

HANDBOOK FOR MEDICINES BY IOSIF ȚIUCRA, A TEACHER, A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT IN THE HISTORY OF PHARMACY COLLECTION (MNIT)*

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Abstract:

Among the numerous artifacts preserved in the History of Pharmacy Collection of the National Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj-Napoca (MNIT) there is an unpublished manuscript, a handbook with practical medical advice, dated 1876 and written in Romanian by Iosif Țiucra, a schoolteacher activating in Bârsa (Berza) village, Arad County.

This research aims to present Iosif Țiucra, the content of his manuscript, and to contextualize his handbook, considering the sanitary problems of the Romanian community in Arad County, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: manuscript, health, hygiene, nineteenth century, Arad County

Rezumat: Printre numeroasele artefacte din cadrul Colecției de Istorie a Farmaciei a Muzeului Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei din Cluj-Napoca (MNIT) am întâlnit un manuscris inedit, un mic manual cu sfaturi medicale practice, în limba română, scris în anul 1876 de Iosif Țiucra, un învățător care activa în satul Bârsa (Berza) din județul Arad.

Cercetarea de față își propune să-l prezinte pe Iosif Țiucra, conținutul manuscrisului și să contextualizeze manualul său, având în vedere problemele sanitare ale comunității românești din Comitatul Aradului, de la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea.

Cuvinte cheie: manuscris, sănătate, igienă, secolul al XIX-lea, Comitatul Arad

Introduction

The present article deals with an unpublished nineteenth-century small-format manuscript, 11 × 16.8 cm, written in Romanian. The complete title of the manuscript is *Carte de mână pentru doctorii de Iosif Țiucra, învățătoru. Folklor din medicina veterinară și umană. Sfaturi practice casnice și din gospodăria agricolă. Carte de mână pentru ne doctori pentru a ajuta celor cadinte în multe feluri de morburi pana la sosirea Medicului (Doctorului). Culese în Berza de Invețietoriulu Iosifu Tiucra* [Handbook for medicines by Iosif Țiucra, a teacher. Veterinarian and human medicine folklore. Practical advice to use at home and on the farm. Handbook for non-doctors to help others suffering from different kinds of diseases until the arrival of the Doctor. Collected in Berza by the schoolteacher Iosif Țiucra]. The small notebook is preserved at the National Museum of Transylvanian History, in the History of Pharmacy Collection, inv. no. IF 2355. The manuscript was planned as a booklet and follows a book structure, with chapters, pagination, and a list of content. The most consistent part belongs to Iosif Țiucra and was written in 1876. At the end of the manuscript, an entry by Ioan Țiucra, written in 1901, completes the text with poetry.

Iosif Țiucra was born in 1818 in a family whose origins go back to eighteenth-century Walachia. His ancestors crossed the mountains and settled in Arad County. In 1840 he graduated the Romanian 'Preparandia,' the first pedagogical school in the region with teaching

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-1562, within PNCDI III.

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in Romanian, established in Arad in 1812. Țucra became a schoolteacher in Bârsa, where he was active for more than 35 years.¹ At the same time, he was a member of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People [Asociația Transilvană pentru Literatura Română și Cultura Poporului Român – ASTRA]. The association popularized science, folklore, and high culture among the Romanian communities, envisaging mainly an educational purpose. Iosif Țucra, like other teachers, was involved in cultural and educational activities.²

The manuscript in the History of Pharmacy Collection is not the first written by the Transylvanian teacher. The monograph of the Bârsa commune mentions Țucra's diary as one of the most important sources regarding the history of the municipality during the nineteenth century, and reproduces the complete text.³ The teacher started a personal journal in 1846 aiming to write his quotidian observations on different aspects of the daily life of Bârsa's inhabitants, pigmented with historical references and his family's personal history. The teacher wrote the diary in the Cyrillic alphabet and later transcribed it in an abstract with Latin characters. The document, finished 29 years later, in 1875, only surfaced in the 1990s. Iancu Țucra, a member of his family, working as an engineer in Cluj, owned the original text and donated copies of the manuscript to the Arad County Museum, the Arad Archives, the village of Bârsa and some relatives.⁴

The Handbook in the MNIT collection seems to be a sequel to the diary. I have not yet found the artifact's donation or sale act. The inventory register mentions that the manuscript became part of the museum's collection in 1997. In the light of the monographic study published in 2012, one can presume that the MNIT manuscript might have the same source, i.e. Iancu Țucra, or perhaps another family member.

The unpublished manuscript, preserved in the History of Pharmacy Collection, raises several questions that the present study aims to answer. I wanted to find out the reasons Țucra had for writing this guide with practical advice for preventing diseases (as he was not a doctor or a pharmacist) and what inspired him in his endeavor. To understand his initiative, a reconstruction of the context from the standpoint of the general health of the Romanian population in Arad County is necessary. Learning about Romanian villages and the health problems faced by their inhabitants in the end of the nineteenth century could help us better understand Țucra's manuscript. Another purpose of this study is to present a part of the handbook's content and some of the remedies that the schoolteacher deemed important to gather and share.

Context

Before talking about Iosif Țucra, his text, and the latter's relevance, I would like to outline the context in which this teacher from Bârsa wrote his guide, based on the secondary literature dealing with the health of the Romanian population in the second half of the nineteenth century in Transylvania,⁵ then part of Hungary, within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The most important studies published on the topic deal with pandemics, the official medical legislation, the authorities' attempts to disseminate and implement the latter, and the way the official sanitary regulations reached the Romanian population. They also focus on the

¹ Godea 2012, 203.

² Godea 2012, fn. 180, 211. More information about Iosif Țucra, his family history, his village and his vision of the world he was observing and its realities can be found in Ioan Godea's monographic study dedicated to the Bârsa commune, published in 2012.

