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**From the past of the balneology in
Transylvania (18th to 19th century)**

Ph. D. Leader

Prof. Univ. Dr. Eva Mârza

Doctorand

Emilia-Camelia Sărac (Haşa)

Alba Iulia

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The synthesis of the work

The concept of health has a wide meaning and it represents a state of wellness from a physical and mental point of view. The preoccupation for the healthcare, although an actual subject, was a concern that was manifested from very ancient times. Man always tried to use whatever came in hand in order to treat various afflictions. The most common ”remedies” were plants and mineral springs which were used without exact knowledge and documentation regarding their prophylactic characteristics.

The apparitions of balneary resorts is first mentioned in the 2nd century B.C. when the first public baths were open in Rome. This first form of balneology evolved in time resulting in the upgrading, during the 19th century, of some traditional resorts in Europe for the purpose of visitors comfort. Some of them are worthy to be mentioned: Karlovy Vary and Sedlitz (Czech Republic), Rogaška Slatina (Slovenia), Eger (Hungary), Bath (Great Britain), Baden-Baden (Germany), Bad Ischl (Austria), Vichy (France).

The territory of Romania nowadays is known for its rich and large number of natural healing factors that could be used both for the inner and external cure. They differ according to the geological structure of the land and can be arranged in several categories. Each one, according to the physical and chemical composition, has a healing effect in treating various afflictions. Balneology is the branch of medicine that studies the healing effects of the therapeutic factors (mineral and thermal waters, therapeutic lakes and muds, pits, salt mine and cave microclimatic) onto the organism. It is a complex science that involves the collective work of scientists from various areas (medical doctors, chemists, apothecaries, mineralogists).

Our concerns regarding mineralogy are older and were determined by the composition of the dissertation work concerning the topic of ”Realities and perspectives regarding the balneary tourism in Romania and in Europe”. From the research that was done in the previous years we realised that very little was written about the curative use of mineral springs in Transylvania. Therefore we decided to put together an analysis study based on previous research and on the archive sources about the past of therapy waters and

their importance in the preservations and the recuperation of health. The desire to continue the research, along with the undisputed significance of the healing factors underlines the importance of the chosen topic.

Due to the fact that the entire territory of our country is rich in mineral resources and because balneary establishments were made in all the geographic areas, and because bit by bit, balneary resorts evolved there, we narrowed the field of our research to Transylvania. This region is also the area with the most numerous healing waters, especially in the Szekely county where the post volcanic activities gave birth to mineral springs under various forms (carbonated, bicarbonated, rich in calcium, magnezium, iron, sulfur, or mildly salted) and to the gas emanations called pits. We could not ignore the other regions of the country. So, in short, we mentioned several important resorts from Wallachia (Călimănești-Căciulata, Olănești), Moldavia (Băltătești, Slănic Moldova), Banat (Băile Herculane) and Crișana (Băile „1 Mai”).

The studied period covers the 18th and the 19th century when a real progress was recorded in all the areas under the influence of the Enlightenment and of the change of the attitude of man towards his own body and its health, we have recorded improvements of the living conditions and personal hygiene. The population became more educated due to state interventions and to cultural activities (salon, coffee shops, accent on reading and documentation). The technical discoveries made by the scientists were very important. As a result, an advanced thinking evolved, and being based on studies and researches, they enlightened humanity. Everything influenced the medicine and balneology. Our research begins with this historical period because the healing waters were rediscovered. In consequence, we decided to analyze the way in which the Enlightenment ideas implemented to the society helped the rediscovery of the balneary factors. In our study we stopped to year 1899 because, beginning with the last years of the 19th century, the process of upgrading the resorts was intensified, the waters were used more and more and the number of visitors recorded a significant progress.

