Ancient Traces of Veterinary Practice in Maramures Area

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Abstract. Historical documents, kept in archives show that the tradition of animal breeding and empirical veterinary practice and subsequently scientific practice in Maramures area origin back to the ancient times. The written proof of these lay in the manuscripts of Florea Copilul dating back to 1788 and Basiliu Cornea 1876, describing a series of animal diseases as well as the fatalities caused by them, even the record of a real necropsy document.

Keywords: veterinary, disease, animals

INTRODUCTION

Historical documents but also collective memory, preserved through local tradition, show that one of the main occupations of the inhabitants of this area was animal breeding. Therefore, it is natural that the animals and their health enjoy special attention, leading to a multitude of beliefs and practices related to livestock farming, pastoral habits, wintering, breeding, luck concerning farming, many of them popular old habits with a magic – ritual background.

Animal health was important to the area inhabitants and, in order to care for it, they resorted to either ethnomedicine either magical remedies.

The lay side of veterinary ethnomedicine in villages was covered mostly by men; the magical side was reserved to women and priests, the mystical - magical interventions being reduced to disenchantments for luck, multiplying of animals and prevention of illnesses (Laura Pop, 1996).

Acts to prevent disease in animals were based on the removal of evil spirits from animals, thus avoiding their evil actions.

Thus, in Maramureș, with the occasion of „Blagoveștene” (March 25 - Annunciation) - crosses were made with garlic on the doors and shutters of the stables to chase away evil spirits. This happened also with the occasion of other holidays, especially New Year.

On the other hand, the priests and the church were called upon in order to preserve animal health as well as in case of illness.

Thus, the sheepfold was blessed by the priest, with the occasion of the „Healing Spring” (Izvorul Tămăduirii) holiday, religious services were held first Friday after Easter for human and animal health; flour and salt were sanctified and then fed to the animals in order to spare them from diseases during the coming summer.

Animals were sprinkled with holy water and smoked with incense together with their shelters whenever irregularities appeared concerning their health and production.

Such practice is still happening nowadays in the Maramureș region.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research has been carried out on historical and monographic works from the targeted area, archive documents and ethnological studies. Reference materials belonging to the National Archives – Maramures Branch and Hungarian State National Archives have been studied concerning the breeding and evolution of livestock in Maramures area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Maramureș as well as in the country, the first documents containing elements of ethnomedicine have been known since the end of the 18th century.

One of the oldest documents is the manuscript of Florea Copilul, dating back to 1788, entitled „Bookmark for All the Medicines that Are in This Booklet”, dictated by an unknown author. This text, written with Cyrillic letters, was recopied after about 100 years by paleographer A.N. Doicescu using the Latin alphabet.

The Booklet contains 165 recipes „for many kinds of diseases and suffering of human and of the livestock around the house” (Ingeborg Bogdan, 1989).

Although most of the recommendations given by the unknown author are irrational, they have a historical value and indicate the age of some therapeutic procedures, such as: puncture of the spleen, introduction of a louse in the urethra, the application of „stirigoaie” (soot), introducing gas in the eye. The original manuscript of Florea Copilul and the text copied by A. Doicescu can be found at the Romanian Academy Library.

In Maramureș, Michael Dâncuș reports a manuscript dating from 1797 and 1799 with a text rich in content (216 titles) written in verse but also in prose, including „doftorii” (remedies), various „advice”, „lucky and unlucky days”, predictions about the coming year and about what will happen (Dancus, 1997).

The author of the manuscript is the priest Ioan P. Koman and the languages used are Latin, Romanian in Cyrillic alphabet and Hungarian. The pages containing recipes for popular medicine refer broadly to human diseases, but we find some of them to be common both to human and animals.

Thus in the chapter called „ruling teachings for many kinds of diseases” – we find treatments for eye cataract („albeata”) - stir honey with rabbit gall and apply on the eye, for cough – dill minced together with onion seed and barley, boil it with vinegar and wine and drink the obtained juice. „When humans or calves have belly worms - use vinegar and wormwood which will clean them all out”

In Maramureș villages we can still encounter a part of the remedies from the manuscript applied mainly in treating animals.

Treatment and healing of animals was done by one or two „skilled” people.

They used to have limited therapeutic arsenal, treated colics of horses and cows, tympanites in cattle, bleeding of sheep and pigs, performed venisections on cows and horses, castrated piglets and even bulls, helped calving and farrowing and even fixed luxations in animals.

The instruments used were extremely rudimentary, a penknife for castration, an awl for „piercing”, a key for venisections.

