

RIVISTA DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI ANTROPOLOGIA MEDICA  
FONDATA DA TULLIO SEPPILLI



*In copertina: Buddha della medicina, Buddha di guarigione. Pittura su cotone tibetana / Pittura sacra di Thangka per la meditazione e la buona fortuna in salute, 1700 circa (The Art Institute of Chicago).*



Il logo della Società italiana di antropologia medica, qui riprodotto, costituisce la elaborazione grafica di un ideogramma cinese molto antico che ha via via assunto il significato di “longevità”, risultato di una vita consapevolmente condotta lungo una ininterrotta via di armonia e di equilibrio.



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# AM

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## *Editoriale di AM 58*

**Giovanni Pizza**

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Questo numero 58 è miscelaneo.

Pubblichiamo sette ricerche: Ylenia Baldanza sulle comunità trans online, Amalia Campagna sulla psichiatria forense, Federico Divino che prova ad applicare la nozione demartiniana di “presenza” al buddismo, Elena Fusar Poli sul Covid-19 a Oaxaca in Messico, Rosanna Gullà che studia la sclerosi multipla, Ilaria E. Lesmo sulla sicurezza dei vaccini pediatrici in Italia, Federica Manfredi che osserva il dolore e i suoi significati simbolici nel caso delle sospensioni del corpo attraverso ganci metallici inseriti nella pelle.

Seguono le recensioni di testi.

Nel complesso abbiamo una nuova testimonianza della vitalità dell’antropologia medica, che effettivamente è tra le specializzazioni dell’antropologia italiana maggiormente sperimentali.

Buona lettura!



## *Physicians Travelling to Eastern Europe*

Elena Barbulescu  
Universitatea Babeş Bolyai

**Lidia Trăușan-Matu, Iuliu Barasch. *Medicină de pionierat în Țara Românească* [Iuliu Barasch. *Pioneering Medicine in Wallachia*], Corinth, Bucharest 2023, 364 pp.**

Like the editor of this volume, my intention to read it and then review it also stems from the interest stirred by the subject that constitutes the third part of the volume: *Contribution to the Knowledge of the Medico-Endemic Situation in Wallachia*. On this occasion, however, I was offered an interesting, pleasant and informative reading not only about medical aspects (exposed to the smallest details) but also about «historical, anthropological, cultural studies or, why not, of human geography» (p. 5) as Alin Ciupală summarizes very well in the introduction of the volume.

The book contains three parts, each focused on a topic related to the life and work of Dr. Iuliu Barasch. The first part gives us a detailed biography of Dr. Iuliu Barasch. Divided into six chapters, in each of them, the publisher presents one side of the doctor's personality: a short biography, where he was born, where he studied, what he studied, who he married, then his activity as a doctor in three localities: Călărași, Craiova, Bucharest, each corresponding to a particular medical reality. Thus, in Călărași Iuliu Barasch is a «quarantine doctor». We thus find out what quarantine entails in general, the difficulties and especially the personal success that our doctor has in keeping the epidemic beyond the Danube. He is a «county doctor» in Craiova. Here the editor describes in detail the medical situation of the county that Iuliu Barasch takes care of, also explaining the two theories of the spread of diseases: the miasmatic and the contagious theory, our doctor being more inclined towards the miasmatic one. His activity and the measures he took against cholera, typhus, and smallpox epidemics, which periodically «swept» the county's villages, are also described here. Further on, in this part we learn about Iuliu Barasch's support for vaccinations, but also about the connections he made between the living and working condi-

tions of the workers and their illnesses, or that he is the one who established the first children's hospital in Wallachia:

Regarding the children, I have already said, Barasch was very sensitive to their sufferings, and in order to ease their pain, he established in Bucharest, in 1858, in his "big house" on Dudești Street, the "Crucea de piatra slum, no. 42" the first children's hospital in Wallachia. [...] He planned it as a charitable institution for "sick children, born to poor parents", with a capacity of "up to forty children" with "rooms" for mothers and nannies, separated from those of the children, and with a consultation room, where the "heartly doctors of the capital" can "give prescriptions and even free remedies for the sick children of the poor, who will be brought to the hospital during certain consultation hours" (p. 72).

In Bucharest, we find Barasch as a professor of natural sciences at the National School "St. Sava", position occupied as a direct result of the publication in 1850 of the work *Minunile Naturei. Conversations on the Special Interesting Objects from the Natural Sciences, Physics, Chemistry and Astronomy*, (Iosef and Iancu Mofci Typography, Craiova), about which the editor Lidia Trășan-Matu tells us:

read today, *Nature's Wonders* reflects the encyclopedic interests of the author and illustrates how a scientist (doctor, in this case) can contribute to a discipline by taking ideas and knowledge from fields adjacent to his profession (physics, chemistry, botany, astronomy, mathematics) and by adapting them to his own field of expertise (p. 65).

