

ION ALBU (1920-2012)



On July 27th 2012, Prof. Academician Ion Albu, MD, passed away, leaving behind a huge void in the minds and souls of his family, his collaborators in the Department of Anatomy and Embryology at UMF (the University of Medicine And Pharmacy) Iuliu Hațieganu Cluj-Napoca, and all those who knew, respected and loved him.

Being the one who continued and reformed the prestigious school of anatomy in Cluj, which had been pioneered by V. Papilian after the Great Union, Prof. Ion Albu led the team at the Department of Anatomy from 1963 till 1990, when he retired.

He was born on October 4th 1920 in the village of Căstău, Hunedoara County. He attended the Aurel Vlaicu high school in Orăștie from 1931 to 1939 and he passed his baccalaureate exam in 1939 in Deva, graduating head of his class. He attended the University of Medicine and Surgery “Regele Ferdinand” in Cluj and Sibiu, from 1939 to 1945, graduating with the grade “highly satisfactory” and receiving the title of “Doctor in Medicine and Surgery”. He enrolled in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Cluj, from which he graduated in 1949.

As a student of the Faculty of Medicine “Regele Ferdinand” in Cluj, he was noticed, thanks to his remarkable talents, by Prof. V Papilian, who accepted him as a tutor starting with his 2nd/3rd year of university (1941-1945). Having an inclination for teaching and a calling for the study of anatomy, he won the contest for the position of

teaching assistant (1945-1949) at the Institute of Anatomy in Cluj and then, in 1949, he won the contest for the position of lecturer at the Anatomy Laboratory I in Timișoara, a title he held from 1949 to 1963.

In 1963, he returned to the Department of Anatomy at IMF Cluj, as a reader (again after having won the contest for this position), and in 1969 he was promoted to professor, after having won another contest for this position, in the same department. As the head of department, he ran the teaching and scientific activities and managed the department until 1990, when he retired, nonetheless maintaining the position of consulting professor and PhD coordinator.

In parallel to his teaching activities, Prof. Albu worked as a consultant in anatomical pathology and in obstetrics and gynecology, which enabled him to receive a good clinical training, reflected in the theoretical and practical orientation of students and in the shaping of young teachers in his department.

As a teacher and head of department, Prof. Albu had numerous initiatives, continuously seeking to improve and to modernize the profile of the Cluj School of Anatomy. Among his initiatives, we present a few to which he dedicated an important amount of his time and work:

- introducing the international anatomical, embryological and histological terminology in all the textbooks and the scientific papers published in various magazines. The clinical use of mostly the older anatomical terms, present in the French school of anatomy and medicine – which inspired the school of anatomy and medicine in Cluj, had to be brought up to date with the new improvements existing in the terminology of the 60s through to the 80s. All the textbooks published by Prof. Albu and colleagues have, written in parentheses, the current international anatomical terminology as well, the purpose of this being to offer the students and doctors ease of access to standard terms used both in anatomy and in the clinical environment;

- in his quest to link anatomy to clinical teaching, both from a practical and from a theoretical perspective, Prof. Albu insisted on and permanently monitored the practical training of students in dissection laboratories. Having at their disposal each year the necessary anatomical teaching material for dissection (up to 52 preserved cadavers), a student had the opportunity to dissect the majority of anatomical areas and thus to put together a spatial image of the information acquired from dissection textbooks and theoretical courses;

- anatomy, as a morphological discipline, has benefited from practical courses and works, a large

amount of images, schematic illustrations offered by the department (over 1,000 illustrations) with a content highly complementary to the information presented in a theoretical fashion and also necessary for guiding dissections;

- the practical courses reflected discipline, punctuality and seriousness, attributes promoted and demanded by Prof. Albu firstly and foremostly from the faculty. The students prepared their work for the dissection laboratory, also bringing with them notebooks with anatomical drawings, the purpose of these works being not only to bring proof of the knowledge they had accumulated, but also to identify committed students with an inclination for morphological sciences and also the potential future directions for which these students had a calling (imagery, surgery). Many of the doctors who today run clinics in Cluj or the graduates who moved to different parts of the country believe that the manner in which they were trained and the way of working at the Department of Anatomy have constituted for them models to follow when it comes to medical training standards; for many of them, these years of training still hold vivid memories;

- the exams that Prof. Albu's students had to take were all carried out in an atmosphere of seriousness and austerity. The students presented their knowledge to a very patient and at the same time very firm teacher. Talks with graduates who became doctors in a number of different specialties, 10-20 years after their graduation, revealed the important role of these exams in choosing their professional orientation and in their professional training. There have been no complaints from any of the former students who had been in the situation of taking their anatomy exams again; on the contrary, most of them stated that such a "cold shower" had been necessary to enable them to realize in due time the difference between the preuniversity academic environment and the university one;

- Prof. Albu promoted embryology as a necessary basis for the understanding of both normal anatomy and pathological anatomy (in the form of anomalies). Excited by the progresses in the fields of embryology, experimental teratology and medical genetics, he found it beneficial to insist on the training of students in this direction.