³ *Marturia timpului. Intemplanturile din lumea largă în patru amputuri vedea și aude, precum și despre ai mei cei de față până la finea anului 1874 culese și prescurtate în Berza Prin Invetiatorului Iosifu Țucra*, published in Godea 2012, 294–350.

⁴ Godea 2012, 266, fn. 195.

⁵ I use Transylvania in the contemporary understanding of the term.

popularization of knowledge on personal hygiene and public health in late nineteenth-century Transylvania, preventive medicine, taking into consideration the diseases, the medical profession, types of medicines and remedies, public health, the impact of epidemics on both demography and the mentality of the population.⁶ There is one study that deals with the health status of Arad's inhabitants and the involvement of teachers in preserving it, pointing out the relevant contributions of teachers as mediators between specialists and the community precisely in the period in which Țiucra wrote his study.⁷

The mentioned studies provide a comprehensive perspective on the health situation of Romanian communities, most of which were rural during this period, and the attempts of authorities and intellectuals to educate people. They all mention the small number of medical personnel to attend to a large population, the precarious living conditions, the pauperism of Romanian villages and the coexistence of traditional methods of treating diseases and modern medicine.

Țiucra wrote his manuscript in a difficult period from the point of view of medical history. Arad County, as part of the province of Hungary, within the Habsburg Monarchy, and of the state of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was affected by several epidemics, among which the most aggressive was cholera. Such epidemics came in successive episodes: they began in 1831, continued with significant waves in 1855 and 1866, and culminated with a great epidemic that lasted between 1872 and 1873.⁸ Besides cholera, numerous other contagious diseases stroke the population, like smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough, scarlet fever, granular conjunctivitis, tuberculosis, measles, and syphilis.⁹

The lack of proper hygiene compounded this phenomenon due to the absence of education and the poverty that characterized Romanian communities living in villages, with an inadequate diet that led to low immunity. Alcoholism was a fairly common phenomenon among the poor, who worked and lived in challenging conditions.¹⁰ In many cases, this situation was aggravated by weather conditions. Drought or heavy rains strongly affected village communities that survived mainly by cultivating the land and raising livestock. Environmental factors were crucial for a good harvest, as were pests. Moreover, certain diseases also affected the health of farm animals, so poverty and hunger worsened during the bad years. In response to these waves of human and animal contagious diseases, government authorities tried to implement a series of measures to prevent the spread of these diseases and to offer practical advice on how to treat them.

Regarding the sanitary legislation in Hungary, according to Oana Habor, two acts of great importance were issued: the Sanitary Act in 1870 and the law on public hygiene in 1876.¹¹ According to the 1876 law, public health was a matter of state policy.¹² For preserving public health, the local authorities, under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, were responsible for supervising the implementation of certain rules regarding the cleaning of the streets, and the buildings where the schools operated, to assure the provision of the ambulance service, and the appointment of doctors where necessary, for supervising children's health.¹³ During pandemics, priests, teachers and doctors also had to report the infectious outbreaks, besides public authorities.¹⁴ Article 141 stated that the administration of communes and cities

⁶ Mora 1997; Bolovan 2007; Habor 2012; Rotar 2012; Virag 2012; Habor 2015; Soroștineanu 2015; Mărza 2020; Dumănescu, Bolovan 2021.

⁷ Oarcea 2020.

⁸ Bolovan 2011, 62–66; Mărza 2020, 96.

⁹ Mărza 2020, 96.

¹⁰ Mora 1997, 110–111; Rotar 2013, 41–64; Mărza 2020, 96–97.

¹¹ Habor 2015, 27.

¹² Habor 2015, 44.

¹³ Habor 2015, 45.

¹⁴ Habor 2015, 50.

was responsible for public health and played the role of sanitary supervisors.¹⁵ The act under discussion established health commissions in the communes that had their own doctor, which included the doctor, a veterinarian, a pharmacist, priests, notaries, teachers, and three educated people working in the administration, with an advisory role and the right of initiative. The commissions were consulted for public health matters, local hygiene, food analysis, abandoned children and numerous other sanitary problems.¹⁶

During pandemic times, the authorities attempted to implement sanitary measures, quarantined certain areas, supplemented the number of doctors and redirected them to the territory. They also restricted certain activities, such as fairs or pilgrimages. Furthermore, they began an active campaign in the press, printed brochures explaining prophylaxis and treatment of diseases, urged the population to adopt a balanced life style, free from excesses, provided information on hygiene standards, how to maintain proper housing, proper preservation of various food types and limited consumption of some foods in order to prevent disease.¹⁷ The law also mentioned the necessity of training the population to act in cases of emergency. People were instructed how to provide first aid and were told the basic rules for maintaining one's health that had to be taught in schools.¹⁸ In the case of the cholera epidemic, Ofelia Mora even talks about the appointment of ministerial commissioners, who, together with supreme committees, procedural judges, and doctors, visited the most affected areas explaining the situation to the people.¹⁹

Uneducated Romanian peasants had a poor understanding of the causes of these diseases, and the propagation of information was problematic, especially in communities with no doctors or pharmacists.²⁰ It is important to note that the Romanian population of Transylvania was mostly rural; between 1850 and 1900, almost 90% of the inhabitants lived in villages.²¹ A significant problem in Transylvanian villages was the lack of education and the survival of superstitions.²² Such communities preferred traditional remedies and often refused medical treatment in favor of divine benevolence, which led to resistance towards any type of regulation. Furthermore, sanitary regulations in pandemics frequently conflicted with religious practice: people could not respect the tradition of burying the dead, receiving the final blessing, or participating in religious processions.²³ By analyzing the response to epidemic outbreaks researchers concluded that there was a lower rate of medical culture in the Romanian communities and less commitment in educating people regarding necessary health measures.²⁴ The high rate of illiteracy in Romanian villages also determined a high level of reticence to medical treatments. People preferred to use traditional remedies based on plants and roots, tested by the community, and rarely did they ask for a doctor's advice.²⁵ The fees for medical consultations were relatively high and exceeded the financial possibilities of ordinary village people. In most cases, even if they acknowledged the need for a specialist, doctors were not available. There was a lack of specialists, and patients had to cover long distances to find a doctor. A single district physician was responsible for all the villages in the respective district, and only rich villages could afford to hire a village physician. The Romanian community preferred Romanian-speaking doctors, and for this reason people even went to see such

¹⁵ Habor 2015, 54.