The administrative and territorial organisation was different in studied period, in Transylvania we used to have counties, Szekely and Saxon Seats. This organisation was characterized by a certain instability in the 19th century (between 1849 and 1877 an evolution of the administrative and territorial structures was recorded, the 6 districts becoming 26 counties). That is why, for the understanding of the geographical location of the resorts and mineral springs, we will mention the present county were they are located. In the same time, we used the term "resort" because we considered that it better expresses

what the baths represented in the 18th and the 19th centuries, that is to say, not only springs and balneary establishments but also constructions and accommodations for the use of the visitors along with the organized leisure activities. For the mineral water consumed as a beverage for the internal cure, we used several terms: "spring", "source" and "fountain", all of them being used in the treated period of time.

The methodology of the research was concerned to put together a history of the main healing waters from Transylvania. Therefore the old books fund was researched within the Batthyaneum Library of Alba Iulia and the "Lucian Blaga" University Central Library from Cluj. We also studied guides, encyclopaedias and special works that are to be found in the County Library from Târgu-Mureş, "Lucian Blaga" County Library from Alba Iulia and "Astra" County Library from Sibiu. The County Archives of Sibiu, Alba, Harghita and Bistrița-Năsăud were also consulted along with several periodic publications from the 19th century. There were, of course, difficulties during the study. First of all we can mention the impossibility of accessing some of the archive sources because there is no inventory of them for the considered period. One must not forget that most of the researched material was written in Hungarian due to the fact that Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There were writings in German and Latin as well, all of them needing authorized translations.

The purpose of our research was to provide important information that could bring light upon a few aspects how many types of healing waters were known in the 18th and 19th centuries and how were they classified or structured, what were the most researched Transylvanian springs and how were they discovered, when were the first accommodations made and who made them, what were the activities that completed the natural factors cure, how did the people find out about the existence of baths and if one can observe a certain evolution regarding the improvement of the resorts and what were the actual activities that were performed.

In order to properly sketch the scientific approach and in order to reach the proposed objectives it is important to make a systematic presentation of the work. It has three chapters divided in several sub-chapters.

In the first chapter, *The historiography of the topic*, we have identified the works of the 18th to 19th century that treated this subject, to which we added some of the special works from the following centuries. Thus, we learned new information about the researches that were made for the healing waters, the specialists that performed these

researches and who published their studies in order to educate the population and to enrich the knowledge about the use of mineral springs with a curative purpose.

In the second chapter, *Aspects from the history of the balneology in Transylvania between the 18th and 19th century*, we focused on everything that going to the baths meant during the two centuries. In order to do that we considered several aspects that were structured in seven sub-chapters. Because balneology evolved in the same time with medicine, the first sub-chapter followed a succinct enumeration of the status of the Transylvanian medical system during the Enlightenment century.

After that we made a description of the natural healing factors which along with the relief and climate were the basis of the existence of the balneary resorts. For each category of waters we mentioned the composition, the treated afflictions and examples were given, both from Romania and from abroad.

In the third sub-chapter we have presented the beginnings or the first "apparitions" of healing springs in Transylvania, who were those who discovered them, when did that happen and how they got to be known. Legends of the time mention the shepherds that grazed their flocks in the areas with curing factors and the constant use of waters helped them heal some of their afflictions. These oral traditions are completed with documented mentions from the 18th and 19th centuries about the first use with curative purpose.

A next and logical stage of our study is referring to the presentations of the researches performed by doctors, chemists, apothecaries and university professors. Among these scientists that marked the Transylvanian balneology during the 18th and 19th century we mention Jan Fridvaldszky, Heinrich Johann Nepomuk Crantz, Lucas Wagner, István Mátyus, Joseph Benjamin Barbenius, Andreas Gergelyffi, Ferentz Nyulas, Sámuel Pataki, Vasilie Popp. The results of the physical and chemical analysis performed by these people are to be found in the fourth sub-chapter along with an exhibition of rules for the efficient use of these waters.

