

LULIU BARASCH, *Medicină de pionierat în Țara Românească: biografie și restituiri medico-istorice* [Pioneering medicine in Wallachia: biography and medical-historical restorations], trans. and ed. Lidia Trăușan-Matu (Bucharest: Corint Books, 2023)

Fundamentally, this book would not have existed were it not for the existence of two characters: the one who writes – Lidia Trăușan-Matu, and the one about whom it is written – Iuliu Barasch. Lidia Trăușan-Matu is the most renowned medicine historian in Wallachia, for the first half of the 19th century. The greater part of her research endeavours was dedicated to this subject: her PhD thesis that she subsequently published – *De la leac la rețetă. Medicalizarea societății românești în veacul al XIX-lea (1831-1869)* [From cure to prescription. The medicalisation of the Romanian society in the 19th century (1831-1869)] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011) –, and numerous studies and monographic works dedicated to several important physicians of their time: Apostol Arsache – Ștefan Petrescu, Lidia Trăușan-Matu, *Apostol Arsachi (c. 1792-1874) medic, om politic și everghet* [Apostol Arsachi (1792-1874), physician, politician, humanitarian] (Bucharest: Omonia, 2023) –, and Iuliu Barasch. His texts are crucial to any approach of the Wallachia medicine up to 1860.

The two aforementioned biographies are dedicated to foreign physicians: one of Greek origins and the other is Jewish. This is a perfectly normal situation for the first half of the century, given that most of the physicians were foreigners. In fact, the creator of the modern medical system in the Romanian Principalities himself, Carol Davila, is also a foreigner.

With the exception of Iacob Felix, who also has Jewish origins but carefully concealed them when he arrived in the Principalities, Iuliu Barasch is the second 19th-century physician to receive some attention in Romanian historiography. At end of the 19th century, E. Schwarzfild publishes the recounts of Iuliu Barasch's 1841-1842 journeys in Galicia, Bukovina, Moldavia and Wallachia – *Itinerar în Cracovia, Galiția, Bucovina, Moldova și Muntenia în 1841-1842* [An itinerary in Cracow, Galitia, Bukovina, Moldavia and Muntenia in 1841-1842] (Bucharest: Ed. Egalitatea, 1894) –, and, after World War I, Moses Schwarzfild publishes an edition of selected writings – Moses Schwarzfild, *Dr. Iuliu Barasch: iunie 1815-30 iunie 1863. Omul, opera, bucăți alese din operele sale* [Dr. Iuliu Barasch: June 1815 – June 1863. The man, the work, selected writings] (Bucharest: Editura Cercului "Libertatea", 1919). A new volume, published much more recently, was Irinel Petrescu, Lucian-Zeev Herșcovici (eds.), *Iuliu Barasch: un iluminist în Țara Românească* [Iuliu Barasch: an Enlightenment scholar in Wallachia] (Bucharest: RAO, 2022). What exactly makes this particular physician stand out? Moreover, why have more works been written about him than about Iacob Felix, who had actually risen to the very top of the Romanian medical hierarchy? It is rather difficult to pinpoint the origins of the fascination for Iuliu Barasch, but it is undeniable, nonetheless. Could it have been fuelled by his tragic

destiny? Or his perseverance in keeping his mosaic religion in a society that was increasingly more hostile towards Jewish people?

Iuliu Barasch was born in 1815. He studies in Berlin and, in 1841, he obtains the title of Doctor of Medicine and Surgery. He decides, apparently at the suggestion of his family, to try his luck in Moldavia, but as the notes of his journey show, Moldavia of that era was not exactly an idyllic place for Jews, so he crosses into the neighbouring country and will settle permanently in Wallachia. It would appear that, here, his career was not affected by the fact that he was Jewish: he first became a quarantine doctor in Călărași, after which he became the primary physician of the Dolj district. In 1851, he became a natural history teacher at the “St. Sava” National School in Bucharest and, in 1855, he was the primary physician of a Bucharest district. He dies in 1863, at the age of only 48. He witnessed only the early stages of the worsening of the “Jewish issue” in Romania. Had he continued to live, things would not have been easy for him, given that he was one of the leaders of the movement for the political emancipation of Jews in the Principalities.