¹⁶ Habor 2015, 67.

¹⁷ Mora 1997, 110.

¹⁸ Habor 2015, 45.

¹⁹ Mora 1997, 112.

²⁰ Mora 1997, 110.

²¹ Bolovan 2007, 230; Rotar 2012, 242.

²² Matei 2021, 172.

²³ Mora 1997, p. 113.

²⁴ Popovici 2015, 295–269.

²⁵ Oarcea 2020, 77.

physicians in nearby boroughs.²⁶ It seems that, at the turn of the twentieth century, a large part of Romanian students at the universities of Budapest and Vienna chose the medical profession. However, they were still insufficient for the Romanian communities' needs, especially in the rural areas. Soroștineanu's study mentions the publication of critical press articles concerning the small number of working places for doctors in rural areas, approximately one doctor for every 20–30 villages.²⁷

The educated members of Romanian communities made great efforts to discuss health problems and regulations in schools, providing children with a minimum medical education, with priests, teachers, and educators playing a crucial role in the matter. Intellectual and financial elites and different charitable organizations planned campaigns to control the transmission of diseases and to reduce their effects through the free distribution of medicines and food to the poor.²⁸

Alongside authorities, doctors, pharmacists, members of the clergy, teachers, and professors, newspapers published in Romanian also had the task of dispersing the public's distrust of the imposed rules. In this context, specialists were encouraged to publish various treatises reproduced in widely distributed newspapers. Numerous periodicals published materials dedicated to health and the prevention of diseases: *Albina* [The Bee], *Familia* [The Family], *Telegraful român* [The Romanian Telegraph], *Transilvania* [Transylvania], *Biserica și Școala* [The Church and the School], or *Românul* [The Romanian], to mention just a few.²⁹ An example given in Ofelia Mora's study is the *Treaty of public hygiene and sanitary police of Iacob Felix*, which was reproduced in *Transilvania*, the official publication of the ASTRA.³⁰ During the cholera epidemic, the doctor described the conditions in which the disease spread: unventilated houses, poor personal hygiene, unhealthy food, and alcoholism, among others.³¹ In such articles, scientific language was adapted in order to be understood by ordinary people, as the press was one of the most effective channels for transmitting this vital information.³²

Other essential communicators for Romanian rural communities were teachers and priests, who played an important role in disseminating the official health program, since they were in permanent contact with the people, they were considered trustworthy, and were viewed as models. Thus, they facilitated official communication with individuals living in the rural areas, translating the main sanitary rules to the latter's understanding.³³ Religious publications also disseminated information related to disease prevention and public hygiene, published the names of Romanian doctors and recommended different medical treatises, such as those written by George Vuia or Simion Stoica.³⁴ They also published natural remedies' recipes and advertised different kinds of elixirs.³⁵

The health status of the Transylvanian rural population and the solutions found by the authorities for pandemic control, the prevention of the epidemics, and the desired improvement of the general health of the population provide a starting point for the analysis of Țiucra's manuscript.

Waves of cholera epidemics affected the Arad area, and in 1873 many people became ill, including children. At the time, newspapers supported the idea of introducing the study of

²⁶ Iudean et alii 2018, 53–54.

²⁷ Soroștineanu 2015, 542.

²⁸ Bolovan 2007, 240.

²⁹ Mora 1997, 111–113.

³⁰ Mora 1997, 112.

³¹ Felix 1873, 168.

³² Habor 2015, 84.

³³ Habor 2015, 150; Oarcea 2020, 76.

³⁴ Habor 2015, 146–148.

³⁵ Habor 2015, 149.

hygiene in schools, not only in seminaries or pedagogical institutes.³⁶ In 1878 priests and teachers were already involved in the sanitary education of children and adult villagers, organizing conferences on morals and public hygiene, pointing out bad habits, offering support in infant care, and stressing that diseases and health in general should not be neglected.³⁷ Teachers were directly involved in the official campaigns to popularize the new medical regulations; therefore, they were better documented in terms of medicine and hygiene than priests. At the same time, many teachers were members of various committees that dealt with managing health problems in their villages. Moreover, they also subscribed to Romanian language newspapers circulating in Transylvania. *Higiiena și școala, foaie pentru sănătate, educație, instrucție* [Hygiene and school, sheet for health, education, instruction], very popular among schoolteachers, was a publication that provided advice on hygiene, preventive measures against contagious diseases, skin care, and diet.³⁸ In the case of tuberculosis, teachers were urged to consult doctors and specialized published materials in order to prepare public speeches on the subject, along with adopting supplementary hygiene measures in the classroom.³⁹ Therefore, one can presume Iosif Țiucra's involvement in such activities inspired the writing of the handbook. Probably Țiucra wrote the book in 1876, under the direct influence of these public discussions and official regulations.