It is the period when, in addition to teaching, an activity that brings him well-deserved prestige, Barasch devotes himself even more to writing:

Besides the *Wonders of Nature*, Iuliu Barasch is the author of a number of three school textbooks (two own contributions and one translation) and a philosophical encyclopedias, a course on "popular hygiene", a travel diary, a study on the types of philanthropic establishments in Europe; he also signed two popularization brochures, a series of thirteen letters about the "medical-endemic situation in Valachia" published in several issues of the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, but also numerous articles on subjects ranging from biographies, politics and domestic economy to hygiene, law, social history and the history of science, published in the Romanian and foreign press (p. 69).

During this period, he was also appointed a doctor at the "blue neighborhood" where he was supposed to

provide primary health care services daily (for "two hours throughout the day") at the district office, that is, to vaccinate "all the children and other people who will be in such need", to "examine one by one all the sick who will appear there" and write them prescriptions with the "necessary doctors" (*Ibidem*).

His activity as a journalist is also related to the Bucharest period, publishing regularly in the *Official Gazette*, *Revista Carpatilor*, *Românul*, *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, and in 1856 he founded the magazine *Isis*, renamed *Natura* starting with 1861 and which ceased publication in 1865. The profile of the magazine has been natural sciences. The other editorial project was *Israelitul Român*, in which his articles campaign for the civil and political rights of the Jews in Wallachia.

The second part of the book deals with the itinerary of our doctor in Krakow, Galicia, Bucovina, Moldova and Muntenia between 1841 and 1842 and is represented by the texts translated and prefaced by Elias Schwarzfeld, in the care and with the notes of the editor Lidia Trășan-Matu. The most consistent part is the one about Galicia and then the one about Muntenia, as if thus emphasizing two locations dear to his soul: the one where he was raised and educated and the one where he lived his life and practiced medicine. Thus Iuliu Barasch tells us why he chose to write: «What prompted me to put these impressions on paper is that I really have something to say [...] And who wants to be silent these days when they have something to say?» (p. 94).

Barasch not only has “something to say” but he tells us in as much detail as possible: about the poor Jewish quarter in Krakow (Kazimir), about the business that is in the hands of the Jews, about the “culturalization” of the Jews and the importance of the school, about how weddings are made and about misalliances, about the too young age at which Jews marry their children, about his admiration for the city of Brody, which he considers «a rather succesul model of a well-organized Jewish commercial state» (p. 151), and much more. Noteworthy is the fine irony with which he describes the things he does not like, such as the description of the synagogue in Chernivtsi, but also the pages with dense description and comparisons between the Spanish Jews of Wallachia and the Polish Jews. Charming pages about the role and image of the woman among the Spanish Jews – a housewife and among the Poles – active and running the trade alongside her husband. Also here we have pages that praise the government of Muntenia for its favorable attitude (laws) towards the Jews.

The third part is divided into thirteen chapters, corresponding to the articles sent to the aforementioned Viennese publication. The first gives us an overview of Wallachia between 1842 and 1855. Chapters 2-8 deal with diseases and epidemics of cholera, malaria, tuberculosis, scrofulosis and syphilis. His writing has a surgical precision: he describes with luxurious

detail the evolution of each disease, the difference between vaccination and inoculation. In the way he describes the diseases and treatment methods, one can see the attention given to a reader with medical studies. In any case, as a lecturer, you feel carried through the whole illness-healing process, especially when Barasch tells about his own malaria illness. We learn from him what is the relationship between food and cholera, the role of psychology in the disease/epidemic, the connection between malaria and tuberculosis, between clothing and disease, between civilization and mental illness, about phytotherapeutic and empirical-peasant remedies, which he reports with understanding and empathy even if from his point of view they have not proven their effectiveness. He also tells us about the *water of life*, in fact about the therapeutic value that the peasants give to brandy, but also about the diet of the Romanian peasant, subjects that can be of real interest for the ethnologist interested in empirical cures, as well as the short passage in which he explains fatalism of the Romanian peasant, and which prevents the latter from having a better coordination in order to prevent epizootics.

The last chapter is largely a *laudatio* for Wallachia. Iuliu Barasch actually admires the speed with which the Romanians here have imitated the West/Occident (foreignness). It begins with considerations about clothing – the replacement of Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Jewish (Spanish) national costumes, like at a masked ball with an extraordinary variety, with European clothing –

the redingota, the joben, the hard hat and the other necessities from French fashion magazines. Then the change of the place itself: “Not only man, but also the land that supports and nourishes him has undergone radical transformations. Thirty years ago, there was almost no agriculture in Wallachia. The land was insecure under the attack of the barbarians and the plague [...] Now everything has changed [...] The country orients itself for a progressive flowering that has already begun. [...] The inhabitants fit for European customs, but what is more important is the cultural road, which naturally unites Western Europe with Eastern Europe. I think of the Danube, of this great river, in which the life of Germany pulsates” (pp. 340-342).

And with this apotheotical ending, what was seen throughout his writings, a deep admiration for Germany, is very clear. It is a book that invites you to read it, beautifully written and very carefully edited by Mrs. Lidia Trăușan-Matu, who, like the central character, Dr. Iuliu Barasch, pays attention to the details, as we could see, for example, when she explains the miasmatic and contagious theories, or when she makes a short biography of the persons/personalities mentioned by the Author.