To follow, we have presented the evolution of the balneary establishments during the two centuries. From the researched materials we have learned what were the stages of the improvements. A first action was represented by the building of a wooden fence around the springs, then the construction of a stone fence and then by their covering with a chapel. In order to allow the use of the waters for external treatment, as baths, the first dedicated buildings were raised, with tubs provided with spring waters that was transported through pipes. These constructions also evolved from wood to stone and, in time, lockers were built in place. In the second half of the 19th century one can observe an interest in ensuring

warm baths. Therefore, some buildings appeared, provided with tubs and water from the same mineral springs. In the beginning the water was heated in a rudimentary manner, by using heated stones or a hot iron, but then, gradually, cauldrons made from different materials were bought. For those who wanted to use the treatment at home, buildings were raised in order to allow the bottling and preservation of water bottles in order to sell them and to transport them anywhere. These improvements eased the balneary treatment and, in the same time, increased the number of visitors.

An absolutely necessary and important action as to create conditions for spending some time in the resorts. Therefore, inns were built, and then villas and because the request grew every year and the provided rooms were no longer enough or the prices were too high, the local residents began offering accommodation in their houses for those who came for the treatment. The bodegas that were built in the beginnings became restaurants and coffee shops. The Transylvanian resorts began to be upgraded according to the European fashion trends. But this thing was difficult due to the lack of investors. Most of the improvements were abandoned in the incipient stage, in the shape of simple constructions that offered modest accommodation and treatment conditions.

Those who took care of the mineral waters and baths soon realized how important and even indispensable for the visitors were the leisure activities that were presented in the sixth sub-chapter. The handiest and easiest to provide were the walks around the springs and the trips in the surrounding areas because most of the resorts are in very beautiful places, surrounded by an impressive natural environment with valleys, mountains and forests. In this respect, promenades were built, shady parks and flower gardens and the benches and kiosks offered places to rest. In some of the more developed areas covered alleys were arranged in order to offer the possibilities to walk and follow the drinking cure during raining and cold seasons. Reading rooms, card playing salons, pool tables and bowling alleys were also very important for the relaxing, socializing and having fun. For all these, special places were built. The conversation salon was periodically provided with books and most important with the newspapers of the time. Music was an activity that was appreciated by everyone. That is why, bands and orchestras were booked to play several times a week, twice a day, during the morning cure but also in the afternoon, after 5 o'clock. Occasionally, balls were organized where visitors could dance, concerts were held with famous artists coming from the important cities of Transylvania and Romania, especially from Bucharest.

While in the first part of the work we managed to underline the development of the balneary resorts in the 18th and the 19th centuries, it was of utmost important for the composition of a history to know what was the image of the balneology in the press of the time and how were the therapeutic waters seen by the foreign travellers who visited the areas with natural healing factors. We considered these contemporary aspects to be of a great importance and very realistic. For the next sub-chapter we have consulted several periodics of the time (*Arhiva Someșană, Familia, Gazeta Transilvaniei, Transilvania, Amicul Familiei*) and we obtained important information that enriched the knowledge about the Transylvanian healing waters. On one hand there were articles describing the resorts, and, on the other hand, there were brief news about the events in those areas. The distinctive note was the fact that these editorials were written by guests who spent some days to the baths so we have subjective presentation resulted from personal experiences. These aspects were diverse, from the impressions regarding the outstanding geographical localization and the exquisit qualities of the mineral waters in treating various afflictions, the accomodation and catering conditions. From the same notes we have learned that not only the simple people used this natural remedy but also the nobemen and the cultural personalities of the time. It is interesting to mention that entire families went to spend summer at the baths or at least many days, as the custom was in the Western Europe.

In these articles, that were a good mean of advertising the resorts, the advantages but also the problems that existed and needed solutions, and thus, they became a guide for those who wanted to visit them. A very important aspect was the difficult access into the resort due to the fact that communications needed improvements. Another common problem for most of the Transylvanian baths was the fact that the hired orchestras were only playing Hungarian songs, the periodics in the reading room were also Hungarian and German, although a great number of visitors were Romanian. From the visitors' notes we notice that the complaints had results, the orchestras included Romanian songs as well and at least two Romanian periodics were provided.

