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"Per la Ciència i per la Pàtria": medical catalanism (1898-1936)¹

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Introduction

By 'medical catalanism' we understand the intellectual and professional movement featuring a significant group of doctors, pharmacists and veterinary surgeons of the first third of the XX century, closely connected to political catalanism which sought, and indeed achieved at some points, higher levels of self-government for Catalonia. It is, therefore, an excellent example of the interweaving of political, professional and intellectual interests. Medical catalanism considered that in order to understand and manage health care, and other issues related to medicine and health, such as medical research and education, and public health in an appropriate and modern way it was necessary to transform the political arena, and to do things differently than in the rest of Spain.

Medical catalanism acted, basically, through the 'Acadèmia i Laboratori de Ciències Mèdiques' (Academy and Laboratory of Medical Sciences). This society was launched in 1878 as a result of the merger of two previous associations set up a few years earlier to overcome the difficulties arising from the reluctance of university circles to the introduction of experimental medicine in the syllabus. The Academy has survived over the years in difficult and changing circumstances and has encouraged long term initiatives.

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At the turn of the XX Century the Academy took shape as the main expression of the merger of intellectual and political interests within medical catalanism. From the intellectual point of view, the Academy made a firm commitment to use Catalan as a modern scientific language, drawing up a medical dictionary, the distribution of which was cut short by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Between 1907 and 1937 the Academy published the journal *Annals de Medicina* (Annals of Medicine), the main voice of the movement. It also encouraged the establishment of other societies in order to achieve the scientific and professional goals of physicians and other health professionals: the 'Associació de Metges i Biòlegs de Llengua Catalana' (Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists Association), the 'Sindicat de Metges de Catalunya' (Physicians Union of Catalonia), the 'Mutual Mèdica' (Medical Benefit Society), and the 'Cooperativa de Consum' (Consumer Cooperative), among others. Moreover, the Academy was the institutional platform that helped the development of medical specialities, a process that radically changed medical practice, the profession and the relationship between doctors and patients. Another fundamental aim was the achievement of university self-government as a way to offer training according to the requirements of European science, in order to overcome the traditional paralysis of the Spanish University as a whole.

From the political point of view, many doctors belonging to the Academy took part as active members in the organization of political parties and institutions that changed the distribution of political power both in Catalonia and the rest of Spain. A first practical outcome of their work occurred between 1914 and 1923, the period corresponding to the 'Mancomunitat de Catalunya' (Catalonian Commonwealth), which developed its own health policy in regard to key public health questions, such as the fight against infectious diseases as well as health and welfare policies, like the management of institutions for the mentally ill. The first dictatorship that Spain suffered in the XX Century (1923-1930) put an end to these initiatives. After 1931 with the arrival of II Republic and self-government for Catalonia (1932), it was possible to undertake a process which sought to implement new health policies, with the significant contribution from the Physicians Union. The social unrest of the republican years and the outbreak of Civil War in July 1936 prevented many initiatives from being put into practice.

As a whole, therefore, medical catalanism has many fascinating ramifications and allows to study in detail a series of overlapping areas among political, ideological

and scientific interests. In this paper, we want to draw your attention to the use medical catalanism made of medical history. In order to legitimate their ambition to build a scientific medicine serving the interests of Catalonia as a nation, they wrote history of medicine, linking their programme with a glorious medical past.

The history of Catalan medicine and medical catalanism

In this context, from the first decade of the XX century, medical catalanism brought up the need of a Catalan history of medicine with its own role within a larger program of scientific regeneration and national construction in Catalan terms. Its aim was to establish a connection, over a long period of decline, with the glorious past of a medieval Catalonia ruled by its own laws and institutions, and within which Catalan had become, earlier than other European languages, a means for scientific communication.

However, the starting point for Catalan medical historiography must be set in the 1888 Medical Sciences Conference, which took place in Barcelona, where one of the sessions was devoted to the history of medicine. Physician and journalist Luis Comenge (1854-1916) took part in it, and introduced a geographical-historical atlas of medicine in Catalonia. Twenty years later, in 1908, he published in Spanish, *La medicina en Cataluña (Bosquejo histórico)* [Medicine in Catalonia (Historical Outline)], which would be the first systematic work on this subject. In our opinion, Comenge's Historical Outline constitutes the most notable contribution to Catalan medical historiography from the standpoint of liberal Spanish nationalism, when medical catalanism was barely starting to bring up another reading from its distinct national point of view. In fact, Comenge perceived an emergence of interest in Catalan medical past "in order to better assert and extol Catalonia's character", in spite of the "long, intense and regrettable waning" that, according to him, history of medicine as a discipline was suffering.

