

ANA ASLAN, THE WOMAN WHO DEFEATED TIME

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Abstract: *Encyclopaedias, medical dictionaries, various speciality studies refer to the name of Ana Aslan briefly mentioning: Romanian doctor specialist in gerontology, academician since 1974, manager of The National Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology (1958 - 1988). Behind all these biographical data there is the life of a lady who chose to devote to research and innovation, who, at the beginning of the XXth century, had the courage to propose and apply innovatory methods to bring us closer to the long-craved “youth without old age”. She emphasised the importance of the procaine in the improvement of the dystrophic troubles related to age, applying it at a large scale within the geriatrics clinic, under the name of **Gerovital**. Ana Aslan invented (together with the pharmacist Elena Polovrăgeanu) the geriatric product **Aslavital**, breveted and industrially produced since 1980.*

Key words: *Aslan, Gerovital, Aslavita.*

1. Biographical data.

Ana Aslan was born on January 01st 1897, in Brăila, being the youngest child of the fourth children of a family of intellectuals. The father, Mărgărit Aslan wasted his fortune because of his inability in business and because of his passion for the card games. The mother, Sofia Aslan, 20 years younger than her husband, was a beautiful young woman from Bucovina, with a special education [1].

She attended the courses of “*Romaşcanu*” *College* in her hometown, her childhood being marked by a sad event, namely the death of her father (when she was 13 years old). After this event the Aslan family leaves their hometown and moves to Bucharest.

In 1915, Ana Aslan graduated the

Central School of Bucharest. There was no obstacle that could not be surpassed for Ana Aslan so that at the age of 16, she dreamed of becoming a pilot and even flew a small plane type Bristol - Coandă. Eventually, she decides to become a doctor –, “undesirable” field for the women in that particular time. She declares the hunger strike to fight her mother’s opposition and registers at the *Faculty of Medicine*, attending it between 1915-1922 [2].

2. Professional Activity and Inventions.

Endowed with a generous spirit, during the First World War, she nurses the soldiers within the military hospitals behind the front of Iaşi. She returns to Bucharest where she works together with the well-known neurologist Gheorghe Marinescu (1919). Three years later, she graduated the *Faculty of Medicine*. She was assigned as assistant within Clinic II of Bucharest, managed by

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professor Daniel Danielopolu, who supervised her doctorate thesis.



Fig. no.1. Ana Aslan – source [www.mediafax.ro/...](http://www.mediafax.ro/)

During **1945-1949** she carries out her activity as tenured teacher in the Medical Clinic of Timișoara. In **1949** she becomes the head of the Physiology Section of the Institute of Endocrinology of Bucharest, year marking the beginning of her carrier of gerontologist and of the period when Ana Aslan would change the global approach for gerontology and geriatrics.

She experiments the *procaine* in the rheumatic diseases, in the case of a student bedrid because of a crisis of arthritis. She continues the researches in an old persons centre and she emphasises the importance of procaine in the improvement of the dystrophic troubles related to age. She obtains remarkable results informed to the *Romanian Academy*, whose member she becomes in 1974 [3].

In **1952**, under the management of Ana Aslan, the Geriatrics Institute of Bucharest

is being incorporated, the first one of this kind in the world, whose organization manner was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for all the similar institutes, creating in the same time a new medical specialty - **gerontology** and **geriatrics** - sciences that deal with the study of ageing process and namely the prevention and treatment of all the diseases associated with ageing. [4].

In the same year she prepares **vitamin H3 (Gerovital)** [5], a cream meant for women over 40 years old preventing and treating the ageing phenomenon, being efficient also in the old age diseases such as arteriosclerosis, vitiligo, sclerodermia etc. The product is based on the discovery of the regenerating property of procaine's trophicity applied in the chronic treatment. In **1958**, when she becomes the manager of the National Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology, she begins to prepare the product on a large scale and to introduce it in the pharmaceutical circuit. She emphasised the importance of novocain in the treatment of the dystrophic age-related troubles.



Fig. no.3. National Institute of Geriatrics source www.mediafax.ro/

As she was highly passionate by cardiology, Ana Aslan used *procaine*, a local anaesthetic that has secondary effects such as vasodilatation in the peripheral arterial diseases. The condition of the patients improved so much after having

used the substance that the doctors were amazed. This represented the uniqueness of professor Aslan who, in 1950 stated that ageing could be stopped and the procaine was a rejuvenating factor.