The present volume actually contains two of the texts published by Iuliu Barasch in the press of that time. The first recounts his 1841-1842 journey through Galicia, Bukovina, Moldavia and Wallachia and it was published in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* between 1843 and 1845. This text had already been translated and published, as mentioned above, at the end of the 19th century. It is reproduced in the present volume as well, so it represents a republication of an old text that had previously been accessible only in the great libraries of university cities. The second text is also from a serial publication – this time a medical journal, *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*. In this journal, between 1854-1855, Iuliu Barasch publishes 13 contributions to the knowledge on the “medical-endemic” situation in Wallachia. The texts compile a true medical topography of Wallachia in the mid-19th century. These texts had been partially known only by a small number of scholars and they are now translated and published in their entirety for the first time, in Romanian. This is the present work’s main merit, in addition to the highly dense introductory study written by Lidia Lidia Trăușan-Matu. It is, however, somewhat inappropriate to refer to her text as a mere introduction. The text titled *Portretul doctorului Iuliu Barasch (1815-1863). Biografie, medicină și istorie* [The portrait of doctor Iuliu Barasch (1815-1863). Biography, medicine and history] is a scholarly work in itself. In its over 60 pages, Lidia Trăușan-Matu goes beyond merely rendering a biography of the physician. She actually somewhat literally retraces his footsteps throughout his life: she finds him in the documents of the “Friedrich-Wilhelms” University in Berlin, she travels to Călărași and Craiova, seeking and finding, particularly in the archives, the traces left by his medical practice and personal life. In addition, the work contains a vast bibliography of the 19th-century Romanian medicine, in which the author is very well-versed.

Regarding the two texts published in the volume under scrutiny, the first is a description of the itinerary of the young physician upon his arrival in the Principalities, immediately after having graduated from the university. His journey takes him through Galicia, Bukovina, Moldavia and, ultimately, in Wallachia. It mostly depicts the Jewish communities from the larger villages and towns through which he passes, in addition to the description of

the general circumstances of the Jews in the provinces he crosses. He focuses particularly on the Jews' way of life, their education (especially their religious education) and the way in which modernisation had impacted these communities. Naturally, he takes the side of modernisation and, implicitly, that of integrating the Jews into the societies within which they lived. I shall highlight the more interesting aspects that emerged from this journey memoir, beginning with the Principalities. First, Moldavia, which is evidently not to Dr. Barasch's liking; and understandably so: here he does not receive the right to practice freely, despite being a licensed physician in Berlin. Iași, in particular, seems repugnant to him, and he describes it in memorable colours: "It is seemingly a big city, with narrow, filthy streets, houses that, instead of being symmetrical on both sides of the street, form a motley mixture of enormous palaces (of which we can only see the stone walls of their gardens) and forsaken holes in the ground called hovels, which the Germans would not even use as pigsties. It is also riddled with all manner of stalls and huts where the proprietors carry out their crafts in their open doors. Thus, for instance, you can see half naked bakers battering the dough with their feet in front of their ovens (...). Nearby, from afar, you can see a noble chariot approaching at full tilt, carrying its precious cargo, while gipsies run alongside it, literally naked. It is thus difficult to prove that these two creatures descend from *Homo sapiens L*, given that they are as different from each other as the camel is to the sloth."¹ This a rather typical description made by a western traveller who sees the eastern Moldavian/Wallachian lands for the first time. This description also, rather inevitably, included a recount of the hideous manifestation of local justice, in which the unfortunate convict, to the sound of a drum, is paraded through the entire city and beaten with bundles of wicker at every crossroads. Although the relations between Jews and locals seem good, especially at that time, due to the wise governance of Mihail Sturdza, the description is nevertheless saturated with the fears that haunt the Jewish community in Moldavia: there were rumours of great merchants or money lenders who had visited the great boyar courts on business and never returned; there had been heinous crimes committed

¹ Iuliu Barasch, *Medicină de pionierat în Țara Românească: biografie și restituiri medico-istorice* [Pioneering medicine in Wallachia: biography and medical-historical restorations], trans. and ed. Lidia Trăușan-Matu (Bucharest: Corint Books, 2023), 228. Original text: "El ne prezintă aspectul unui oraș mare, cu ulițe strâmte și murdare, casele în loc de a fi simetrice pe ambele părți ale străzii formează un amestec pestriț de palate enorme din care nu vezi decât zidul de piatră al curții, de gropi subpământene numite bordeie, pe care nemții nu le-ar întrebuița nici chiar ca staule de porci, de tot soiul de dughenițe și maghernițe, unde proprietarii își săvârșesc meșteșugul cu ușile deschise. Așa, de pildă vezi niște brutari pe jumătate goi care frământă pâinea cu picioarele în fața cuptorului (...) Alături cu acestea, zărești din depărtare o trăsură de gală, care sosește în galop cu prețioasa-i povară, în vreme ce alături de ea aleargă niște țigani goi, în sensul literal al cuvântului, așa că-ți vine greu să dovedești că aceste două creaturi s-ar coborî din *Homo sapiens L*, fiind deosebite una de alta precum cămila de leneș." If not marked otherwise, all quotes from the book under scrutiny have been translated by the translator of the present book review – A.C.

against the Jews, for all manner of reasons, by instigators and perpetrators whom everyone knew, but who continued to walk freely without a care in the world. Many other such acts prove that “the average Moldavian does not regard the murder of a Jew as anything more than a minor sin or even a non-existent sin.”² Consequently, Moldavia does not seem like a good place to live for a Jew, regardless of his education. The situation in Wallachia does seem much different. Here, through hard work, doctor Barasch does indeed manage to make a life for himself. In 1845, the future seems much brighter, viewed from Bucharest, rather than from Iasi. In Muntenia, the Spanish Jewish community is socially integrated and has full rights. Up to that point in time, it had been even able to buy lands and, therefore, doctor Barasch could rightfully believe that the future would not be bleak: “there are at least half a dozen tolerated religions in this country and their followers are emancipated; why would the Jews not become emancipated as well?”³ Unfortunately, for the Jews, doctor Barasch’s common sense question, together with an equally natural hope, would prove utopian: the Romanian nationalism, particularly after the Union, would go hand in hand with what would later be called antisemitism. Iuliu Barasch did not know that, in 1845, the period of tolerance for the Jews in the Principalities was about to end.