The research made for the composition of the present approach lead us to the notes of some foreign travellers that visited the Transylvanian balneary resorts. First of all we must notice that these travellers had different nationalities and occupations and that is why each description has a different perspective. From their testimonies we have noticed that most of them were specialists who knew about the rich underground of our country and wanted to convince themselves about the healing power of the therapeutical waters. Most of their writings presented the mineral springs with their physical and chemical

composition as well as with their geographical location, and these descriptions were included in speciality works. It was one of the advertising methods but also the proof of the fact that the Transylvanian mineral waters were known abroad and appreciated for their healing effects.

The advertisement for the resorts were also made by means of commercials published in the press in the second half of the 19th century. These ads provided brief but essential informations about the services offered to the visitors. We can add the postal cards that were sent to the loved ones and friends. A trend of the time, these postal cards were a good way to communicate with those that were at home but also to describe the resorts by means of photos of the mineral springs and balneary establishments that were suggestive for the general picture.

After all these stages of development for the resorts were analyzed, we have noticed that among the best know, frequented and well organized of them we can mention Tuşnad, Vâlcele, Bazna, Geoagiu-Băi, Homorod, Zizin, Malnaş, Covasna, Rodna, Sovata. All of them have important springs that specialists considered as good as the famous healing waters in Europe. The difference was made by the modest treatment and relaxation conditions. That is why many Romanian visitors opted for travelling abroad for balneary treatment.

In the third chapter, *Case studies*, we made a detailed presentation of three resorts with different healing waters and from different geographical areas: the salted lakes in Ocna Sibiului (Sibiu County), the mineral springs in Borsec (Harghita County) and those in Sângeorz-Băi (Bistriţa-Năsăud County).

We must mention that the beginnings of the salted lakes in Ocna Sibiului are not certain. The archive sources and the dedicated literature offer information about the salt mines abandoned due to water infiltrations. On the spot, these lakes were formed but the accumulation of water lasted for many years, each lake having a different evolution. We have the first mentions in the 16th century when the Austrian medic van Pezen came to Transylvania with a mission and took a bath into the salted lakes. In the 18th century there were six lakes: The Inner Red Lake and the Outer Red Lake (together they formed the present Horea Lake), the Free Lake, The Outer Green Lake (today it is named Cloşca), the Inner Green Lake and the Women Lake (the last two forming the nowadays Crişan Lake). Lake Thököly (presently Brâncoveanu) was also known along with the others. Until 1820, the access was free, without a bathing tax. A first attempt to improve the lakes, surrounding them with a fence and the building of a balneary establishment with changing

cabins was made in 1846 when the baths were officially opened. The alleys for promenades were made, both open and covered, trees were planted close to the lakes and also on the surrounding hills, villas, restaurants and annexes were built, all for the comfort of the guests. From the researches made by medics and specialists, as well from the press of the time we have learned that every year new improvements were made and attempts to attract as many visitors as possible were made by presenting the conditions and the services.