They were familiar with a series of remedies based on plants or minerals that were applied whenever necessary.
The harvesters and those who used healing plants as remedy were called herbalists. Over time, a few most talented emerged out of the large group of these popular healers, becoming real „doctors”, demanded and respected for their knowledge.

They used to transmit their gained knowledge and healing experience to the following generations by word of mouth and then by starting to compile true collections of written prophylactic and therapeutic receipts.

In addition to the chronicles and documents of the time, we get rich information about disasters and outbreaks that have haunted the past out of the notes made on old worship books, either hand written or printed.

It is known from ancient writings that, starting with the 16th century, Transylvania sheltered the so-called „oleicari” - empirical Slovak origin migrants, dealing with animal healing, whose practice has been prohibited starting with the year 1835 (Munteanu. M, Simona Ciupe, 2001).

In the area around the town of Baia Mare, the remote followers of these healers were considered the so called „castrators” performing ovarietomies in sows and castrating calves by immobilizing the animals on their knees. (Heres et al., 2003)

Dr. Gabriel Bâle found a book in the library of priest Viorel Tira from Baia Mare area, (clearly a translation) by Petru Maior, Romanian historian and philologist, famous representative of the Transylvanian School. The book was entitled „Teachings to prevent and treat illnesses of the ones traveling around the country and those dealing with horned cattle as well as horses, sheep and pigs” Buda 1816. (Heres et al, 2003).

The book is written in Romanian but in the Cyrillic alphabet.

Some of the oldest documents that specify a number of animal diseases as well as animal mortality due to these diseases, records of these losses and even the description and registration of a genuine necropsy act were found in the Maramureș County Archives.

The author of these documents had some knowledge, appropriate for that age, about a number of diseases and specific terminologies.

The package XLV U.S. 145 – 1818 – 1819 contains reports of praetors and documents of the researches conducted in relation to animal diseases in the Maramures County area.

This package contains 27 sheets of calligraphy and includes documents about animal diseases in Maramureș County area between 1818 - 1819, written in Latin, German and Hungarian.
We chose as an example page 12, a copy of the original document.

Fig. 2. Page 12 of the original document, describing the diseases
Source: Romanian National Archives - Maramures County Branch

The book of Vasile Cornea (Basiliu Cornea) entitled “Home veterinarian” was found in the archives of the Maramures County Library, written in May 1876, as the author confesses in Viseul de Sus – Maramures. It seems to be the first book of its kind written and
published in Romanian language, using a Latin Transylvanian alphabet. The work was printed in the year 1877 in the commune of Gherla, near Cluj, using letters of the diocesan press.

The author, 1867 Graduate of the Medical – Surgery school in Cluj, having the distinction of “Master of Surgery, Obstetrics and Veterinary”, is righteously considered a worthy Maramures descendant of Romanian veterinary medicine.

The 266 pages of the book, written in the charming language of the time in Latinized spelling of the Transylvanian School, is divided into four sections, dedicated to the main farm animal species bred at the time: horses, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs (swine).

Each section comprises 6 chapters: the natural history of the species; the description of the breeds and their appearance; reproduction; a comparison between the healthy state and the ‘morbid’ one and finally the description of the diseases related to each species.

Fig. 3. The cover of the manuscript written by Vasile Cornea
Source: Romanian National Archives - Maramures County Branch
CONCLUSIONS

- Scientific veterinary medicine has its roots in old empiric practices of animal treatment.
- Given the geographic particularity of Maramures, favoring the breeding of animals, the popular culture has kept a rich therapeutic arsenal, referring to the diseases of animals.

We can distinguish two sides to the Maramures popular veterinary medicine:

A – A mystical - magical side
B – An empirical side

Concerning mystical - magical side, we have countless disenchantments and perceptions regarding, mainly, the prevention of animal illness caused by evil forces but also the elimination of spell or magic consequences, thought to be the main source of animal illness by the people in Maramures villages.

Regarding the empirical side, we can mention the Miscellanea Manuscript dating from 1797 -1799, written by Mihai Dancus.

It includes a wide number of medicines and advice regarding care and health of animals.

- Concerning the written testimonies about animal diseases, an important source is represented by the inscriptions on old church books.
- One can find documented references to animal diseases in archives, in the reports of praetors as well as in the papers resulting from epizootic researches performed in the Maramures region;
- In Viseul de Sus - Maramures, the ‘Master of Surgery, Obstetrics and Veterinarian’ – Basiliu Cornea, wrote a book in 1876 about animal diseases called ‘Home veterinarian’, published a year later in Romanian, in Latin alphabet, in the city of Gherla. This work, alongside others, was the starting point for training famous practitioners and has contributed to the first manuals to be used in veterinary schools.

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