entitled: “Medical Folklore in Romania”. On the occasion of the next congress, the VIII\textsuperscript{th} one in Rome in 1930, prof. Castiglioni from Padua, enumerated the two sources of medical folklore: the magical conception common to all primitive people and the experience [2].

As for him, prof. Gomoiu described the contribution of medical folklore from an etymological, historical and medical point of view [12]. He drew the attention that, from an ethnological point of view, the folklore documents his adepts upon the way, man was feeling or thinking in the course of ages. It increases the number of characters which permit establishing resemblances and differences among the nations, and so new appreciation – criteria are acquired upon their degree of superiority and culture. For his part, the historian, comparing the different kinds of folklore with each other, can more easily deduce the relationships between the nations he is studying and consequently the moving of their migration. As for the physician, he often discloses in the popular practices the germs of the most modern therapeutics.

On the other hand, very curiously, that same medical folklore was not hold back as a theme at the IX\textsuperscript{th} Congress of the I.S.H.M., organized in Romania in 1932. It was only a delay, because during the next congress, the Cantacuzene Commission was born. The topics of the Bucharest Congress were: “The Evolution of Medicine in the Balkanic countries” and “Defence of Europe against the pest”. This last theme was the subject of the very last posthumous publication of prof. Tricot-Royer [22].

The Cantacuzene Commission

This commission was baptized “Cantacuzene”, after the name of a famous Romanian physician, bacteriologist and professor, Ion Cantacuzino (1863 – 1934), founder of microbiology and of experimental medicine in Romania. He was even Minister of Health, Work and Social Security [9].

Although he has published nearly nothing about History of Medicine, Gomoiu proposed him as second president of the Romanian Society for the History of
Medicine. In his funeral oration, Gomoiu will say about him: “Our president, creator of his own history and also of others, passed himself into the history”.

In a letter of the 21th of October 1935, written to prof. Tricot-Royer (10), founding president of the I.S.H.M., thus a short time before becoming himself president of the I.S.H.M., prof. Gomoiu specified the work to be done by the members of his commission:

The first question that had to be asked was how to draw the bibliography of medical folklore and of folklore generally spoken in their respective country that means the names of the authors, their works, the specialized journals, the institutions, etc. Then the question of standard forms comes to collect the folkloristic material, which can be discussed some months afterwards. Firstly the names of the pathological entities have to be discussed as they are designed by the peasants of the different countries and their clinical pictures, so that people can conclude to their synonymy and compare their treatments. For each country a card of the territories, where the different denominations or treatments are used, has to be established.

Prof. Tricot-Royer, nominated as president of this commission, was the Belgian delegate, whereas prof. Gomoiu became the secretary general and delegate for Romania. The commission included also Mrs Gomoiu, the doctors Bologa from Cluj, Laignel-Lavastine from Paris, Guuart from Lyon, Thaller from Zagreb, Süheyl from Istanbul, and Ali Mihali from Albania.

It is not astonishing that the tandem, Tricot-Royer – Gomoiu, was the most important pivot of this commission, because these two scholars have already published a lot of papers concerning the medical folklore in their respective country, and because they respect each other for many years.

Concerning it, prof. Tricot-Royer had already made a through inquiry upon medical folklore in Belgium (21). He made a distinction, on the one hand between mystical folklore with the invocation of God, the Holy Mary or the Saints specialized in the cure of some illnesses, and on the other hand empiric folklore in which the Belgian popular remedies, originating from the fauna, the flora or of the third kingdom are described. His research works lead him to contact all the parish priests of the whole country, to give him all the useful information of that purpose.

At the beginning of 1936, Gomoiu considered the possibility to create either an International Academy for Medical Sciences, with a special section devoted to medical folklore, or an “Academia Demoiatrica” (Academy for the study of the folklore), independent of the I.S.H.M., but his projects were never realized.

The Romanian physician distinguished 4 categories of folklore:
1. the original or primitive folklore;
2. the altered original folklore either with foreign contribution or with borrowing from scientific medicine;
3. the folklore adapted to the new times;
4. the folklore completely based upon scientific medicine and practised by people without any qualification.

Before being presented to the General Assembly of the I.S.H.M. in 1939, a part of the report of the Cantacuzene Commission has been already published by prof. Tricot-Royer in Brussels:

“The Medical Folklore in the Balkan Area” [20] with a survey of the works of Prof. Süheyl (Turkey), Gomoiu (Romania), Stoianoff (Bulgaria), Ali Mihali (Albania) et Thaller (Yugoslavia).

This last one, prof. Lujo Thaller, would preside in 1938 the XI th Congress of the I.S.H.M., the last one before the Second World War, where two themes were discussed: “The mystical medical folklore “and” Flora, Fauna and Minerals in popular medicine” [16]. During that congress the uni-
ring prof. Gomoiu presented the report of another commission he set up within the I.S.H.M., concerning the teaching of medical history within the different countries of the world [15].

During 10 years, from 1928 on (VIIth congress of the I.S.H.M. in Norway) until 1938 (XIth congress of the I.S.H.M. in Yugoslavia), medical folklore played a preponderant role among the topics dealt with. Even after the Second World War the Romanians continued to show their interest for that subject. In 1970, during the 2 Congress of Bucharest (the 22 of the I.S.H.M.) presided by prof. Bologa, and with Dr Manoliu and Dr Brătescu as general secretaries, “The scientific value of folklore” was one of the main topics [16]. In 2009, at the VIIth Balkanic Congress for the History of Medicine, justice was again done to the popular Romanian Medicine.

**The contribution of Prof. Gomoiu to the study of Medical Folklore**

In the beginning, the members of the Cantacuzene Commission proceeded to make a survey of the folklore material of each respective country. In this paper we limited ourselves to the work of prof. Gomoiu [12].

During all times, the inhabitants of Romania were acquainted with a kind of medicine, as well empiric as religious. Before the arrival of the Romans in Dacia (actually a region in South-East of Europe, on the left bank of the Danube, corresponding to the actual Romania), the inhabitants knew on an empiric way the properties of medicinal plants. About 500 years before Christ, when he conquered all these peoples, Darius already observed the curative properties of many sources in that region. The Romans conquered the country between 101 and 107, and erected many altars and monuments in honour of Aesculapios and Hygia. Dioscorides, physician of Greek descent, accompanied those Roman legions, and studied the specific flora of Dacia, throwing a light upon the medicinal properties of some plants.

On the other way, Gomoiu established that, ignorant the real cause of illness, people attribute it to God, to the devil and to other invisible genies, and the treatment will include incantation and conjuration tricks. Besides it, the Romanian people owns a traditional medicine, deprived of each supernatural element, constituted on one’s own found, increased with scientific contributions. During a: the centuries, original practices and imported ones mingled, but these last ones, either of an empiric or of a scientific nature, were modified or adapted according to the tastes and the preferences from people adopting them. Gomoiu believed that in Romania the medicine with supernatural involvement and empirical medicine play an even important role, but in most of the cases, one is being serving as an assistant to the other. Plenty of examples of the prescience of our modern medicine were given by Gomoiu.

**Conclusion**

The importance of the Study of Medical Folklore didn’t get past the historians of medicine during the decade before the Second World War. The contribution of the I.S.H.M., of her third president Gomoiu and of her founding president Tricot-Royer is far from being negligible. Prof. Gomoiu can be considered as an emblematical and exemplary figure into the study of the History of Medicine, particularly in the study of medical folklore, as well on a national as on an international level.

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