

A Brief Summary of the Military Hospital in Craiova from its foundation until 1916

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Abstract

The Romanian military hospitals, also called lazaretto, appeared in close relation with the organization of the military force. The first quarter of the lazaretto in Craiova was in the houses of boyar Priscoveanu. During the period of time between 1833-1840, the Military hospital in Craiova was installed in various buildings in the city, such as the houses of the church Sfanta Troita or the rooms of boyar Iancu Gradisteanu. Starting from 1864, the Military Hospital in Craiova became a division hospital. In 1881 the new quarter of the Military Hospital was built by the Ministry of War in Caracal, a district in Craiova, being formed of several pavilions following the English pattern. Because of the new reorganization of the army, in 1883 the territorial divisions were turned into Corps of Army and the residence military hospitals received the title of Hospitals for Army Corps, being under the authority of the chief physician of the Army Corps.

Key words: lazaretto, military hospital, Craiova, army, physicians.

Introduction

The sanitary military units and the sanitary military department were founded later in Romania because of the historical and political events.

In 1803, by a decision of Constantin A. Ipsilanti, the ruler of Wallachia, the *Infirmery for Pandours* was founded, nearby the monastery *Mihai Voda*, in Bucharest, but it functioned only temporarily (Dinu, 2014: 221). In Bucharest, Coltea Hospital was occupied by Russians in 1810 (Felix, 1902: 46), who turned it into a military hospital.

The attempt to raise an army in 1803 failed. Only in 1830, after the Treaty of Adrianople, in every Principality an army and corresponding hospitals were created. At the same time, several military hospitals functioned periodically and temporary in the country, for the foreign occupying forces or for the wounded in the wars between the Great powers, such as the Crimean War between 1853-1856.

In Craiova, during the Russian- Turkish war from 1806-1812, several military hospitals were founded, among which one in the houses of boyar Nicolae Glogoveanu, where it functioned for four years (Dinu, 2014: 222). Other Russian military hospitals functioned in Craiova between 1828-1829, as a consequence of a new Russian-Turkish war and of a plague epidemic, brought by the Turkish prisoners in 1828. These hospitals were founded in the larger houses of the boyars and merchants from Craiova, namely in the houses of Ganescu, Nicolae Glogoveanu, Almagencei and in Dumba's inn (Demetrescu, 1924: 324).

On March 4th 1832 there was a lazaretto in Craiova that treated the army members. Besides it, an officer hospital is mentioned in documents and it had a great contribution to the health of the military and the civil population in the area (Lupașcu, 1982: 2). The exact date of using this hospital for the first time was not specified, but it could not have been later than August 1831, as it results from the request of the commander of the Third Regiment in Craiova, sent to the Chancellery of the Major State of the Army, regarding the payment of Andrei Schwale, a pharmacist in Craiova, for the debts gathered within the last four months. In this request, dating from December 1831, it was specified that this pharmacist had been previously paid for the medicines supplied to the army (The Service of the National Central Historical Archives, Stabul Ostirii fund, file 901/1831:2).

The history of the military hospital in Craiova was closely related to the evolution of the Romanian military organic structure.

As I mentioned before, at the beginning of the 19th century, because of the Russian- Turkish war from 1806-1812, in the Romanian Principalities many Russian hospitals were founded, which offered medical assistance to the Russian soldiers in particular, but to the locals as well. The Russian hospital in Craiova was founded in 1808, in the houses of boyar Priscoveanu and functioned until 1830. Although Romanians were among the medical staff of this hospital and took care of the Russian soldiers as well as of the Romanian ones, the Russian hospital in Craiova cannot be considered a Romanian military location.

The appearance of Romanian military hospitals- called *lazaretto* at the time, in documents the title of *military hospital* being used simultaneously with that of *lazaretto*, was connected to the organization of the military force.

The Russian-Turkish war from 1828-1829 ended with the Treaty of Adrianople, whose result was the Organic Regulation, that was to come into force in Wallachia in July 1831 and in Moldavia on February 1st 1832. By the Treaty of Adrianople, the right of the Romanian Principalities to have their own army was acknowledged: the *Permanent Militia* in Wallachia and the *Earth Patrol* in Moldavia. Therefore, in 1831 the *Military Regulations* were elaborated and the *Permanent Militia* was founded, formed of three regiments, in Craiova the *Third Line Regiment* being founded.

In the *Military Regulations*, elaborated in July 1831, it was decided that the medical attendance of the founded regiments should be done through three *lazarettos*, namely in Bucharest, Craiova and Ploiesti. The first used *lazaretto* was the one in Craiova, in August 1831, maybe even earlier, with a capacity of 20 beds, followed by the *lazaretto* in Bucharest, in September 13th 1831, with a capacity of 40 beds. The fact that the *Military Hospital* in Craiova was used immediately was probably a consequence of the taking over of the houses in which the Russian hospital had functioned until the previous year, in the houses of boyar Priscoveanu.