The study of the Borsec resort shows us that the beginnings were also unclear, according to the oral tradition the springs being discovered by some hunters in the 15th century. In the 16th century, the Italian medic Bucella prescribed prince Sigismund Báthory of Alba Iulia a treatment with Borsec water, transported here in barrels. In the second half of the 18th century, near the spring a guard room was built for the Szekely infantry colonel, and after that, the colonel, along with the officers of the regiment, with the permission of the villages Ditrău and Lăzarea (who owned the springs), built a guest house. The intense use of these waters began however in the first years of the next century under the influence of Bálint Gunther and Antal Zimmenthausen, who made the first improvements and built a glass factory in 1804 offering the locals viable jobs. From that point on, the bottling of the mineral water began making possible its transport anywhere, a benefic business for the researched area. After a series of physical and chemical analysis made by specialists, the springs were arranged, balneary buildings were built for hot and cold baths, villas, rest houses, restaurants appeared and green spaces and promenades were provided. These improvements were made with the support of the two (Ditrău și Lăzarea) who owned the springs and especially with the help of count Lajos Lázár. An important role in the development of the resort and the advertising of the mineral waters was played by doctor Károly Cseh, who published a brochure about the baths in 1873, reedited 11 years later. The fame of Borsec attracted a large number of visitors and amplified the process of bottling and export. The international exhibitions to which it participated were opportunities to obtain prizes and golden and silver medals: in 1873 the golden medal granted by emperor Franz Joseph and the medal of merit given to the International Fair in Vienna, in 1876 it was granted the silver medal and the honorary diploma to the exhibitions in Berlin and Trieste, the honorary diploma to the Exhibition in Paris in 1878 and the silver medal to the Exhibition in Budapest.

Sângeorz-Băi had a lot of difficulties in attempting to develop and to value the mineral waters. From the researched historical sources we found out that they were known from the second half of the 18th century when they were studied by Crantz și Nyulas, but

the first improvements were made only after 1803. Resulting from the initiative of the 2nd Border Regiment an access road to the spring was made and in order to ensure shade during summer, trees were planted along the road. From the half of the 19th century some rudimentary arrangements were made: for the warm baths the construction was made in wood and had cabins and the water was heated using hot irons. For the cold baths a large pool was made and from 1857 a room for the drinking cure was added. The largest problem here was the lack of consistent income, therefore a loan was necessary for the improvement of the resort. With the help coming from the fund of the border regiments, solid balneary establishments were built, restaurant and cellar for bottling the water. In 1879 it received the name of Hebe, after the goddess of health and beauty in Greek culture and, an year later, the Hebe Corporation was born which took the administration of the baths and took care of their upgrading. From the research we have a conclusion about the fact that Sângeorz-Băi was the only Romanian resort in Transylvania, that is to say that the owners, the tenants and all the others involved in the organization were Romanian. Also, most of the guests were Romanian, a lot of them coming from Moldavia and Wallachia.

A certain evolution can be observed for all the three resorts during the two centuries, especially during the second half of the 19th century. The qualities of the healing waters were observed from the research of the specialists and from the appreciation of the guests that followed a balneary treatment and left impressions in articles that can be read in the periodicals of the time. The establishment of a local balneary commission was very important as well especially for the fact that it took care of the improvement of the springs and the organization of the leisure and entertainment activities. All those who were concerned with the development of the baths realized that without these above mentioned constructions: balneary establishments, reception buildings, mess halls, that needed permanent upgrading, and without any possibility to spend the free time, a balneary life could not be conceived. Even more, the guests had a pharmacy at their disposal, a post office, a telegraph and a medic was a permanent resident in the resort during the season in order to provide qualified advice regarding the effective use of mineral waters. In order to ease the access to the baths, the construction of railroads, carriage rental and the modernization of communications was very important due to the fact that it offered the possibility of transport.

By means of our research we wish not only to underline the impressive balneary potential of Transylvania but also the appreciation of the mineral springs manifested in the researched period. Our concern lies in describing the trajectory from mineral springs

discovered by chance to resorts that were similar to those famous abroad. In the present approach, using documentary materials existing in the national archives from Sibiu, Harghita and Bistrița-Năsăud, using bibliography and personal visits to the objectives, we managed to collect precious informations about the therapeutic waters in Transylvania and to compose a history of the balneary resorts until the end of the 19th century. We have shown the importance of the natural healing factors from ancient times, focusing on the Enlightenment period because it marked an opening of the society towards the exterior. Visiting the balneary resorts was significant for the healthcare, for the regeneration of the body and mind, gradually becoming a trendy enterprise. The modernization of life in the 19th century allowed the growth of the economic relations in which the balneary resorts found a place of their own, in the same time offering jobs for the local population.

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