Prof. Albu coordinated the publishing activity of the department and as a result, shortly after his joining the department, all the necessary textbooks were finalized, these being the same textbooks that not only the students in Cluj use today, but also the ones in other university centres (The Human Anatomy, V. Papilian, volumes I and II).

A special place in the continuous professional training of the teaching staff, over which Prof. Albu kept a watchful eye, was held by the scientific work, represented by scientific sessions (USSM, meetings of the Academy of Medical Sciences Chapter), symposiums, anatomy congresses and the publishing of articles in specialised

magazines, both in our country and outside. The scientific research managed by Prof. Albu as PhD coordinator also took place as part of the preparation and presentation stages of PhD theses. The research themes were numerous and varied: arterial variants, venous variants, peripheral nerve and muscular variants; visceral variants; the anatomy of hernia regions (inguinal, umbilical, and diaphragmatic); anomalies of the nervous and endocrine systems; current and historical anthropology etc.

Mesoscopy and microscopy studies were also themes chosen by some PhD students: the structure of the round ligament of the uterus, the structure of the disc of the temporomandibular joint, the structure of collagen etc.

Students were also involved in the scientific research work, by organizing student scientific clubs whose activity and results were validated in both local and national sessions, in different university centres.

Prof. Albu was a member of numerous scientific societies both in the country and outside (The Medical Sciences Association Union, The Normal and Pathological Anatomy Association, Rev Roum Morphol et Embryol, Anatomische Gesellschaft, The European Teratology Association, Acta Anat Basel, Vertebrate Directory etc).

Prof. Albu published over 193 original scientific papers in both national (Rev Roum Morphol, Clujul Medical) and international magazine (Acta Anatomica, Anat Anz., Folia Morphol Sarajevo).

His activity as a teacher, a doctor and a citizen was honoured by offering him the title of honorary citizen by the municipalities of Cluj-Napoca and Orăştie. He was also awarded numerous nominations, titles and accolades outside of the country (Who is Who in Science - England, 1977; Who is Who in Western Europe, 1975; Who is Who of Intellectuals, 1979; Man of the Year; Who is Who in the USA and in the World; The International Directory of Distinguished Leadership, USA, 1985; Man of the Year, 1995 and many others.).

After retiring, he continued his work as a consulting professor and PhD coordinator at the Department of Anatomy in Cluj; he taught at the Department of Anatomy of the Ecological University in Bucharest, and also at the "Andrei Mureşanu" Faculty of Medicine in Braşov; he held the position of vice-chancellor and professor of anatomy at the "Spiru Haret" University in Bucharest.

Prof. Albu continued to be an active presence at all the events that took place at the Department of Anatomy and Embryology, UMF "Iuliu Haţieganu", Cluj, through conferences (*Victor Papilian, Founder of the School of Anatomy in Cluj*), at the opening courses of school years, at presentation sessions for PhD theses and scientific papers during the celebration of university days.

As a man, Prof. Ion Albu was characterised by moderation, discipline, gravity, tenacity and severity with oneself. These traits (both natural and taught) allowed

him to reach remarkable professional heights during the course of his life.

As a man of vast and refined culture, he also had hobbies: he loved music of all kinds, the arts (drawing, painting, sculpture – he also taught artistic anatomy), he had a passion for history and literature ever since high school, he deeply enjoyed hikes and travelling around the country and abroad.

In his relationships with the department's teaching staff, Prof. Albu was always restrained, within the limits of a decent and civilized behaviour. He resolved the delicate situations that inevitably rose from time to time after a thorough research, by providing just solutions that contributed to the welfare of the department or of the students.

It is impossible that, in just a few pages, the life and professional activity of Prof. Ion Albu be properly described – a personality so complex and so grand. His

passing away leaves a huge empty space amongst the doctors and anatomists in Cluj and in the country. He will be remembered by students, teaching staff and doctors alike thanks to the extensive informational material written by him and left as inheritance, and from which they will all benefit and will use for preparation. Those of us who were closest to him will deeply and forever miss him for the human and professional role model that he was his whole life, leaving his mark on the destiny of so many of us.

We are grateful to him for everything he did for the field of anatomy in Cluj and for us, as people, doctors and teachers and we are trying to say goodbye, for as short a time as possible, to our mentor, our colleague and for some even our friend, who has started a journey longer than the fleeting existence that is one's life.

Francisc Grigorescu Sido