The second text, the medical topography of the Wallachia, is extremely interesting, as part of the history of 19th-century Romanian medicine and as it reflects the relations between scholarly medicine and traditional healing. This is the age in which the knowledge of the peasant healers is not yet unconditionally rejected by the doctor of the quarantine in Călărași or of the district of Dolj. Quite the opposite, given that Iuliu Barasch seems rather avid of the healing practices used by the peasants in Muntenia. For instance, in the case anthrax (known locally as *dalac*), the physician notes the existence, in several villages, of certain characters specialised in curing this disease through “local cauterization with red-hot iron or nitric acid”; and in the early stages of the disease, these same peasant healers diagnose the illness accurately by “the involuntary tendency to sleep, which the patient feels from the first onset of the disease.”⁴ Naturally, Iuliu Barasch is interested in the traditional healing methods, which he documents assiduously, and he states that he could extensively cover the subject of the “sympathetic antifebrile cures” from “the traditional Wallachian medicine,”⁵ but he does not do so simply because of the editorial space limitations. He does, however, offer two examples of people cured of fever, which he had “seen with his own eyes,” thus making the recounts completely believable: the first was an elderly female patient who had been sick for 18 months and had been treated using the classic remedy – quinine – with no results. She then “goes to

² Ibid., 236. Original text: “moldoveanul nu privește omorul unui evreu decât ca pe un păcat puțin grav sau un păcat neexistent.”

³ Original text: “găsești doar în această țară cel puțin o jumătate de duzină de religii tolerate și pe adepții lor emancipați; de ce să nu fie emancipați și evreii?”

⁴ Ibid., 282. Original texts: “cauterizarea locală cu fier incandescent sau cu acid nitric,” “tendința involuntară de a dormi, pe care bolnavul o simte începând de la prima apariție a bolii.”

⁵ Ibid., 310-311. Original texts: “leacurile antifebrile «simpatetice»,” “medicina populară valahă.”

church, where, at the onset of the crisis, she is washed with holy water (deemed to be highly miraculous, due to the presence of St. Dimitri's remains in that church) on her forehead and spine, and the fever disappears."⁶ The second example also involves a woman who had been ill with a fever for a long time. She is thus advised to "walk barefoot one early September morning in a faraway garden and to pour over her naked body enchanted water that had been left outside the entire previous night. She follows the advice and is thus cured of fever."⁷ These miraculous healings undoubtedly also reflect the basic principles of traditional magical medicine, in which Iuliu Barasch seems to believe to some extent. Perhaps because immediately upon arriving in Wallachia, he falls ill with a fever, which he treats by the book, meaning with quinine, but his overall state seems to only temporarily alleviate. In desperation and "tired of taking quinine," he tries "folk remedies in order to test the vaunted effectiveness of these remedies on myself. I thus resorted to various emetics and nausea-inducing substances, but to no avail."⁸ Thus, the empirical remedies of the folk medicine also have their limits. Regardless, doctor Barasch's text is extremely interesting, from the viewpoint of the history of the (high) medicine of the 19th century and especially of the history of folk medicine of that time. The medical topography of Wallachia is replete with recounts of folk healing methods, traditional representations of diseases, and the means by which rural communities interact with major epidemiological threats, such as cholera outbreaks.

In conclusion, this volume, by bringing back into circulation texts from the mid-19th century, as well as through the excellently written and well-documented introductory study, is open to all readers interested in 19th-century Romanian history.

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⁶ Ibid., 311. Original text: "ea se duce atunci la biserică, unde e spălată în momentul declanșării crizei cu apă sfințită (socotită ca deosebit de miraculoasă, datorită prezenței rămășițelor Sf. Dumitru în acea biserică) pe frunte și șira spinării și febra dispare."

⁷ Ibid., 311. Original text: "să mergă desculță într-o dimineață de septembrie devreme într-o grădină îndepărtată, unde trebuia să verse peste corpul ei gol apă descântată, care a rămas afară toată noaptea. Ea urmează sfatul și e vindecată de febră."

⁸ Ibid., 301. Original text: "leacuri populare pentru a încerca pe mine eficacitatea preamărită a acestor remedii. Am recurs astfel la diferite emetice și substanțe producătoare de greață însă fără succes."