The commander of the *lazaretto* in Craiova was the chief-physician of the Third Line Regiment, who had double subordination, to the regiment commander and to the *Health Commission* in Bucharest.

The first chief-physician of this hospital was Ignatie Navara, enrolled in the Third Regiment Craiova, since the foundation of the *lazaretto*. He was not from Craiova. He was most probably from Transylvania, because he began his studies at the Medical- Chirurgical School in Cluj, without graduating it. He was chief- physician of the *lazaretto* for a short period, only in 1831. After he left, physician Petre Ferrari (1775-1843) was transferred from Ploiesti to Craiova and he ruled the military service in Craiova until April 1832. Between 1832-1833, physician Mihai Vilag, specialised in surgery, was in charge of the hospital, being the first commandant originating from Oltenia. During this period, the hospital doubled its capacity by purchasing a new building, so that in 1833 it had 40 beds. Between 1833-1840, the hospital was ruled by physician Carol Vasarhely, a foreign doctor, specialised in surgery, obstetrics and veterinary medicine, brought in the country as a secondary physician in 1832 at the *lazaretto* from

Ploiesti and then appointed chief-physician of the *Military Hospital* in Craiova in 1833.

During this time, the hospital was installed in different buildings in the city, such as the houses of the church *Sfanta Troita* or the rooms of the bookkeeper Iancu Gradisteanu. Since 1840, the documents referring to the military settlement from Craiova became rare. The successor of physician Vasarhely, after he was transferred to the *Army Hospital* in Bucharest, remained unknown. Apparently, after a few years, physician Mihai Vilag became chief-physician again.

When the revolution from 1848 took place, physician Tadeus Navara was in command of the medical service. He was not the first commander, as that one had died 12 years before, but a kinship between them could not be denied. The staff of the military lazaretto at that time included a chief-physician, three positions of battalion physician, which were unoccupied or partly occupied most of the time, and several attendants.

In order to provide the medication, a contract was signed with a pharmacist from the city, for whom the army administration periodically discounted the owed sums. Within the hospital there was a “pharmaceutical point”, that offered products manufactured in the city. Immediately after the Revolution from 1848, for unknown reasons, probably related to the redistribution of the staff or the cholera epidemic, that affected the army, the capacity of the lazaretto in Craiova reached the impressive number of 200 beds. Consequently, this growth involved another location or the annexation of several buildings. The hospital functioned in this way only for a few years, after that, because of the staff dislocation, -in Craiova only a campaign remained-, the number of beds drastically lowered to 20 in 1851, a scheme kept well after 1860.

For the years 1850-1860, no document referring to the names of the physicians who worked in the hospital was found. The only thing known is that the *Military hospital* functioned in Craiova, being organised in Curcuti houses, starting from 1860 (National Archives Service of Dolj County, Prefecture fund, file 29/1864: 1). After the Union of the Principalities, which involved the fusion of the two armies, a new reorganisation on modern basis of the military service was needed. Therefore, the administrative fusion of the sanitary services in Wallachia and Moldavia began with Carol Davilla’s appointment as general inspector of the sanitary service, of everything related to the hierarchy and administration of the hospitals belonging to both Principalities.

In 1863 the army was organised in three headquarters, in Bucharest, Iasi, Craiova. The military effectives rose again and so did the capacity of the hospital. Several civil buildings in the area were occupied again; however, in the district hospital, military patients were hospitalised, too, in this way a considerable part of the hospital being occupied. This made the authorities in Craiova claim, on several occasions, the construction of special buildings for the Military Hospital, but their claims remained without response.

In 1864 a new law for organising the army was issued, by which the country territory was divided into four divisions, having headquarters in Bucharest, Iasi, Craiova and Galati. For each territorial division a chief of the medical service had to be appointed, among the main physicians of the army, who was the leader of the respective military hospital, too. Starting from this date, the military hospital in Craiova became a division hospital, under the command of the second class M.D., N. Caligaris (1826-1875). Because on 21st August 1872, the position of M.D. for Dolj county was vacant, the prefect of the county proposed to the general director of the Health Service, physician Iacob Felix, to appoint provisionally physician Caligaris as M.D. of the county, if no other physician was interested in that position (National Archives Service of Dolj County, Prefecture fund, file 191/1872: 31). But the Superior Medical Council decided that physician Caligaris could not occupy the position of M.D. of the county and that of military physician, for a long period of time, because the latter did not allow him to make calls in the county. The chief of the Health Service, physician Iacob Felix, suggested that they continued looking for another physician in Dolj that could fulfil all the duties of a county M.D (National Archives Service of Dolj County, Prefecture fund, file 191/1872: 32).

On 27th July 1870, the secondary military physician Chimentu Vasile was stipulated in documents (National Archives Service of Dolj County, Prefecture fund, file 105/1870: 25). Since 1875, a divisional pharmacy was founded within the hospital, in which a second class pharmacist and two inferior class pharmacists worked.