Ana Aslan Geriatrics Institute becomes one of the most well known institutes of this kind in the world, offering solutions in ageing fighting, both from the point of view of the outside appearance and from the point of view of the inside one. Most of the treatments are meant for the people over 40 years old, age when the body starts losing its elasticity and tonicity.



Fig. no.4. Gerovital H3

The patients are assisted by a series of doctors in making the treatment that includes the re-fortification of the muscles of the body, by means of massages and gymnastics, therapy and drugs specific to the age.

Gerovital H3 – the range of products conceived to fight the skin-ageing phenomenon, formula adapted to the various types of skin and to their specific problems. The component elements of the formula play a decisive role in the process of cellular regeneration, in the stimulation of the blood circulation and the normalisation of the sebum secretion. The genius of this formula resides in the fact that the distinguished researcher

approached beauty according to health. The name of the product represents the combination of two words: “gero” coming from Greek and meaning “old” or “powerful” and “vital” that in Latin means “life” [6].

The products created by Ana Aslan are **Gerovital H3 Deluxe** and **Gerovital H3 Regular**.

In **1956** the researcher presented her discoveries at the **European Gerontology Congress of Germany**, where they were regarded with scepticism. Novocain was known until that time only as an anaesthetic used by the stomatologists.

The specialists could not easily accept that this was a fountain of youth. In order to confirm her results, dr. Aslan organizes a wide research program. For two years blood samples were taken from over 15.000 people, all around the country. In this experiment 400 doctors from 140 clinics took part. Some of them received Gerovital and the other ones a placebo, but nobody except the doctors who were giving the drugs knew what he/her was receiving. 40% of the ones who had taken the drug took less sick-leave days. During that period an epidemic flue affected the communist countries. The mortality rate of those who had received the placebo was of 13% and of those who had received Gerovital was of only 2.7%. Gerovital was breveted in over 30 countries, initially being considered a miraculous drug; it has an effect of balance on the vegetative nervous system, with visible improvement effects on various physical diseases.

In **1976**, the researcher is awarded the inventor patent for **Aslavital** (together with the pharmacist Elena Polovrăeanu) efficient product in the therapy of the nervous system and of the cardiovascular system. Aslavital represents the first range of products in the country based on clay; she uses an original concept of preventing and delaying skin aging, emphasizing the

exceptional potential of clay. The concept of anti-aging proposes a complete program of sensitive skin care, having as ingredients clay, rice natural oil, vitamins, extracts of marigold and ginseng. Eight years later (1984), **Aslavital for children** is being homologated, being successful in treating nervous deficiencies.

She creates the concept of "aging prophylaxis" and she is concerned with the elder people abandoned by their families. She refuses to charge the care home taxes for these unfortunate people, audacity costing her 1,500,000 lei, such money being imputed to her by the Party authorities. After seven years of court harassment, she is acquitted. Yet, the acquittal comes rather late, five months before becoming forever a legend. Justice is made far too late, taking into account that the outcome of her researches had brought incomes of 17,000,000 dollars annually, to the state.

Moreover, the reputation of Ana Aslan products stimulates local tourism. Several hotels in the country offer their guests the possibility of undergoing treatments and procedures using Gerovital and Aslavital. These programs – generically called **Ana Aslan Health Spa** – combine the natural environment factors specific to mountain or seaside resorts (the air with intense ionization, the salt water and the saprophilous mud, plants having healing effects) with a multiple of classical procedures. The clients have access to hydrotherapy rooms, massage rooms, facial and body aesthetic care, electro and magnetic therapy, individual kinesitherapy and fitness rooms. The list of the most famous resorts of this type includes Eforie Nord - Astoria Hotel, Europa Hotel - Ana

Aslan Health SPA, Poiana Brasov - Sport Hotel, Bradul Hotel, Poiana Hotel, Bucharest - Athenée Palace Hilton, CrownPlaza.

Personalities such as Charles de Gaulle, Indira Gandhi, Charlie Chaplin, Salvador Dali, Winston Churchill or Pablo Picasso had had treatment with Gerovital in Bucharest.