Formal observations about the manuscript

As mentioned, the manuscript was conceived as a booklet and presented as a small book, in Romanian. The structure of the textbook consists of a dustcover (probably added later) handwritten in blue ink: *Carte de mână pentru doctorii de Iosif Țiucra învățător* [Handbook for medicines by Iosif Țiucra, a teacher]. The cover is handwritten in blue ink on cardboard: *Folklor din medicina veterinară și umană. Sfaturi practice casnice și din gospodăria agricolă* [Veterinarian and human medicine folklore. Practical advice to use at home and on the farm]. The title page is also handwritten in ink: *Carte de mână pentru ne doctori pentru a ajuta celor cadinte in multe feluri de morburi pana la sosirea Medicului (Doctorului). Culese în Berza de Invețietoriulu Iosifu Tiucra, 1876* [Handbook for non-doctors to help others suffering from different diseases, until the Doctor's arrival. Collected in Berza by school teacher Iosif Țiucra]. The book starts with a motto, written on the verso of the title page: *Pre celu bolnavu alu cerceta. O faptă a milei trupesci* [To examine the sick. An act of bodily mercy].

The handbook has 90 themes or chapters with Iosif Țiucra's bits of advice, and a total of 76 numbered pages written in 1876. Presumably, some pages are missing because the text ends abruptly. Ioan Țiucra wrote 10 additional pages with poetry and some personal notes in 1901. The index starts on page 105 and ends on page 110. Inside, on the second cover, there is an inscription, written in graphic pencil: *Preot Teodor Bodogaie, fost profesor de teologie Gușterița* [Priest Teodor Bodogaie, former theology teacher Gușterița (n.n., a village in Sibiu County)]. This inscription might connect the handbook to Teodor Bodogaie, a theologian and teacher in Sibiu, born in 1911, but I am not confident that the annotation denotes a propriety mark.

The manuscript is written in an archaic Romanian language, specific for the late nineteenth-century Transylvania, making the text difficult to decipher. For example, numerous words end with an extra (mute) 'u' (*pusu* instead of *pus*, 'laid'; *acoperitu* instead of *acoperit*, 'covered'). The author learned to write using the Cyrillic alphabet,⁴⁰ but, in his desire to be read

³⁶ Oarcea 2020, 77.

³⁷ Oarcea 2020, 78.

³⁸ Oarcea 2020, 79.

³⁹ Oarcea 2020, 81.

⁴⁰ In Transylvania, in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a transition period between the two alphabets, and at some point, the two coexisted. In the first half of the nineteenth century newspapers were written in Cyrillic

by his successors, he switched to the Latin alphabet. Moreover, in the nineteenth century the Romanian language had a different orthography and topic than the ones used in present-day Romanian. The teacher wrote his text without using diacritical marks and hence many words are almost unrecognizable to a contemporary Romanian speaker. The author uses plenty of regionalisms for plant and substance denominations, but also for different diseases or body parts. He also included typical expressions, as they were used in the common language of his village. For some of the substances mentioned in the text, I was unable to find a correspondence with nowadays pharmaceutical products. In what concerns some of the diseases he mentioned, I have tried to identify the best equivalent in contemporary Romanian and for the English translation. Where I did not understand the meaning of the words or did not find an equivalent, I kept the original Romanian form or paraphrased it in English.

Content observations

In terms of structure, the information is structured according to types of interventions, not illnesses. The advice collection has 90 entries, each containing practical information for different situations, from first aid in case of drowning, electrocution, rabies, animal bites, broken bones, and frostbite, to information on various plants and their effect on human health, especially poisonous plants and fungi, dietary advice, as well as advice on hygiene, advice on treating animals for all kinds of illnesses, food preservation (how to store grapes and plums over the winter, the meat over the summer, or remedies for food affected by mold) and various other practical tips. The order of these guidelines seems random, probably related to how the author remembered these issues or perhaps related to situations in daily life that prompted him to write various practical instructions.

Iosif Țiucra identified the necessity for the community to have basic knowledge about health hazards that had to be solved very fast, without the presence of a doctor or a pharmacist. He decided to help by writing a few pieces of advice, some stemming from his own experience, as he often mentioned in the handbook: ‘I tested it and it worked.’ Others are remedies from folklore, as noted in the title of the manuscript, and yet others probably stem from the legislation he had to disseminate at school as part of the educational process or from newspapers that published medical articles. We know that the teacher from Bârsa read newspapers; in his diary he mentions *Gazeta de Transilvania* [The Transylvanian Gazette], *Amicul Școalei* [The School’s Friend], *Concordia* [Concordia], *Amiculu Poporului* [The People’s Friend], and *Tutti Frutti* [Tutti Frutti].⁴¹

The motto used at the beginning of the handbook is relevant. It is a reference to The Corporal Works of Mercy, found in the teachings of Jesus, and provides a model of moral behavior in treating others. Țiucra followed his Christian belief and probably considered that it was his duty to help the ones in need, especially in those hard times when people faced numerous deadly contagious diseases.

This gathering of data is also interesting owing to the association between curing human diseases and injuries and treating animals or even preserving food, or treating plants for parasites, the author paying almost equal attention to all these subjects. As previously mentioned, in the rural context, the family’s survival depended not only on the health of the humans, but also on the survival of the animals and the successful growing and preservation of crops. The text under analysis is inclined more towards prevention than treatment. His

alphabet, around 1850–1860 there was a transition alphabet, both in Latin and Cyrillic, and only after 1865–1870 the texts started being written only in Latin, with the Cyrillic alphabet still being used, albeit rarely, in private correspondence until the end of the century. When Țiucra wrote his handbook, the Latin alphabet was already predominant.

⁴¹ Godea 2012, 268.

preoccupation with medical problems and their treatment also becomes apparent in the previously mentioned diary, a handy tool for understanding Țiucra's handbook.

