

Acta medico-historica Rigensia (1997) III: 446–453

DOI: 10.25143/amhr.1997.III.56

**JÓZSEF ANTALL,
HISTORIAN, MEDICAL HISTORIAN, PRIME MINISTER
(8 APRIL 1932 – 12 DECEMBER 1993)**



In April 8th 1992 all colleagues, former colleagues of the Semmelweis Medical Historical Museum, Library and Archives were gathering for a private meeting. They wanted to greet the former director of the institute, Dr. József Antall at his 60th birthday. The building was droned with ardent enthusiasm, since they cooked and baked, and made presents for the former colleague, director, and not least for the friend who always helped those who were in trouble. The multilingual museum guides, who once had badly suffered but were redressed in the Museum, placed their own-made sweet and salty pastries and cookies on the table. A Polish colleague offered a traditional beetroot soup. The librarians, museologists, archivists together with the dexterous restorer-team produced a giant photo album in which they collected the pictures that presented Antall's 26 years in the institute. Everyone stood in excitement, and wrote with a pen on the black sheets below the photos the dates of bygone events. Sometimes he and sometimes others recalled the data of the photos.

We felt that he had come home, got relaxed and took part in the conversations. The doyen of the institute, the 94-year old pharmacist Dr. Beralan Zboray greeted the Prime Minister, who – with his traditional humour – answered with respect. This day we felt that he was the same again, that in our company he had forgotten about his nation-wide problems and returned to his old, and confidential “oasis” , where he had been able to carry on his political, historical and literary conversations for years, and tell his inexhaustible jokes which made his colleagues laughing. No doubt, it did not occur to any of us on this day, that this could be the last time we saw him at a merry party, and after 18 months we would meet at his coffin, in the house of the Parliament, to pay our last respects. We had known that he fought a serious illness, but the atmosphere resembling those of the old days gave us relief and confidence in the future. One of us made a video record which perfectly presents this unique atmosphere.

The *Communicationes de Historia Artis Medicine*, which he had edited for decades, published a special issue for his birthday, with a bilingual congratulation of the new editor-in-chief and a promise, that «... his associates, his friend and pupils, since we share his ideas and have had similar lives, we understand him, and the same »substitute« , the study of medical history, became our profession as well. We regard it as a duty to preserve to posterity all those he has started... we promise that we shall take care of his life-work, we shall raise its international reputation and safeguard our common work».

His family background and education made it possible for him, who had been after all a historian of politics and education, to take the opportunity, within the limits of dictatorship, the only chance in academic life, and establish the national basis institute for medical and pharmaceutical history from the very beginnings. His father, Dr. József Antall senior, a politician of social affairs, who was an aide in the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and governmental commissioner of refugee affairs, supporter of Polish, French, British, Dutch etc. refugees, was arrested by the Gestapo in October 15th 1944. After 1945 he was Minister of Reconstruction of the first two governments and governmental appointee of the Hungarian Red Cross. He lived retired during the dictatorship. It was the esteem that he felt for his father, and the spirit of the gymnasium of the Piarist Order, which determined the younger Antall's interest in history and politics.

The congratulation was rightful to the man who were able to make good use of his political talents even during the years of communist dictatorship and created an institute and form a discipline which could remain a nonpolitical “oasis”. Antall's teaching career was forced to cease, apparently due to his involvement in the 1956 uprising, and he could carry it on, between 1962–1971, in adult education only. During the 1956 revolution he was a teacher at the József Eötvös Gymnasium and was president of the school's Revolutionary Committee. After the revolution he was transferred to the Ferenc Toldy Gymnasium, where his class of second

form, which at the first anniversary of the revolution sang the National Anthem, was forbidden from university education, and Antall himself was expelled from all the secondary schools of the country. Eventually, he applied for a fellowship in the Semmelweis Medical Historical Museum, and occupied his place in May 1st 1964. In the beginning he was a part-time fellow, but soon (October 16th) promoted to a full-time researcher. And three years later, in June 1967 he was posted to the National Medical Historical Library in order to prepare its unification with the Semmelweis Museum. The two institutions were united in January 1st 1968 and Antall became the deputy director of the new and enlarged institute. The director was the noted gynaecologist, Professor Sándor Fekete.

The new Parliament Act on Archives gave way for the Semmelweis Museum to collect archival documents and papers of medical history, and in 1974 an archive was added to the Museum and Library, which has been named the Semmelweis Medical Historical Museum. Library and Archive, and was classified an "A" grade national museum in 1980. Antall was a deputy director general from 1972, and from 1974 the managing director general of the institute. Due to his political behaviour, however, and to the fact that he did not join the communist party, his formal nomination as director general, did not come until 1984.