Medical catalanism historiographical proposal largely departed from Comenge's aims. Yet it shared with him some of the traits shaping the distinctive challenges and tensions of the historiographical endeavour it would have to tackle in subsequent decades. First, the predilection for studying late Middle Ages medicine; second, the argument for the convenience to start approaching a Catalan history of medicine by "a bio-bibliographical work" which had "only partially been undertaken"; and third, a periodization of modern medicine, detached from the Middle Ages, in two periods: the first one, characterized by the decline, comprising nearly the whole XVI century, the XVII and the first two thirds of the XVIII; the second one, characterized by the

resurgence, would start with the creation of the Royal College of Surgery of Barcelona and would last up to the beginning of the XX century, through the entire XIX century.

The first historiographical contributions by medical catalanism fit in that unavoidable predilection for medieval history, entertaining the idea of a medicine linked to the city of Barcelona, profusely producing medical texts in Catalan and brimming with great figures. Undoubtedly, the best fitting one was Arnau de Vilanova (ca. 1240-1311), kings' and popes' physician, professor in Lleida and Montpellier, and among those behind the introduction of the "new Galen" into European college medicine. A large part of Josep Maria Roca i Heras' (1863-1930) work, another one of the attendants to the 1888 conference, matches this paradigm. It is enough to go through the articles of the series "Notes medicals històriques" (Historical Medical Notes), published in the journal *Annals of Medicine* between 1918 and 1927, to realize that the idea underlying Roca's historical discourse is the perfection of the health care and medical milieu in medieval Catalonia, including the exaltation of the good physicians and the good patients in the royal court, the wise health policies and the unfortunately vanished charity for poor patients.

The bio-bibliographical effort, on the other hand, started taking shape from the elaboration and publication of the *Bibliografia Medical de Catalunya* (Medical Bibliography of Catalonia) after the second conference of Catalan-speaking Physicians in 1917. This publication was aimed to show all and sundry the pride to belong to a noble medical tradition and the existence of a period and a disposition worth of being currently imitated. It was introduced as a "first inventory", within a more ambitious project, an "Index Bibliogràfic Medical de Catalunya" (Medical Bibliographical Index of Catalonia). Fifteen years later, such a project had not only been forgotten, but the journal *Annals of Medicine*, taking advantage of its twenty-fifth anniversary, published a "Bibliografia mèdica catalana, 1907-1931" (Catalan Medical Bibliography, 1907-1931) which included the publishing of medical journals in Barcelona. The Catalan-speaking Physicians Association announced as well the publication of a second volume of its Medical Bibliography.

As regards the history of the resurgence of Catalan surgery during the Enlightenment, we must bring up that, in November 1916, the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of probably the most famous surgeon of the Spanish Enlightenment, Antonio Gimbernat (1734-1816), was officially commemorated in his home town, Cambrils. Thus, a new focal point for historiographical attention on medical

catalanism was opened. Interestingly, it was a matter of adding a representative figure of Enlightened Spain to the illustrious pantheon of Catalanness, in order to turn him into a personage of obligatory reference for subsequent Catalan medical historiography, as we shall see. All civil and ecclesiastical authorities, under the chairmanship of Catalan Sebastián Recasens, then dean of San Carlos Faculty of Medicine in Madrid, and standing for the king Alfonso XIII, attended the 1916 ceremony, which basically consisted in placing a commemorative stone plaque on the front of the house where Gimbernat was born. As the initiative was coming from Faculty of Medicine of Barcelona, professors far from prone to catalanism took part in the act. Pediatrics professor Andrés Martínez-Vargas (1861-1948), who cannot be precisely branded as catalanist, was the main officiant, seconded by hygiene professor Rodríguez-Méndez (1845-1919), rather known owing to his anticatalanism, and decisively supported by the then bishop of Solsona, Francesc Vidal i Barraquer (1868-1943), born in Cambrils. All medical associations from Barcelona attended as well, including the Academy and Laboratory of Medical Sciences, then already the main bastion of medical catalanism. Moreover, the above-mentioned Roca i Heras attended on behalf of the 'Ateneu' (cultural association) from Barcelona, albeit his presence was rather inconspicuous. The Catalan-speaking Physicians Association very enthusiastically joined the act, yet another proof of the strategy of appropriation of Gimbernat's figure within the historiographical strategy of medical catalanism. Gimbernat held all features to become a model of scientist worth of being admired and imitated inside and outside Catalonia. In this sense, he had everything going for him. On the one hand, Gimbernat was professor of anatomy in the Royal College of Surgery in Barcelona, a scientific institution created under the reform ideals of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, he was fluent in French and English and travelled abroad pensioned to France and England, where he got directly in contact with great figures of world surgery, such as John Hunter, thanks to whom his work achieved a remarkable international projection, making him worthy of an eponym to term a fibrous crease of the crural tract. Moreover, later on, he played an important institutional role in Madrid as founder and director of Royal College of Surgery of Madrid. And as if that weren't enough, at the end of his life, he fell from the absolutist Ferdinand VII's favour, making him an attractive figure both for Spanish liberals and for Catalan regionalists. In this context, his status as royal surgeon for Charles IV, his belonging to the Spanish army within a state model