The teacher has a personal approach in both manuscripts. He did not apply a scientific method in gathering the remedies and was rather interested in the topics that had a direct impact on him. However, his individual problems are well contextualized and presented against the background of his village's life. In the diary Țiucra recorded historical, economic, cultural, or educational information, such as he knew and perceived it; therefore, his text became a local narrative chronicle that covers a very long period in the history of the place, next to his own personal history.⁴² He added important information over the years that can be used in various fields of research, from the history of the village, the church, and the school, to studies of rural economy or climatological and medical history.⁴³ The teacher consistently recorded certain aspects of his family life. He mentioned the birth of his children, the schools they attended, their marriages, the illnesses they suffered, and the most important events that influenced life in the village: weather conditions, the general state of the crops, the price of products, epidemics and diseases, human and animal mortality, and pests that destroyed the crops, accidents, etc. For example:

This year we did not have an easy life, and we were not free from the numerous diseases that hunted us – from which many of us also perished, such as inflammation of the lungs, cough and cold, cold in summer, dreadful cholera, in autumn the blight, the cold, the pox and the sore throat; it seems that God has begun a war to cut man off from the earth. There were not numerous diseases spread among the cattle, except for the sheep and goats, and most of them perished of the yolk.⁴⁴

These aspects of daily life are also reflected in the advice he chose to include in his handbook. Comparing the diary and the handbook, one can notice people's reactions to different medical situations because, in both manuscripts, the teacher also mentions the community's habits when facing pandemics or diseases. Village superstitions are also noted in his handbook; he provides, for example, two solutions for treating rabies, none working.⁴⁵ One of them, 'according' to mythology, is mentioned as 'written salt':

One spindle, used by women to spin, you use it for writing and after you have written, with one knife scratch the written salt and feed it to the cattle, mixed with a large quantity of bran, early in the morning, before sunrise. Furthermore, for the human, in the evenings, one makes a cake, puts Verise [sic!] salt in it, and bakes it in hot ashes and then, three mornings in a row, before sunrise, he tastes good with his tongue for three times, first the salt then the cake. Many came to me, and I wrote the salt, and those who follow this way never suffered, nor their animals. Everything must be prepared very quickly; if not, and the rabies installs, there is no doctor and no cure against it. It is better to put out the sparkle than to extinguish the entire house after it starts burning. In the case of all diseases, fast help is good.⁴⁶

Popular beliefs and practices were widespread in Romanian villages; for instance, other magic practices were performed to cast out diphtheria or to cure epilepsy.⁴⁷

⁴² Godea 2012, 266.

⁴³ Godea 2012, 274.

⁴⁴ Godea 2012, 348.

⁴⁵ Bărbulescu 2015, 306–328.

⁴⁶ The information can be found in Țiucra 1873, 16–17.

⁴⁷ Habor 2015, 121.

Still, during the 29 years that the diary covers, the teacher only mentioned twice consulting a doctor for his own health problems. It seems he had circulatory problems affecting his legs and needed surgical intervention. He mentioned that if it were not for the doctor, he would have lost his life.⁴⁸ He also mentioned some of the sanitary rules applied in the village. In 1856, probably after a cholera episode, an order was issued stating that everyone had to whitewash their house inside and out.⁴⁹ He also noted in his diary the opening of a pharmacy in Sebiş⁵⁰, Arad County, in December 1876, deeming it a significant event.⁵¹

For each year, he talked about the diseases the villagers faced, according to their frequency and severity. We find out when cholera struck the village of Bârsa: in 1849 cholera reaped many, the teacher wrote, and in an entry dated 1851 he mentions that his brother died of the same disease.⁵² In November, the community raised a cross in the church garden in front of the crypt to guard against cholera that had claimed many lives in the village.⁵³ He also mentioned that on 15 August 1855 there was a religious service to protect animals from disease.

The handbook under discussion reveals the problems that the commune's inhabitants faced at that time. Țiucra chose to start his volume of practical advice with first aid interventions. He offered solutions on how to handle frostbites, the drowned, the hanged, the ones struck by lightning, and those who had ingested poisonous substances. The advice he offered in cases of emergency were meant to avoid death until the doctor's arrival. It is noticeable that for severe problems like lightning strikes or frostbite, he mentioned that the doctor must be consulted: 'If someone becomes all frozen ... after one has put him into bed – one must cover him with snow up to the mouth and afterward send for the doctor to continue with the necessary operations.'⁵⁴ In other serious cases he specifically mentioned that medicine must be administered: 'For dislocations and broken bones, one must pull them to put them in their original place, and from all the remedies, it is better to use the medicine than the spirit, and again cold water and a good rest.'⁵⁵

The handbook also provides information on how people could tell the difference between plants, how to recognize poisonous plants and fungi, and what quick solutions they could implement to avoid death until the arrival of a doctor. In the paragraphs dealing with accidental poisoning, Țiucra devoted an essential place to poisonous plants and mushrooms, describing them and precisely identifying the places where they grew. His readers could be safe following his advice. Like in the other chapters, prevention is the primary goal. He also described the symptoms caused once the plants were ingested. Nonetheless, he did not provide any suggestions for treating symptoms caused by these plants. Among the mentioned plants are cypress spurge (*euphorbia cyparissias*), the Henbane, Belladonna, Hemlock, (White) Hellebore, Narbonne, and Star-of-Bethlehem. For example, in the section dedicated to *balandaritalele*⁵⁶ (*Datura stramonium*) he noted: 'These grow in slippery places and have big white flowers and a piney head full of flower seeds that make ill the children breastfed upon them. The seed can cause fever, muscle tension, gristle, ill senses, gnashing of teeth, and death.'⁵⁷

⁴⁸ Godea 2021, 317, 326.

⁴⁹ Godea 2012, 323.

⁵⁰ In Romanian: 's-a deschis potica din Sebiş' (Sebiş is a town, 82 kilometers from Arad).

