

## The Minovici siblings - medical pioneering and spiritual universe

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Medicine is by definition a field of the sciences, closely linked to the conditions and the most concrete realities of the social environment. As such, key medical personalities have always had a deep insight into the problems of contemporary society; they strove to exceed the limited area of their specialty and expand it to embrace the social determinants of pathology issues.

The inaugural exhibition marking the reopening for the community, after more than a hundred years, of the Dr. Nicolae Minovici (1906-2016) Museum is organized in partnership with the “Dr. Mina Minovici” National Institute of Forensic Medicine and the “Francis I. Rainer” Institute of Anthropology of the Romanian Academy.

The exhibition is built around the medical pioneering of the Minovici siblings; their story is integrated into a broader phenomenon, which refers to the history of the medicine in Bucharest and includes other renowned medical figures, such as Victor Babes and Gheorghe Marinescu. Mina and Nicolae Minovici were the founders and directors of the National Institute of Forensic Medicine (1892), the first institute of its kind designed as per standards that have had worldwide influences up to this day [7]. The “Minovici Siblings - medical pioneering and spiritual universe” exhibition presents, for the first time, objects from the didactic pathological anatomy museum of the “Dr. Mina Minovici” National Institute of Forensic Medicine, such as the collection of human tattoos done by Mina and Nicolae Minovici since the nineteenth century. In 1898, Nicolae Minovici had received his PhD in medicine with the “Tattoos in Romania” paper, a topic which, at the

time, was studied for the first time in our country [8]. Four of the tattoos are for the first time identified thanks to a case study of Professor Francis I. Rainer, conducted in the mid-1920s and presented in the exhibition as well [2]. The exhibition also includes the forensic kit that belonged to dr. Nicolae Minovici, the microscope the Minovici siblings used in their forensic practice, and numerous documents related to their scientific activity.

Dr. George Severeanu, in his old age, said sometime during the interwar years that Mina Minovici was “my most savant student”.

In a time when Romanian medical institutions were founded through private funds (the “Elias” and “Caritas” foundations, Asezamintele Brancovenesti or Eforia Spitalelor Civile, Mina Minovici (1858-1933) manages to convince the leaders of the city of Bucharest, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Justice to invest in the first European forensic institutional project. This happened in Bucharest in 1892 [9].

The city of Bucharest spent 87 thousand gold lei, and the state spent another 50 thousand gold lei for the Morgei building, designed by architect Cristofi Cerkez. The state was spending 29 thousand lei gold annually to maintain it by the end of the nineteenth century. The Paris and the London morgue were inaugurated in the 1920s. On June 15, 1919 she was elected Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest; she was re-elected again in 1923, 1925 and 1930. Minovici Mina said: “a medicine expert needs to possess, in addition to visual and auditory memory, two great moral qualities: complete detachment from people or the subject of the court proceedings, and a steadfast conscience in the service of science” [1].

Stefan Minovici (1867-1935), once he had

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completed his university studies, organized the laboratory of the analytical chemistry department in the shed of a building on Scaune street. In 1907 he managed to find a new location for the laboratory, the former primary school on the current Ferdinand boulevard, where it continued to operate until 1930. Stefan Minovici



Dr. Nicolae Minovici, Dr. Mina Minovici and Prof. Stefan Minovici in front of the Morgue of Bucharest, around 1930.

founded the “Society of Chemistry in Romania”, which became the official body representing Romania within the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry based in Paris; he was then nominated as the vice president of the Society in 1925. In 1924 he became part of the Organic Chemistry department of the Faculty of Sciences in Bucharest, and two years later he became a member of the Romanian Academy. His entire scientific activity was rewarded by the Faculty of Pharmacy, who granted him the “Doctor Honoris Causa” degree (1932) [5].



Mina Minovici (sitting) around 1892-1893, together with colleagues in the courtyard of the Morgue.



Morgue of Bucharest, erected in 1892 due to the vision and efforts of Dr. Mina Minovici.





Nicolae Minovici together with the first voluntary interns of the Ambulance Service (Salvare) around 1906.

Nicolae Minovici (1868-1941) aimed to give medicine not just scientific, but also social and moral significance. He stated that “when caring for the sick, the doctor performs social and moral work, he performs within the field of ethics, which means truth and virtue, not vice and lies...” [4].

This broad conception of humanity was based, in its actions, on a deeply realistic spirit, supported both by temperament and by practical achievements. This tendency towards realism and concrete was evident right from his first scientific research, the topics of which approach concrete and practical issues within the most delicate areas.