During the War for State Independence, between 1877-1878, the staff of the Military Hospital in Craiova effectively participated at the battles from the south part of the Danube, proving a high patriotism. Therefore, the First Division in Craiova had an ambulance formed of the chief physician, nine physicians and surgeons, two pharmacists, an administration officer and 80 people from the sanitary company. On

the other hand, the personnel that was not relocated offered medical assistance to the seriously injured, evacuated from the country.

After the War of Independence, an important stage in the history of the military hospital in Craiova followed. In 1880 its capacity was of 80 beds and the locations in which it functioned were disparate and improper for the purpose they were created. This led to the much waited construction of a modern hospital settlement. The existing commandant, division physician Gheorghe Stavrescu, who ruled the hospital between 1878-1883, made numerous attempts regarding the construction of an extended hospital, situated in the outskirts, in Caracal district (The Official Gazette, 1891: 5553), according to the requests of the time, following the English pattern, consisting of several pavilions. For this purpose, in 1881 the Ministry of War bought from Maria M. Poenaru, by document 677, and from The City Hall of Craiova, by document 571, the land on which the hospital was built. At the moment, the land was vacant and after the purchase the construction of the pavilions began.

By reorganising the army, in 1883, the territorial divisions were transformed in Corps of Army and the residence military hospitals became Corps of Army Hospitals, under the authority of the chief-physician of the Corps of Army. The first commandant of the Corps of Army in Craiova was the division physician Ion Vercescu, during 1883-1897 and 1899-1902, whereas between 1897- 1899 the commandant of the hospital was colonel physician Dumitrescu and between 1885- 1887 secondary surgeon was major sergeant Dinescu Theodor, from the first sanitary campaign (National Archives Service of Dolj County, Prefecture fund, file 35/1888: 14). The hospital in Craiova also coordinated the activity of the divisional hospitals in Turnu Severin, Slatina and Pitesti.

During 1885-1889, the following pavilions became functional: the chirurgical pavilion B1, the medical pavilion B3, the pavilion for dermatology-venereology B4, the pavilion for contagious B2 and pavilion C. Thus, since 1885, the medical service was separated from the chirurgical one. In 1892 there was a fire in the chirurgical pavilion, which became functional again in 1895. In 1893 the construction of the administrative pavilion A was finalised and in 1895 that of pavilion D, which was occupied by the military sanitary warehouse. Fencing the hospital was finished in 1886 and in 1889 the water sanitation became functional.

In 1898 the hospital had a capacity of 200 beds, divided in two services: medical and chirurgical. Since 1897 a chemistry laboratory

was founded, led by captain pharmacist Gheorghe Constantinescu, to which a bacteriology service was added in 1911. In 1906 the radiology service was founded, which initially functioned within the laboratory, its leadership belonging also to captain pharmacist Gheorghe Constantinescu. Because the installation was old, the hospital received a new installation of radiography and radioscopy in 1915.

In 1914 the eye specialist service was founded, including ear, nose and throat service, contagious diseases and dermatology- venereology services.

Between 1880-1916, the Military Hospital in Craiova was definitely appointed and endowed in a manner that made a remarkable medical and chirurgical activity possible. Some of the best surgeons of the army worked here: Ion Vercescu, who invented the procedure named after him in the hemorrhoidal treatment and who performed the first hernia operation, Athanasie Demosthen, who applied a radical treatment for hernia, Iacob Potarca, Ion Elian, etc.

The military chirurgical service in Craiova was an example in that period, due to the professionalism of the physicians, but also to the modern equipments: an operation room with an installation for sterilising water, the bandage material and the toolset. Colonel physician Grigore Petrescu, one of the most remarkable eye doctors of the army, performed numerous operations and made researches and studies while he was chief of the hospital and of the *ophthalmologist service*, between 1902-1905. Physicians Ion Butza and Ion Falcan also remarked themselves in this domain.

On 23rd November 1911 colonel physician Ilie Antoniu opened the series of scientific gatherings of the military physicians from the garrison with a conference about the health service in campaign and on 2nd December 1911 colonel physician Iacob Potarca presented the paper *The Importance of studies regarding the operational medicine and the topographical anatomy for the operational surgery during times of peace and war*. Among the physicians who worked in this hospital in that period of time, besides those already mentioned, others were also representative: Constantin Gorascu, Constantin Papilian, Nicolae Condemin, Ilie Antoniu, Carp Ionescu, Nicolae Becherescu, Aurel Panea, etc. Because the old hospital became cramped, it was decided that a new one should be built, for which in July 1916, a land of 25 hectares was expropriated, near the old hospital, but the construction did not start because of the war (Dinu, 2014: 223-228).

We can conclude that the Military Hospital in Craiova may be considered the first Romanian army hospital, opened with at least one

month before the one in Bucharest, being also the oldest hospital settlement in Craiova.

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