In time, the reputation of the products and of the treatments offered at Ana Aslan centers attracted numerous celebrities such as Ymma Sumak, Somerset Maugham, Salvador Dali, Charlie Chaplin, Pablo Neruda, Aristotel Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, Indira Gandhi, Marlene Dietrich, Charles de Gaulle, Lilian Gish and Tito.

3. Personal life.

Paradoxically, this special woman who perfectly spoke French, German, Italian who could easily have a conversation in English, Greek, Spanish and Polish, who read the greatest Russian prose writers in the language of Balzac, used to believe fortune tellers. Ana Aslan used to systematically receive in her house of Aviatorilor Boulevard a woman who was telling her fortune using cards or coffee. Some people were certain that the fortune teller was – as many other people who used to come to her house – informers of the Security Services. In the same time, Ana Aslan believed in God who used to permanently have on her an icon of Virgin Mary. Ana Aslan was not only a scientist and a doctor, but also an extraordinary woman. Among her patients there were kings, presidents of states, heads of the secret services, actors and simple earthlings. Otherwise, she avoided doctors

all her life, having troubles in letting herself on their hands, as she was her own doctor. She hardly accepted being operated of colon cancer by professor Setlacec, at Elias Hospital. A surgery is performed on her and when they thought they made it, as it was incipient colon cancer, less aggressive in elder people, the final act occurred. A new surgery is proceeded because of an infection with *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* taken from the hospital, but the infection had already seized the entire abdomen.

On Thursday, May 19th 1988 Ana Aslan died at Elias Hospital. Elena Ceausescu refused to make her last wishes come true: funerals with a priest, together with her mother and brother, in Kalindero-Danielopolu crypt and she is buried in Bellu Orthodox Cemetery without a priest and without candles.

On the Internet, at the address GERO Vital Web Site, a totally different version of the death of the savant is launched - in Portuguese. Mysterious sources assert that she died in suspect circumstances and that some historians conform that she had been assassinated by the Security Services. It is asserted that investigations have never been made related to this issue.

The international fame and the numerous distinctions granted to her, the number and rank of the patients in the political, scientific and artistic sphere all over the world include Ana Aslan in the constellation of the most well-known world personalities who "moved" the Universe. No doubt that she was the most interesting medical personality living before 1989 in Romania.

"Being forever young does not mean being 20 years old. It means being optimistic, feeling good, having an ideal to fight for and reaching this ideal." (Ana Aslan)

4. Titles. Prizes and Distinctions.

The geriatric researches and the development of Gerovital H3 formula brought Ana Aslan the quality of honor member in numerous medical societies and organizations, thus becoming one of the most important Romanian researchers. Consequently she was a member of several societies [7]:

- Member of the *Academy of Sciences*, of New York;
- Member of the *World Union of Prophylactic Medicine and Social Hygiene*;
- Honor Member of the *European Center of Applicative Medical Researches*;
- Member of the *Board of Directors of the Gerontology International Association*;
- Member of the *National Society of Gerontology* of Chile;
- President of the *Romanian Society of Gerontology*.
- Her activity was crowned with numerous Prizes and distinctions:
- "*Leon Bernard*" international prize and medal, prestigious distinction awarded by the *World Health Organization*, for the contribution brought to the development of gerontology and geriatrics, 1952;
- *Merito della Repubblica*, Italia;
- *Cavalier de L'Ordre Palmas Academica*, France ;
- *Honoris Causa Professor and Doctor Emeritus* of *Braganza Paulista University*, of Brazil;
- *Commemorative Gold Medal*, Nicaragua, 1971;
- *Merit Cross, Class I*, Germany, 1971;
- *Hero of the Socialist Work*, Romania, 1971;
- "*Augusto Pinaud*" Medal, Venezuela, 1972;

- *Knight of the New Europe, Oscar Prize*, Italy, 1973;
- *"Eva" International Prize*, Italy, 1974;
- *Commander degree in the Order "De Orange Nassau"*, Holland, 1975;
- *"L'Ordre du Merite" in the rank of Grand Officer*, Senegal, 1976;
- *"Dag Hamarskjoeld" Prize*, 1977;
- *"Dama di Collare Del Santo Graal"*, Nice, 1978;
- *Citizen of Honor and Sciences Honorific Professor*, Philippines, 1978 etc.

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