⁵¹ Godea 2012, 279, 350.

⁵² Godea 2012, p. 314, 316.

⁵³ Godea 2012, p. 280, 322.

⁵⁴ Țiucra 1873, 1.

⁵⁵ Țiucra 1873, 9.

⁵⁶ *Balandaritia* is a Transylvanian regionalism used to denominate *ciumăfaie* (in English, 'Devil's Trumpet,' 'Thorn Apple' or 'Jimsonweed'/'Jimson Weed'). The word *balandaritia*, *balandarița* or *bolundarița* probably derives from the Hungarian word *bolond*, meaning 'crazy.'

⁵⁷ Țiucra 1873, 19.

Țiucra described various treatments that could be performed with palliative substances that people had at home, such as salt, vinegar, honey, alcohol, and sometimes even plum brandy. He wrote about the virtues of substances that presumably had beneficial effects on several conditions, such as oil: against feverish sweat and chest pain, cattle lice, and horse scab. **Vinegar** is also recommended for treating numerous conditions. Bread crust soaked in vinegar and put on the forehead was recommended for headaches. Vinegar was also recommended as a disinfectant, but it could also be used to stop bleeding in case of wounds; moreover, salty vinegar had sterilizing properties for wounds caused by poisonous bites (before sucking the poison out): ‘When someone hurts oneself with some sharpened object or with something else, the blood must be stopped by dipping a rag from a shirt in vinegar or brandy and to strongly tie the cut, still pouring brandy from time to time over the bind...’.⁵⁸ Țiucra also recommended washing one’s teeth with vinegar in order to remove bad smell. Vinegar was also useful for treating animals: boiled with sugar and water it became nutrition for bees, in the years when the quantity of honey was not enough for sustaining the bees over the winter, but it could also be used in a mixture to treat sheep diseases.

Zaitinul⁵⁹ (‘oil’) was recommended for all kinds of wounds, especially for skin burns. It was supposed to be heated on fire and turned into an unguent. With this substance, one had to lubricate a clean piece of paper, put it on the wound, and change it often until the healing began. Oil was recommended for stomach pain as well: ‘you rub the belly with *Zaitinu* or hot ash mixed with embers and water as hot as one can bear it.’⁶⁰

Lye of ashes is recommended for poisonous wasp bites, **brandy** with salt for stomach pain and **sour stone (alum)** and **charcoal** for disinfecting open wounds, ‘if the blood does not stop, grind some sour stone and wrap it with some flour like ground charcoal, and that mixture spread it all over the cut and tie it firmly, and it will stop,’ the teacher wrote.

Țiucra also recommended some remedies that were not so accessible in villages. **Coffee** was mentioned for headaches and for waking up after hard drunkenness. Another solution for headaches was **camphor** melted in alcohol, mixed with a bit of saffron; a cloth had to be dipped in this mixture and put on the forehead to solve the problem. He mentioned camphor also for repelling flies or treating eye diseases: fresh egg white, crushed sugar, and camphor whipped in a bowl until they became a mousse and then placed on a patch over the eye.

For treating the ones bitten by sick animals, especially rabid dogs, cats, wolves, or foxes, he suggested the same, rather unusual, treatment, for both humans and cattle, assuring his readers that those who tried this remedy suffered no harm. He proposed the conservation in salt of ‘green bugs called little worms’ that have to be ingested:

For humans: in the evenings, after dinner, one must give the bitten 1 to 5 worms. If he feels nausea, one can hide them inside his food, and the less sensitive must eat them plain because they do not taste bad. They are salty like Easter bread; then, some stomach cramps will follow and a feeling of heaviness, but after 12 hours, everything will go away.⁶¹

He also suggested a recipe for an unguent that allegedly treated any kind of wound. For its preparation one had to appeal to the apothecary.

⁵⁸ Țiucra 1873, 9.

⁵⁹ *Zaitinu* is probably *zăitin*, meaning ‘oil’ (Mărgărit 2012, 238).

⁶⁰ Țiucra 1873, 51.

⁶¹ Țiucra 1873, 13.

Buy from the apothecary distilled *Nienberger fasteru*⁶² in value of 50 Kreuzer [currency; equals half a Gulden]; in a clean *zaitinu* [oil] heated on fire then make the unguent and lubricate a clean piece of paper and put in on the wound and often change it until you see the healing begins.⁶³

These types of universal remedies were popular and many newspapers published advertisements for ‘true universal medicine.’ In 1886, there was an advertisement for *Whilhelm’s Thea curățitoare de sânge* [Whilhelm’s Thea blood cleaner], a concoction, that was supposedly curing rheumatism, open wounds and other types of affections.⁶⁴ All the advertised products had fancy names like: *Sucul și Bomboanele Spitwegerich* [Spitwegerich Juice and Candy], or *Extractul lui Shaker* [Shaker’s Extract] and they were mostly doing more harm than good, being severely criticized by doctors.⁶⁵

Among the sicknesses mentioned by the author are colds or chills (the name he uses for fever symptoms), diarrhea, stomach pain, vomiting, hemorrhage, heartache, cough, toothache, blindness, and erysipelas, but he also gave advice for dealing with contagious diseases like chickenpox and cholera.