As early as at the gymnasium (grammar school) of the Piarist Order (called Endre Ady Gymnasium after its nationalization) he was keenly interested in history, sociology and folklore. One of his early papers delivered in May 5th 1949 in the school literary group was about the system having only one child in Hungarian families. This short essay, which appeared during the process of his maturation, the years of adolescent study, the practice for scholarly work, was related to medical history in a broader sense.

At university he took a degree in history and historical auxiliary disciplines (1955), in Hungarian literature and grammar (1957) and in librarianship (1962). He passed exams in museology at Professor Zoltán Oroszlán's courses, read anthropology under the auspices of Lajos Bartucz, folklore under Gyula Ortutay, and Muslim cultural history under Gyula Germanus. As a result of this studies he wrote several essays concerning medical history: e.g. «*The race-components of Hungarians*» (1951).

Though his interest was mainly focused on political history and the history of education, his various studies explain, how could he – within the limits of dictatorship-in such a specific, peripheral field, as medical and pharmaceutical history develop a complete oeuvre. In this process, he was also helped by some other experience. During his teaching career he contributed in drawing up a project for the introduction of art history into secondary education in 1955/56. Unfortunately, after the 1956 revolution he was forbidden to take part in this draft any longer.

His work in the Semmelweis Institute and his researches were closely associated with his organizing and management duties. He worked out the

organization of the institute, the structure of its collections, and with his colleagues he carried out cataloguing the collections of the museum and the archive, and the books and periodicals of the library. During the last decades many foreign institutions has sent representatives to study this structure and the organization of the Semmelweis Institute. He did not have any model in mind to follow, he had been even unable to pay visit abroad till 1969. Nevertheless, among these circumstances he arranged the permanent exhibition of the museum (Pictures from the Past of the Healing Arts), on his own, with two of his colleagues, in 1968. The conception of the exhibition has not changed, though the presentation was renewed in 1974, 1981 and 1991.

His exceptional characteristic, that he always strove after the best results, appeared in his academic activities on the field of medical and pharmaceutical history too. Hungarian pharmacist wanted to present their profession with an independent museum. He created the financial and theoretical background of the department of pharmaceutical history in form of a separated museum and a library. One of his young colleagues in the institute presented the permanent exhibition of the Golden Eagle Pharmacy Museum, entitled «*Pharmaceutic of the Renaissance and the Baroque*», in the rooms of a former pharmacy that had served the public for 150 years, at 18 Tárnok street. The József Ernyey Pharmaceutical Library, on the other hand, has found its home in the rooms of the former Saint Christian Pharmacy (1981). Now, we can surely say that in respect of medical and pharmaceutical museology and librarianship Hungary is regarded as a «great power» among Hungarian and foreign researchers.

As part of the new objectives the Semmelweis Institute has been trusted with the national supervision of similar collections as well. In the former family house of Frigyes Korányi, at Nagykálló, the Korányi Memorial Museum (1977), and in Budapest the Géza Kresz Ambulance Museum (1987) was opened. A row of pharmacy museums (Sopron, Székesfehérvár, Kőszeg, Kecskemét, Eger) and still working museum pharmacies (Győr, Pécs) were among the other newly established institutions. The national supervision of the furniture and equipment of almost sixty other pharmacies was added to the functions of the Semmelweis Museum, Library and Archives in 1973.

Through these works József Antall became a professional on a field that had been almost unknown to him, and which had been practised by elderly physicians and pharmacists. Medical history was not on the curriculum even of medical education in those times. He recognized that any researches that can claim for comprehensive and satisfactory results in medical history ought to use the methods and accomplishments of archeology, folklore, anthropology, sociology, art history and above all those of history itself. *«It is not by accident that the need for medical attainment is equal in age with man... through medical experience and medical theory, medicine has become one of the oldest science during the past millennia. We know few such*

sciences, which by the integration of so much knowledge was able to develop such an independent philosophy as medicine. » – he had written recently in the Preface of a book about medicine in arts, by one his colleagues, before he left Hungary for Cologne to follow a serious treatment. A last message to anyone, be either physicians, historians or cultural historians, who study medical history. His conceptions were justified in practice by collecting professionals from similar fields around himself while certainly kept in consultation with medical and pharmacy experts. Probably, it came about as a result of this double – medical and historical – view that our museums has become models for Europe's other medical historical collections.

