

An underrated personality of the Cluj School of Pathology: Alexandru Șerban (1920–1977)

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Abstract

The Romanian School of Pathology from Cluj has an important prestige, well known in Romania and abroad. It was founded in the same year with the Romanian Faculty of Medicine from the same City. The founder of the School of Pathology was Victor Babeș (1854–1926). In 1920, his role was continued by his remarkable pupil Titu Vasiliu (1885–1961). Unfortunately, a personality of this School of Pathology rarely mentioned is Alexandru Șerban (1920–1977). He was pupil of T. Vasiliu and he led the Department of Pathology from the Cluj Faculty of Medicine between 1973 and 1977. The purpose of our paper is to put into evidence his contributions in the development of pathology in Cluj and in Romania. We mention some data about his life. Thus, we pay an homage to his memory.

Keywords: Alexandru Șerban, underrated personality, the tradition of pathology from Cluj.

Motto: "You do not know something better than long time after you learn it".

JOSEPH JOUBERT (1754–1824)

Introduction

The *motto* of our paper wants to point out that a thing must be known in different ways: first of all in a general view, secondary in a detailed way. For reaching the second way, it needs time.

Regarding history of morphological sciences from Cluj, there are different ways of writing it: the main achievements, the personalities, the evolution of different concepts, etc. Unfortunately, rarely is time enough (or interest) to do research about underrated personalities. Of course, some might ask the question: are underrated personalities capable of being interesting for the nowadays readers? The answer is the following: it depends. The problem is why some personalities become in time underrated ones. One argument is that the merits of one personality can be important, but those of another personality can be more important, or having a bigger social impact. Another reason is that the life of a personality can be too restricted, thus having not enough time to put into evidence all his qualities or to fulfill many projects: scientific, didactic, etc. It can be also another reason: the limited interests for paying an homage for a personality of the past.

The Romanian School of Pathology from Cluj has an important prestige, well known in Romania and abroad. It was founded in the same year with the Romanian Faculty of Medicine from the same City. The founder of the School of Pathology was Victor Babeș (1854–1926). In 1920, his role was continued by his remarkable pupil Titu Vasiliu (1885–1961) [1]. It is useful to mention that a School of Pathology in Cluj existed during the period

of the Hungarian Faculty of Medicine, between 1872 and 1919.

In the history of the Romanian School of Pathology from Cluj, an underrated personality was Alexandru Șerban (1920–1977).

He was member of the third generation of professors of the Romanian Faculty of Medicine from Cluj. His colleagues were: the dermatologist Iuliu Căpușan (1918–1991), the surgeon Eugen Cosma (1918–1980), the pathologist Victor V. Papilian (1920–1982), the anatomist Ioan Albu (1920–2012), etc.

Short biographical note

Alexandru Șerban was born in Dorohoi, July 27, 1920.

He graduated the National High School in Jassy, in 1939. In the same year, he was registered at the Cluj Faculty of Medicine. In 1940, Alexandru Șerban followed the Faculty during the refuge in Sibiu and returned in Cluj in 1945. He had the chance of having remarkable professors, such as: Victor Papilian (1885–1959) – at Anatomy, Ioan Drăgoiu (1878–1941) – at Histology, Titu Vasiliu (1885–1961) – at Pathology, Dimitrie Negru (1883–1955) – at Radiology, Iuliu Moldovan (1882–1966) – at Hygiene, Grigore Benetato (1905–1972) – at Physiology, Alexandru Pop (1895–1954) – at Surgery, Iuliu Hațieganu (1885–1959) – at Internal Medicine and Valeriu Bologa (1892–1971) – at History of Medicine.

Al. Șerban was appreciated by many of his professors. Titu Vasiliu initiated him in the morphological researches. Thus, being student in the fifth year, Al. Șerban began his teaching career as Junior Pathologist at the Department

of Pathology of the Faculty of Medicine from Cluj, under the leadership of Professor Titu Vasiliu. For Al. Șerban, his master – Prof. Titu Vasiliu – was the highest example of erudite professor, having outstanding didactic, scientific and human qualities [2].

Al. Șerban graduated the Faculty of Medicine from Cluj in 1944. In 1945, he took his license, receiving his PhD in medicine and surgery. Al. Șerban learned from T. Vasiliu the anatomical and clinical manner of analyzing the pathological processes.



Alexandru Șerban (1920–1977), Associate Professor, MD, PhD.

In 1948, Prof. Titu Vasiliu retired. In the same year, Professor Rubin Popa (1901–1958) became the chief of the Department of Pathology. He led this Department between 1948 and 1958. For Al. Șerban, Professor R. Popa was a real model of perseverance in achieving the scientific research. Thus, Al. Șerban wrote that Rubin Popa had “a clear and well ordered thought, a beautiful, fluent, natural language, a faculty to express simply the most complex problems, qualities attracting the admiration, even the veneration of his disciple and his auditory” [3].

Under Rubin Popa’s leadership, in 1948, Al. Șerban was promoted Assistant Professor.



Anatomic Building of the Cluj Faculty of Medicine, cca. 1960.

☞ Scientific contributions

Since 1948, Al. Șerban started to be very much involved in the Department’s researches. In 1950, he was promoted Lecturer by R. Popa. In the same year, Al. Șerban wrote the chapter about developmental disorders in the first volume of the Department’s course of pathology, entitled “Notes of Pathology”, Rubin Popa being its editor. In the second volume, published in 1951 and coordinated by the same professor, Al. Șerban wrote four chapters concerning

respiratory diseases, skin diseases, pathology of the reticuloendothelial system and diseases of female genitalia, breast and pregnancy [4].

In that period, Al. Șerban performed a very ample didactic and scientific activity.

After the premature death of Prof. Rubin Popa, the Department of Pathology was supplied by Associate Professor Valentina Dachnovici (between 1959 and 1960). She was the Head of the Department of Parasitology [5].

Although Al. Șerban continued to develop a very remarkable teaching and laboratory work, his professional ascent was delayed, due to the so-called “bourgeois origin”.

In 1960, Professor Augustin Mureșan (1908–1985) took over the Department of Pathology leadership. In 1967, he helped Al. Șerban to become Associate Professor.

After Mureșan retirement in 1973, Al. Șerban led the Department of Pathology having the position of Associate Professor. He coordinated the activity of this Department from 1973 until his early death in 1977.

Alexandru Șerban was never promoted to the Professor position, although he had a professional and human value that should have been honored for this academic function.

He wrote a large number of scientific works: 82 were published and 110 were communicated. His major research topics were: cancerous disease, infectious disease, experimental tuberculosis, sepsis, histochemistry of endocrine glands, collagen diseases, peptic ulcer disease, cardiopathies and occupational disease. At the end of his life, he made major contributions in lung diseases [6].

One of his most remarkable papers was entitled “Contributions to the study of the muscular lesions in certain cardiovascular disease and collagenoses” (1963), the other co-authors being A. Mureșan, M. Morar and E. Diaconu.

Alexandru Șerban’s scientific interest included biometeorology. He studied the factors which influence the worsening heart disease and the production of deaths caused by weather variations [7].

While he led the Department of Pathology, Al. Șerban wrote “Oral pathology” – course for students in dentistry (1973), “General pathology” – lectures for students in general medicine (1974) and “Special pathology” – also lectures for students in general medicine. For this third volume of lectures, his co-workers were Ioan Călușer, Petre Florescu, Virgil Gădălean, Monica Matei and Mariana Olteanu.

Alexandru Șerban remained in the memory of those who knew him as a devoted pathologist, an experienced professor, an endorsed researcher and a man of great integrity.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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