From his diary we know the teacher was familiar with the symptoms and consequences of cholera, which seems to have been a permanent presence in the Arad area in the nineteenth century. Since the great cholera of 1831, the Buteni region was regularly affected by the disease, each new episode resulting in numerous deaths among the population. The disasters caused by cholera are mentioned in 1848, 1849, when in October ‘it killed many of the Hungarian people,’ in August 1851, when again many people died, including the teacher’s brother Theodore and his wife, and in September and October 1855, when 16 people died in Bârsa. The last record of this disease appears in 1873, and the teacher stated that the time of great cholera started in the village on 1 June and lasted for three months.⁶⁶

Analyzing his advice, it is somewhat clear that the teachers were among those responsible for educating people in matters of public health. He admits that there was no cure to stop cholera, and his suggestions refer mostly to hygiene measures. He recommended good room ventilation, keeping the house clean, changing the bedding often, drinking a glass of wine in the morning, eating fat-free and simple light food in moderate amounts, avoiding low temperatures and physically tiring work, and consulting a doctor. He did not provide recipes for this dangerous disease, being aware that he was not qualified to treat it. Instead, he noted common-sense advice aimed at not worsening the illness and keeping the sick alive until the doctor’s arrival. For treating cholera doctors prescribed mint tea, mint (for chewing), sage, wood bark, laudanum, bismuth subnitrate, quinine, boiled water, thermally prepared food, clean air, quassia extract (for cleaning mustaches), crystal iron-sulfur melted with distilled water, wine spirit, mint oil and carbolic acid, pepper and cloves.⁶⁷

For chickenpox, another contagious disease, Țiucra mentioned that if the pustules start bursting, the following rules must be followed: moderation in eating and drinking, no fruits, drinking beverages that make one hot and cause sweat, fresh air, keeping active and not padded in clothes. It is also mandatory for the afflicted not to scratch their pustules and keep a good spirit.

From his recommendations one can deduce what were the most common afflictions. For example, regarding stomach sickness he mentioned that many people suffer from it because

⁶² Presumably a product bought from Nürnberg, Germany.

⁶³ Țiucra 1873, 67.

⁶⁴ Habor 2015, 116–117.

⁶⁵ Habor 2015, 118–119.

⁶⁶ Godea 2012, 289.

⁶⁷ Habor 2015, 111.

it is difficult to establish what causes it and often people die because they ingest the same food or drink without knowing they are in danger. For these situations, he recommended ‘sour milk, with a lot of whey, kraut or sour cucumber juice, up to two liters,’ and also ‘skillfully warming the stomach by putting wet hot ashes wrapped on top of the stomach until the vomiting or diarrhea starts; by then, the disease is gone.’⁶⁸

He also included pieces of advice for hemorrhoids,⁶⁹ from which everyone was apparently suffering:

One can find this disease in every person, which is caused by excessive sitting for writing and so on, or too heavy a burden that causes swelling of the belly, pain, and twinges in the entire body. When the man feels this, he must know that the hedgehogs [hemorrhoids] have *decârnitu* [regionalism, perhaps moved or twisted]. The best cure for hedgehogs [hemorrhoids] is gunpowder and natural honey. Take the gunpowder as much as fits in a thimble, distill it in a glass of water and drink, then immediately take a spoonful of honey.⁷⁰

Another category of advice concerns the treatment of those suffering from alcoholism, known to be a severe problem in poor environments. It seems that the problem was so serious that in 1871 priests, teachers and doctors were publicly urged by the editors of *Transilvania* [Transylvania] to teach people about the dangers of this vice.⁷¹ The teacher’s writings include no less than three entries on this subject. For severe alcohol poisoning, he recommended tea with sugar and milk, but without rum, salt melted in water, or coffee, and for those who drank spirits, he recommended replacing strong alcohol with beer.

He was concerned with providing lifestyle bits of advice for overweight people, for example, to whom he recommended more exercise, smoking, walking or riding, and lots of sweating, as well as swimming in cold water, avoiding alcoholic drinks and fatty foods, light soups in the evening, stopping eating before they feel full, and sleeping less.

Țiucra also paid attention to aesthetic issues such as warts, but he nevertheless cautioned his presumed readers about the toxicity of cosmetics that women used for makeup. The word Țiucra used for denominating makeup was *ruminele*, a regionalism deriving from *a rumeni*, meaning ‘to color in red.’ The teacher was against their use mainly because they were made of substances that could become dangerous for the skin and for children, especially infants.

One category of advice that Țiucra provides in his booklet refers to the storage and preservation of food, remedies for partially spoiled food and drink, and solutions for eliminating pests. This advice was precious to village people, and preserving nourishment and avoiding eating damaged foods sometimes made the difference between life and death. Diet, next to hygiene, was a constant topic in the articles written by doctors in periodicals, and it considered among the most important factors in the constant fight against diseases.⁷² In Arad, for instance, one can mention doctor G. Vuia’s contribution to the popularization of hygiene and dietary rules in a material adapted for priest and teachers, where he noted the importance of a healthy diet and guidelines for how food had to be prepared and preserved.⁷³

⁶⁸ Țiucra 1873, 25.

⁶⁹ When he refers to hemorrhoids, he also uses the terms *trânsi*, a regionalism, or *arici*, meaning ‘hedgehogs.’

⁷⁰ Țiucra 1873, 67–68.

⁷¹ Habor 2015, 171–172.

⁷² Habor 2015, 191.

⁷³ George Vuia, *Higiena poporală cu privire la sâteanul roman. Învățăture practice pentru preoți, învățători, seminarii, școli normale, licee și pentru toți cei care țin la sănătatea poporului de la țară*, Arad 1884. See Habor 2015, 191.

In the same vein, Țiucra noted, for example, a recipe for preserving grapes for up to eight months, if placed with bran and corn flour in a sealed jar and kept cold. For plums, he suggested picking them before they were fully ripe, placing them in a bowl covered with plum leaves, and keeping them in a well, where they would last until winter. Meat that was problematic to store on summer days could be kept for up to four weeks in sour milk, which had to be replaced every two days. He also gave practical tips on how to clarify wine, how to repair wine that had lost its strength or had turned moldy, how to clean rancid butter, or how to recover frozen eggs. He knew how to get rid of garden fleas, mice, ants, and cockroaches. Most of the suggested remedies could be prepared with accessible substances such as vinegar, bitter salt, brick, ash, sage, quick lime, brimstone, and wormwood.