These results are especially remarkable if we take into consideration the antecedents and the difficulties he was faced with, things which he had to overcome during the Kádár-regime of the 1960-70s. Though the Semmelweis Museum did not have any supporters (like count Ferenc Széchényi or Baron József Eötvös in case of the last century collections), he enlarged the institution step by step with new libraries and exhibitions. He himself, has written about the development of medical historical collections from the beginnings at the turn of the century till the results of the 1980s. In his «*The medical and pharmaceutical museology in Hungary*» (Múzeumi Közlémények, 1971, 2, pp. 28–42) reviewing the history of science museums, he stressed the importance of the book and manuscript collections in addition to material collections. Beside university collections (Vienna, Copenhagen etc.), independent museums were organized from the beginning of the 20th century (London: Wellcome Institute, Budapest: Medical Historical Museum in 1905, Kolozsvár: Pharmaceutical Historical Museum 1906). These, however, incomplete initiatives had been accomplished with the József Ernőyey Pharmaceutical Museum (1948–1955), which collection later was taken over by the Semmelweis Museum. According to Antall's conception, the overall institute can act as a research centre having been equipped with collections of objects, books, and archival papers. The basic collections are the library of the former Royal Society of Budapest Physicians (1842), its archives (1837) and museum (1905). In Hungary pharmaceutical museology started in Kolozsvár, where the materials of Hungarian pharmaceutical history were accumulated since 1887. By 1918 its collection counted 1000 items.

According to the decree of the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education Antall worked out the directives for the preservation of furniture and equipment of pharmacies with historical or artistic value, and in co-operation with the country pharmaceutical centres, he rescued many of the furniture of old *officinas*. Museology, with respect to medical and pharmaceutical museology formed significant chapters of his work, and gave topics for his papers and books. (Picture from Past of Medicine, Budapest 1973, published in four languages; Mementos of European medicine and pharmaceutic, Budapest, Corvina 1981 in three languages.)

His vision of medical history was presented in the issues of the *Communicationes*, which had been edited by him for decades. The *Communicationes* is published together with the Hungarian Medical Historical Society, in which he held the chair of secretary general (1972) and where he later became president (1987–1993). It was his idea to subdivide the work of the Society into different specialized sections (history of science, folk-medicine, medical linguistics etc.), each profiled to put experts of similar subjects in touch. Similarly, in co-operation with the Hungarian Pharmaceutical-Historical Society, a section of pharmaceutical history was also erected, where Antall was a member of the presidency too. In recognition of the contribution of the books and periodicals published by the Semmelweis Institute and the Society, and due to the intensive connections with Hungarian and foreign societies, which were always helped by the background institute, the Semmelweis Medical Historical Museum, Library and Archives, the International Medical Historical Society (Paris) and the International Pharmaceutical Society (Bremen) held for the first time in their history an International Medical Historical Conference in 1974, and an International Pharmaceutical Conference in 1981 in Budapest. Antall was the chief secretary of these congresses. Both international societies agreed that the most remarkable congresses, so far had taken place in Hungary.

Through his historical studies on political processes or on political thought and education, he came across the problems of medical history. He recognized that the political and economical history of liberalism is closely related to health policy. He typified the characteristic of the Pest medical school, and his main field within medical history became the investigation of the role of Semmelweis, Balassa, Markusovszky, Lumniczer, Korányi in it. He gave lectures about his results in international congresses at Weimar, Bucharest, Budapest, Basel, Innsbruck etc., and from 1974 at the universities of Düsseldorf, Munich, Cologne, Marburg, Vienna, Padova and Istanbul as well.

It was not only the study of state health policy, and – in association with Eötvös – the investigation of the centrist's idea of public health reform, but museology, with respect to medical and pharmaceutical museology, that formed significant chapters of his life-work, and gave topics for his papers and books.

In 1981 Antall published a summary in the *Orvosi Hetilap* (Medical Weekly), entitled «*On the situation of medical history in Hungary*», which was about the circumstances of this field from many aspects. He emphasized, that Hungarian medical society supported but the organization of mere basis institute, and rejected the incorporation of medical history into the curriculum of the university. Moreover, medical students were not required to write theses since the middle of the 19th century, as a result of the purely clinical approach of those times. The Institute of Historical Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) does not regard

medical history as a research subject either. The Science and Technical Historical Committee of the MTA supported mainly scientists who investigate science itself or technological disciplines.