characterized by absolutism and centralism, or his collaboration with José Bonaparte's reign (1808-1813), did not cast a shadow over his resume in front of both causes.

It must be borne in mind that the loss, in 1898, of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the last remnants of the colonial empire, revealed the deep crisis that was taking place within end-of-the-century Spanish intellectual circles. In all probability, amongst men of science, Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934) best captured, in his *Tónicos de la voluntad* (A Tonic for the Will) – written a few years before he won the 1906 Nobel Prize, and reaching tens of editions and translations –, the program of social regeneration aimed to restore Spain to the pre-eminent place it deserved among European nations, “collaborating, together with the most knowledgeable peoples, to the great venture of civilization and progress”.

In 1907, the Spanish Government created the 'Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas' (Board for Scientific Studies and Research Advance), and gave to Cajal its presidency, which he held until his death, twenty-seven years later. This agency put into practice most of the program Cajal had outlined in his book, such as the creation of research institutes, the fellowship policy to broaden studies in a foreign country, the organization of advanced courses given by internationally prestigious scientists, and the creation of the 'Residencia de Estudiantes' in Madrid, with its own laboratories for the training of researchers.

This program was designed and built under the coordinates of a strict Spanish centralism, setting it up against the view political catalanism had of Catalonia's fit within Spain. From the Diputación de Barcelona (County Council of Barcelona), controlled by catalanists, in that same year of 1907, the 'Institut d'Estudis Catalans' (Institute for Catalan Studies) was founded, being one of its aims to boost scientific culture by supporting scientific research and the creation of institutional mechanisms that were not really far from those proposed by the Board for Scientific Studies and Research Advance. In fact, by seizing the opportunity of tributes paid to Ramon y Cajal due to his retirement, his figure became an object of appropriation on the part of medical catalanism. In 1923, Roca i Heras dedicated him a *Tribut al Mestre* (Tribute to the Master) in the Academy of Medical Sciences. In his panegyric, Roca remembered the lectures Cajal had given in the institution and his teaching years (1888-1892) at the University of Barcelona, as well as the attempts on the part of some of his students to keep him in Catalonia and avoid his departure to Madrid. His discourse did not lack references to the Catalan medical tradition, trying to place Cajal among Arnau,

Gimbernat and Bartomeu Robert (1842-1902), whom catalanism considered as one of Catalonia's Founding Fathers.

In any case, historiographical efforts in Catalonia, in these first two decades, remained far from any prospect of academic institutionalization; their public expression shifted between ambivalent timely tributes and Roca i Heras' enthusiastic erudition in publications primarily meant for physicians, in addition to the efforts that brought forth the above-mentioned Medical Bibliography of Catalonia. Teaching of history of medicine within the university framework continued to be an exclusive prerogative within PhD studies, which could only be fulfilled at the Central University in Madrid. The persistent demand of university autonomy by political catalanism requested, among other things, the authority for the University of Barcelona to grant PhD degrees, which undoubtedly had open for it the possibility to institutionalize the history of medicine.

General Primo de Rivera's coup in September 1923 and the establishment of a military dictatorship, which prompted, among other things, the end of the limited autonomist experience of the above-mentioned Catalan Commonwealth, which had started in 1914, was not going to help improving the situation as regards this issue. Paradoxically, it was throughout these years when the first college manuals of history of medicine were translated into Spanish by socialist sympathizer Eduardo García del Real (1870-1946), who then held the professorship in Madrid. The first of these editions, Fielding H. Garrison's, was printed in Madrid; however, the second one, Paul Dieppen's, was printed in Barcelona.