His medical specialty pushed him, more than any other doctor, to look more closely at the dramatic realities arising out of the organization of the society at that time, as he came in contact with these due to his profession; his humanistic conception of a doctor’s mission urged him to take an active attitude towards these realities and try to correct them the best he could, with the means available. Because Nicolae Minovici meant medicine to have not only a scientific meaning, but also a social and moral one [3].

One of his first achievements was the scientific liquidation of a terrible social scourge of the early twentieth century, namely begging and vagrancy. There were 15 000 beggars in the capital alone at that time. After five years of hard work, Professor Nicolae Minovici



Vila Dr. Nicolae Minovici in photo taken in 1912. Was donated to the city hall of Bucharest in 1937.

had examined and made records for 13 000 individuals identified as beggars; he treated the sick, hospitalised the disabled, found jobs for those that were able to work and exposed large numbers of people who faked their illnesses. In Bucharest, at the headquarters of the Salvation Society, he organized a social assistance office which offered jobs to beggars. He founded the first women's shelter-homes for unwed mothers, where they could go and stay before and after giving birth, until they could find a job. He initiated the construction of public toilets for men, founded night shelters and installed the first public fountains on the streets [6].

Nicolae Minovici had several significant achievements: in 1906 he founded the "Salvation Society" - the first in modern Romania - together with its annexes: the office for social assistance in finding work for the beggars from Bucharest and the Samaritan School, a medical facility that had in the beginning, as an ambulance, a hansom cab paid for by the doctor himself. In the "Health and Happy Life" journal no. 2 April 1935, the work of Dr. Nicholas Minovici is described as follows: In 1934, dr. Nicolae Minovici summarised the description he so eloquently makes of the capital in 1906, not so much by lack of social assistance measures, but especially by lack of organization. He showed what one man can do by will and skill alone, being a true precursor of the Ministry of Social Assistance which was founded later on. Following a request from the authorities, he easily rounded up, using public agents, thousands of beggars and vagabonds who roamed the streets of the capital and who were the source of so much social unrest, playing an important role in bolstering crime rates. He methodically examined each person from different standpoints: medically and physically, mentally and socially. He treated the sick, admitted the disabled in asylums, put the able people to work, and exposed the ones who faked their disabilities with the touch of a master [10].

The "Salvation Society" was joined in 1937 by the first Emergency Hospital in Romania, the second in Europe after the one in Moskow. As per Nicolae Minovici, "when caring for the sick, the doctor performs social and moral work, he performs within the field of ethics, which means truth and virtue, not vice and lies" [3].

As for the Dr. Nicolae Minovici villa, this was called by him the "villa of non-recreation", as he always came here to work on his projects. Nicolae Minovici never lived there. His residence was with the "Salvation Society", located in the current Izvor park area; he led the society since its inception in 1906 until the last year of his life,

1941. The "villa of non-recreation" was designed to have a representative role. At the beginning of the twentieth century Mina and Nicolae Minovici had both institutional collaborative, but also personal, relationships with the European medical world, and visits were constant. In order to provide an image of Romania, a country that was modernizing apace after 1860, but was still exotic and little known for the many cultural partners and scientific from Europe, Nicolae Minovici has decided to dedicate himself to a project that would show to the others, in detail, the authenticity of his country. This project was the National Art Museum, housed in one of the first Neo-Romanian styled buildings built in Bucharest by architect Cristofi Cerkez. After 1906 all the external collaborators of the Romanian medical world were brought to visit the "villa of non-recreation", so they could sample a part of the Romanian culture [5].

In 1905 he started building the first house as per the "Romanian traditional style" in the north outskirts of the city. The building has a rich history; its present condition is the same as it was in its early years of existence. From this point of view, especially from a museum perspective, it is a unique site in Bucharest.

It can be considered as the first collection of traditional art that represented all the regions of the country, uniformly and harmoniously presented in a special exhibition space. This makes the Dr. Minovici Museum the first museum of traditional art in Bucharest.

In 1937 Dr. Nicholas Minovici donated the villa to the city of Bucharest (the total area was of 13.878 square meters). As per the donation document, the villa would forever be a museum of national art with the name of "Professor Dr. Nicolae Minovici National Art Museum".

Between 1935-1940 Nicolae Minovici donated his entire fortune to the Romanian Athenaeum (paintings), poor students (cash) and to the city of Bucharest (the beautiful villa from Sosea, the first ethnography museum in Bucharest, founded in 1906). If we had to summarize in a few phrases the entire effort of the medical pioneering of the Minovici siblings, we could do it with the chemist Stefan Minovici's last words: "Rise up through spiritual life, the one that exalts and ennobles through sacrifice. So that you are never wrong, always listen to the voice of conscience; conscience is the soul and the soul is divine" [3].

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