Animal diseases were a significant problem for Țiucra and the community of Bârsa. In his diary, he mentioned on a yearly basis whether the animals were healthy or whether they suffered from various illnesses. Thus, we learn that the sheep were suffering from capering or coenurosis, a disease caused by parasites that attach to the animal's brain. The disease manifests itself by dizziness and convulsions and, rarely, it can be transmitted to humans. To treat the animals, Țiucra suggested the nasal administration of spirits and honey with barley juice and vinegar, along with a bloodletting procedure.⁷⁴ Another mentioned disease affecting sheep is sheep cough, for which Țiucra recommended the root of the hairy plant (*Cirsium arvense*) mixed with bran or chili pepper (*piperca*). He also provided solutions for curing cattle diarrhea, for which he suggested milk mixed with bran, eggs and oak bark and leaves, or elderflower. Țiucra also noted some practical advice, for example, on how to repel a particular type of fly from the *Simuliidae*⁷⁵ family, mentioned also in his diary for causing much damage in 1856.⁷⁶ Actually, his preoccupation with this subject is often apparent in the diary, where he mentioned in 1852 other diseases that affected animals, such as the plague, of mouth, and nails sour that affected sheep, goats, and calves. In another entry, he mentioned pigs that died of different illnesses. In his handbook, he included multiple remedies for treating pigs: 'The substance obtained by boiling rancid bones is useful for the pigs, given to them on an empty stomach. In pig's cholera, it is also useful to catch the small frogs that live under the pig's water basins or the old wood or bridges, but one must choose the frogs with the red bellies.'⁷⁷

Conclusions

Țiucra's manuscript is a collection of various materials on all the health-related topics that the Romanian rural community should, in his opinion, be aware of. The handbook thus deals with first aid measures, contagious diseases, accidents, cases of poisoning, eyesight problems, toothache, stomach pain, unhealthy dietary habits, but also includes practical advice on how to preserve food and eradicate pests. The approach to these problems resembles in some cases the advice given by doctors in Romanian periodicals or by public authorities in times of pandemics, while other entries are bits of advice taken from folklore, and yet others have no relevance, being related to superstitions that were still quite popular in Romanian rural communities.

One naturally wonders to what extent contemporary publications influenced Iosif Țiucra in his preoccupations with communities' health problems. We know that the teacher from Bârsa was familiar with Romanian newspapers published in Transylvania and Hungary.

⁷⁴ They were not accustomed to raising large herds of sheep in the region, hence knew little about actual treatments. The respective disease is traditionally treated, even today, by professional and skillful shepherds by means of trepanation and live brain surgery, from which the animal usually recovers. It can also be contacted by humans, also requiring brain surgery. I thank the peer reviewer for the pertinent observations.

⁷⁵ In Romanian: *Muscele columbace*.

⁷⁶ Godea 2012, 323.

⁷⁷ Țiucra 1873, 36.

Being an active member of the ASTRA, he was likely aware of, or even involved in the association's activities and projects concerning health education for Romanian rural communities. In newspapers such as *Transilvania* [Transylvania], *Telegraful Român* [The Romanian Telegraph], or *Observatorul* [The Observer], doctors and members of ASTRA's scientific section, published articles that aimed at popularizing knowledge on issues of personal and public hygiene in Transylvania.⁷⁸

It seems Țiucra was not the only teacher that had foreseen the need for such a manual. Aneta Oarcea mentions in her study dedicated to the involvement of teachers from the Arad County in maintaining population health at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century that the practitioners of this profession were actively involved in the authorities' efforts to introduce sanitary education among rural communities. Petru Vancu, a teacher in Măderat, published similar information in his monographic study, later, in 1905. He gathered traditional remedies, mentioning, just like Țiucra, the beneficial role of different plants in curing diseases and ameliorating symptoms. To offer but few examples, he mentioned garlic for relieving ear and stomach pain, or acacia and Lady's Mantle tea for treating cough and sore throat.⁷⁹ Similar to Țiucra's manuscript, scientific knowledge was entangled with traditional remedies in Vancu's case as well.

The purpose Țiucra wanted to serve by writing this booklet is unclear. However, it is evident even from the title he chose for his manuscript that he intended to create a valuable guide for the ordinary people living in Romanian villages, mainly to prevent the spread of diseases and to provide first aid. How these tips were supposed to circulate among the people is open to debate. Maybe Țiucra wanted to publish the material as a printed volume or as articles in the periodicals of the time; considering how the handbook was structured and written, the former option is more plausible. It is also possible that the text was circulating in his village and was used by the ones who could read it.

In 1878 the state started a sustained campaign of instructing the population about basic rules of diet and hygiene, with the participation of Romanian Transylvanian doctors educated in Vienna, Budapest and Cluj. Oana Habor mentions the works published by George Vuia and Simion Stoica, for example, which were clearly more systematic, more complex and better documented than Țiucra's text, although there was common ground between their recommendations.⁸⁰

Țiucra identified the needs of his community and he acted accordingly, using, with good intentions, all the knowledge he had on the subject. However, unfortunately, he was limited in medical training and relied a lot on folklore and empirical treatments. In some cases, he failed to provide real solutions, though in others his suggestions might have prevented the illness from aggravating. Considering he was not the only teacher willing to write about health problems, it is evident that there was an acute need for information among villagers in Romanian rural communities. The manuscript provides important insight data about mentalities and medical concerns in the second half of nineteenth century and, for historians interested in the subject, Țiucra's handbook and diary, correlated with other contemporary sources, provide an overview of the daily life in the Romanian villages in Arad County.

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