History of medicine in the *Monografies mèdiques* (Medical Monographs)

Outside the narrow university framework and despite of governmental hindrances, matters did not stagnate during the years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. The conferences of the above-mentioned Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists Association were discontinued; albeit as compensation, another endeavour, destined – even though it was not its main objective – for the generation of Catalan history of medicine from a catalanist standpoint, was set out: the *Monografies Mèdiques* (Medical Monographs) series, founded and directed by Jaume Aiguader i Miró (1882-1943). Aiguader was, perhaps, the most politically projected figure of medical catalanism as right-hand man of Francesc Macià (1859-1933), first president of the Republican 'Generalitat' (Catalan autonomous government) and leader of 'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya' (leftist, catalanist and republican party). As a member of this party, he was

elected mayor of Barcelona in the April 14th, 1931 elections that ended the Bourbon monarchy. Later on, during the Civil War, he became one of the ministers of the Republican Government in Madrid.

The collection of Medical Monographs, written in Catalan, attempted to make available to all physicians state-of-the-art medical texts about very diverse subjects which, due to increasing specialization, were difficult to keep up with. At the start of the Civil War, it had already exceeded one hundred volumes published. Its publication constitutes the best example within the medical field of advances attained in the process of linguistic normalization of Catalan. It must be borne in mind that the twenties were specially important for scientific and medical Catalan; among other reasons, because philologist and engineer Pompeu Fabra's proposed rules were generally adopted, meaning in practice the departure from a faltering orthography and an erratic and archaic lexicon to the achievement of a modern language, characterized by an universal, precise and concise vocabulary, perfectly adapted to up-to-date medical science.

Aiguader published some historical-medical monographic works but, in our opinion, his most interesting contribution was the unremitting attention he paid to these subjects in the pages accompanying, in an outer sheet, the Monographs series. In the section "Noticiari" (News Bulletin), nearly always written by himself, countless historical-medical notes, reviews and short articles can be found.

In order to understand Aiguader's historical training background, it is inevitable to take into account the close personal and political relationship he kept with Antoni Rovira i Virgili (1882-1949). Rovira was the author of an extremely interesting *Història dels moviments nacionalistes* (History of nationalist movements), published in three "series" between 1912 and 1914, as well as a *Història Nacional de Catalunya* (National History of Catalonia), a piece planned to come out in thirteen volumes, seven of which appeared between 1922 and 1938. The significance of his work and his approach was noticed in distinct circles, especially within catalanist republicanism, where he and Aiguader were noteworthy members.

Two remarkable examples may help understanding the historiographical evolution Aiguader meant for Catalan history of medicine. First, owing to his peculiar vindication of Arnau de Vilanova's figure, whose portrait appears as an emblematic ensign in each and every cover of the about one hundred issues of the Medical Monographs. Arnau, as the most relevant medical figure of Catalan medieval culture, was, for Aiguader, the exponent of a troubled period –the Middle Ages– that "old" historians labelled as

“transition”, while “new” historians (like Berlin professor of history of medicine, Paul Diepgen (1878-1966)) were calling it “tradition”. Back then, Arnau attempted to “find the path to get out of barbarism through the mess of the coarsest errors and superstitions”, a path that would only finish “two centuries later, way into the Renaissance” by means of Paracelsus’ gesture of burning the books “in Latin and Arabic to announce a new Medicine to the world”. Second – and wholly coherent with these premises – his no less peculiar vindication of Miguel Servet’s figure (1511-1553): on the one hand, properly catalanized to serve as vindication of the own tradition; on the other hand, persistently universalized as a Freedom of Thought advocate, a victim of religious intolerance and, needless to say, the discoverer of pulmonary circulation.

In all, Aiguader’s historical-medical contributions, characterized by their wishful nature and their marked nationalist component, to the point of political agitation, stayed away from the university academic milieu, which remained closed to historical-medical teaching.

Towards the institutionalization of Catalan history of medicine

The aspiration to consolidate the teaching and practice of a history of medicine according to medical catalanism in a more normalized institutional framework could start materializing after the proclamation of the Republic and the attainment of political autonomy for Catalonia. We may point out two stages for these first achievements: on the one hand, the so-called 'Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona' (Autonomous University of Barcelona) and, on the other, two professional medical associations: la 'Societat de Cirurgia de Catalunya' (Surgery Society of Catalonia) and the Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists Association.