Medical history became a compulsory subject at university when Emil Schultheisz, a former medical historian then Minister of Health passed a decree in 1985. Antall wrote: «*All in all the whole Hungarian scientific and intellectual world ought to feel the importance of the historical approach in shaping our common mind, in creative scientific thought. No matter that Hungarian academic life has been lead by active and noted figures of science history even of medical history, if it [medical history itself] can not meet the need of medical profession as well*».

Antall cited Ágost Trefort's (Trefort was Minister of Education between 1872–1888) claims about the dangers of both over specialization and scrappy education of professionals and then continued: «*Synthesis and theoretical approach are indispensable at least in the genesis of scientific progress. It is a fact, which has not usually been realized by narrow-minded pragmatism, that can not feel the broader perspectives in respect of inspiring factors*». Remarks by physicians (OH July 14. 1981) for Antall's judgement agreed with his points and emphasized the importance of good standards of medical historical papers.

It was the necessity and the sole intellectual possibility that introduced him and a few of us, who originally had wanted to become historians, art-historians, archeologists, or literary-historians, to medical, and cultural history. This ought to be emphasized because we started it in the 1960s and 70s, when there was not even a department of cultural history at any university in Hungary and only a few historians were involved in this discipline at all. It did not happen by accident either that one of the important sources, used later by professor Domokos Kosáry (now president of the Academy of Sciences), in his excellent work about 18th century Hungarian cultural history was the publication of the *Communicationes*. This was understandable, because those who read history at university could not deal with subjects related directly to medical history. The task undertaken by these art-graduates around Antall was difficult: they decided to study medical history which had been out of university education in Hungary.

His editorial work was characterized by actuality and organization skills. The main fields of the *Communicationes* have been: Semmelweis's life and work, the history of medical faculty, museum guides, international congresses, anniversaries and special volumes (pharmaceutical history, folk-medicine, medical historical textbook etc.). An outstanding source is the volume about Semmelweis's discovery and on the pathography of his illness. Another important book was the volume on the 200th anniversary of the foundation of the medical faculty at Nagyszombat. In 1983 together with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences a congress was organized for the five hundred years anniversary of Luther's birth. Next year the papers given for Zsámboky anniversary were published together with a facsimile edition

of Zsámboky's famous *Icones*. Lastly, we mention the volumes that came out for the International medical Historical Congresses (Bucharest, Suppl. 4/1970; London Suppl. 6/1972). Certainly, the papers of the congress held in Budapest appeared also, apparently, in a two volume book in 1976.

Antall was especially interested in Semmelweis himself, in the enigma, and tragedy of his life and death, and the house where Semmelweis was born, and where the Museum has been placed. The enigma of Semmelweis's death was solved eventually. The house, where Semmelweis was born became the last resting place of the "Saviour of Mothers" as well.

Antall was awarded for his medico-historical studies, and foundations of museums – among others – by the István Wesszprémi medal (1971), the József Erneyey Medal (1981), and the Ferenc Móra Award (1972). He was elected vicepresident of the International Medical Historical Society, and corresponding member of numerous foreign medical historical societies. It is owing to him that during the years of Kádár's dictatorship, in the first half of the 1960s the national basis institutes of medical and pharmaceutical history – that is to say museums, libraries and archives – were re-established from the very beginning, though pre-war initiatives were always taken into considerations.

Due to his unexpected and tragical death we regard his words at his 60th birthday party as a farewell speech and a last guide: *«The years of my life belong to those periods of history which were full of events. I always tried to serve my country no matter how small a place I was posted at and I always tried to change it better, for making it a better island. My objective was to create oases each time. In this institute I wish this development to be continued... This [institute] is one of the few foundations which had had a fairly respectable intention, which wanted to produce something good. True, it was not planned to develop into such a big size... In an age of transmission when something has finished, collapsed, including even many of the everyday human norms and when individual associations have certainly been shaken too, [I ask you] to keep an eye on basic values and avoid everything contrary to fairness and to the norms of human behaviour. Preserve humanism, preserve the feeling of solidarity based on national foundations and the fairness toward each other; these are indispensable to allow to work any smaller community, or any community at all.»*

The Prime Minister of the Hungarian Republic while preparing himself for the confidential feast of Christianity died on the third Sunday of Advent, about 5.15 p.m. in a hospital. Fate did not give him chance to continue his three and a half year long political career for the next electoral period, and to help, at least with his advice, his would-be successors. Nevertheless, he, the medical historian, who spent 26 years, the longest part of his adult life on this field, was able to produce an ever lasting work not only for medical and pharmacist society, but for our national culture as well.

Erősen ajánlom

az érdeklődőknek a kötetet, melynek szerzője

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