The Autonomous University of Barcelona brought forth thanks to the 1932 *Estatut de Autonomia de Catalunya* (Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia), attempted to reform the traditional model of higher education and managed, among other things, to launch PhD studies, thus far completely centralized in Madrid. It is accurate to situate within this new institutional framework the scheduling of the course "Comentaris sobre història de la medicina" (“Remarks on the history of medicine”), addressed to medicine doctorate students, and which must have been taught in the old Academy of Medicine, along several evening sessions, through March 1934. The person in charge of teaching it, as an associate professor of history of medicine, was Jaume Pi-Sunyer Bayo (1903-2000), son of the renowned physiologist August Pi-Sunyer, as well as historian Carles

Pi-Sunyer's nephew. The program consisted of just six subjects: a) Paracelsus; b) blood circulation; c) the origins of the experimental method; d) oxygen and respiration; e) vaccination taken to America; and f) Cervera and Catalan medicine. Only the last section of the program was devoted to merely local historiography, although there is no doubt that Miguel Servet's figure would occupy a noteworthy place in the chapter devoted to the circulation of blood.

Meanwhile, another initiative was set in motion, bearing the unequivocal aim to move ahead, albeit outside university circles, towards the institutionalization of history of medicine in Catalonia, once again by means of Gimbernat's figure. The Surgery Society, through an *ad hoc* established committee, promoted the commemoration of the two hundred anniversary of Gimbernat's birth in 1934. They decided to pay homage to him in the Academy of Medicine, in parallel with an exhibit of surgery books written in Catalan, either original or translated, and to announce a competition to award a prize to historical works devoted to Gimbernat and Catalan surgery. They did all this taking advantage of the eighth conference of Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists, which took place in Barcelona in June of that same year. The decision for the competition, which eighteen works had entered, was announced in the meeting; five of the six planned prizes were awarded, as one was declared void.

By the end of June 1936, on the occasion of the ninth conference of the above mentioned association, celebrated in Perpignan, the Surgery Society published, with the support of a pharmaceutical laboratory, a book including three of the awarded works: a biography of Gimbernat, written as a matter of fact by Jaume Pi-Sunyer i Bayo; a study on Bernat Serra and other XIV century surgeons, brought in by Ricard Carreras i Valls, who was well-known for his zealous defence of the Catalanness not only of Columbus, but of the whole "Discovery" endeavour; and Antoni Cardoner i Planas (1902-1984)' work on the Royal College of Surgery of Barcelona. The latter would years later be author of an extensive historical-medical and teaching work on history of medicine at the University of Barcelona, within the ephemeral Department of History of the Faculty of Medicine (1967-1971), run by psychiatrist Ramón Sarró. His best known work, *Història de la medicina a la Corona d'Aragó (1162-1479)* (History of Medicine in the Crown of Aragon, 1162-1479), was published in 1973, still under Franco's regime.

In the prologue of the 1936 book we have been mentioning, a highly interesting fact was pointed out: the publication had been possible thanks to the steps taken by the 'Comitè de Recerques i Investigacions Històriques' (Committee for Historical Research

and Investigation), a nearly absolutely unknown entity to date and on which we are currently working. As far as we may gather from the manuscript that comprises the minutes of the Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists Association, the committee was created within this entity, rather as a result of the success of the tribute to Gimbernat in June 1934, and with the mission to develop “the Catalan medical history and bibliography”.

It should be mentioned that surgeon Pere Gabarró (1899-1980), author of the above mentioned 1936 prologue, was precisely the designated person to head the delegation of the catalanist association to the Tenth International Conference of History of Medicine, which had to take place in Madrid from September 23rd through the 29th, 1935. It is recorded in the minutes that García del Real, the Conference chairman and wholeheartedly in favour of extending the university teaching of history of medicine, sent an invitation to the catalanist association to take part in the conference and that this was willing to accept it.

The Civil War was a lethal blow for these initiatives towards the institutionalization of history of medicine in Catalonia, inside and outside the university, as well as for the entire program of medical catalanism. The Catalan-speaking Physicians and Biologists Association ceased to exist, the Institute for Catalan Studies went into hiding, and the Autonomous University was closed down. Most of the leading figures supporting the use of history of medicine as a tool for the construction of a medical science in the service of the Catalan nation had to take the path of exile. Some would never return, like the above mentioned Jaume Pi-Sunyer Bayo, or like another bright hope of history of medicine, the anarchist Félix Martí Ibáñez (1911-1972), who during the 1950s was professor of History of Medicine in New York. But this is another story that, in the last analysis, comes to remind us the need to avoid simplifying the development of medical historiography according to just a few clichés.

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