

PORTRAITS - PERSONALITIES OF ROMANIAN SCIENCE AND CULTURE

Prof. Dr. Ramon Valentin (1929-2007) - medicină sportivă și ortopedie

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Prof. dr. Ramon Valentin (1929-2007)

What is the real significance to the scientific study of the different activities and achievements performed by the people before us? The knowledge about man in society? Of human societies? much less than that: it has not changed at all for two thousand and two hundred years even since Arisotel's followers found the answer to the question; historians tell us about actual facts, in which man is the actor; history is a true novel.

Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire suivi de Foucault révolutionne l'histoire*. Éditions de Seuil, Paris, FR, 1978.

Paul Veyne (b. June 13, 1930 in Aix-en-Provence), French historian and archaeologist, at present emeritus professor at Collège de France.

It is 80 years this month since Ramon (Ray) Valentin was born in Târgoviște, Romania on December 29, 1929 and who died on September 21, 2007, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

An exceptionally endowed physician and professor, he illustrates the perfect example of a harmonious combination between sports medicine, orthopaedics and sport traumatology specialities.

Between 1947 and 1953 he was a student at the Faculty of General Medicine, "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest. After graduating in 1953, he continued and improved his medical studies, he became a specialist in sports medicine in 1957 and a specialist in orthopaedics in 1959. These two complementary competences, obtained following a competitive examination, allowed doctor Ramon Valentin complex biological approaches such as functional anatomy and reconstructive orthopaedic surgery, which opened for him undreamed-of professional prospects overseas.

A man of extraordinary probity, he never forgot his teachers. Thus in his memoirs about prof. dr. doc. Ilie Th. Riga he wrote in 2005: *My studies started in 1947 and soon after together with all my colleagues I had the honour of attending prof. dr. I. Th. Riga's lectures on Human Anatomy. To our surprise, what we had expected to be a series of totally barren and boring lessons miraculously turned into a unique demonstration of a perfect blending between science and art! This fascinating moment had been made possible only owing to professor Riga's special artistic talent; he suddenly started juggling with the crayons which supported, completed and translated the spoken words into images. The visual attraction was accompanied by a lecture based on rigorous logic, which contributed to the engraving of the presented subject in the memories of the listeners. I would like to add that the anatomy lectures were a pure example of the concept expressed by the great French poet and critic Nicolas Boileau in his classic work L'Art poétique*

(1674): "Ce qu'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement / et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément". *In a country in which universally acknowledged talents have abounded (Eminescu, Grigorescu, Brâncuși etc.), Prof. Dr. I. Th. Riga attained acmes rarely reached by men of "pure" science. I will always remember him as a Renaissance follower, inspired by famous forerunners such as Leonardo Da Vinci, for whom science and art are linked by the common denominator of creative instinct.*

Between 1953-1970, in Romania, dr. Valentin worked at the Constanța Municipal Hospital, General Surgery and Orthopaedic Clinic. Although a young physician, he contributed to the editing of two chapters and the making of illustrations in the book entitled *Problems of Bone Pathology*, Medical Publ. House, Bucharest, 1955, Chapters: Al. Rădulescu, Al. Dorthemeir, *Bone Condensation* (photos pp. 98, 99, 100, 101, 102,103) and Andrei Voinea, *Clinical and Experimental Considerations on Intrabone Anesthesia* (photos pp. 222, 223, 225, 227, 229). Since he was one of the few physicians with double specialization in sports medicine and orthopaedics, he worked as a doctor of the "Farul Constanța" football team and after that of the athletics national team to medically support their performances. He made contributions to the periodical magazines of his time: *Revue of Surgery* (1956-1958), *Revue of Sports Medicine* (1957-1958, on hypertrophic callus and arthroses of sportmen) and *Revue of Radiology* (1966).

In 1970 he left for Israel, where he worked five years (1970-1975) at the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Municipal Hospital in Naharyia, a Mediterranean town in the north of the country. Between 1975-1980, he was senior orthopaedic surgeon at Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, a town in the SW of the Zimbabwe Republic (Rhodesia), the second important city after the capital Harare.

From 1980 to the end of his life (2007) he carried on both his activities in Johannesburg, South Africa, the clinical activity at *C. Hani Baragwanath Hospital* and the didactical one at the *Univesity of the Witwatersrand*, going up medical and academical hierarchical steps reaching the positions of chief of clinic and professor. For that he had attended specialization courses and performed exchanges of experience in the most famous centres: in 1990 at *Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard University Medical School*, Boston, MA, USA and in 1998 at *Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Sunnybrook and Women's College, Health Sci-*

ences Center and Regional Trauma Unit, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

In South Africa he had the opportunity to take up again and especially to develop his ideas and activities begun in Romania regarding functional, reparative and orthopaedic surgery, thus continuing in thinking and acting to achieve the inseparable connection between sports medicine and orthopaedics.

His participations in international congresses, his clinical research and his lectures delivered both to students and to young physicians are illustrations of that. Here are some examples. In 1990, as invited speaker to *Sports Medicine Conference, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard University*, Boston, MA he presented the paper *Posterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction Using the Iliotibial Band* (original technique). Among his clinical studies connected to sports traumatology we can mention: *Severe posttraumatic knee instability –biological reconstruction; Knee instability treated with carbon fibre substitution and augmentation; Surgical management of bi- și triplanar pelvic instability, following trauma; Intramedullary locking nailing for fractures of the long bones; The retrograde technique for the Seidel humeral nail; Observations on the shoulder hemiarthroplasty in severe humeral trauma*. His lectures were highly appreciated by students of medicine and of physiotherapy, as well as by young orthopaedic physicians.

He was member of numerous professional societies: from 1994 - emeritus member of *South African Orthopaedic Association*; from 1997 - member of *South African Orthopaedic Trauma Association*; from 1998 - President for South Africa of *AIOD (Association Internationale pour l'Osteosynthèse Dynamique)*, Strasbourg, France; from 1999 - member of *ASIF (Association for the Study of Internal Fixation)*. Moreover, in Johannesburg he belonged to numerous faculty and hospital commissions: *Orthopaedic Selection Committee* and *MB BCh Final Year Examination Board of University of the Witwatersrand*; *Medical Advisory Committee, Senior Management Committee, Theatre Management Committee and Functional Unit Committee* of *C. Hani Baragwanath Hospital*.

„At the beginning of the new millennium, orthopaedist R. Valentin at Department of Orthopaedics of *Baragwanath Hospital* was appointed university professor. It was a decision made by the Faculty of Medicine belonging to *Witwatersrand University* and acknowledged by the Ministry of Health in South Africa. That was not only a long waited-for decision, but also a

proof that the above-mentioned authorities understood they could no longer avoid a self-evident fact: the admittance *de facto* and *de iure* of the exceptional qualities of an orthopaedic surgeon, who had altruistically dedicated 27 years of his life exclusively to the public health in South Africa. Evidently it was also a personal victory, which he enjoyed near to us, those who loved him, with the same humility which had always characterized him. But professor Valentin did not want to fly up to nebulous spheres where some people can do when they obtain a title. Our kind gentle colleague and friend remained by us, the same hard-working and dedicated man, willing to give a helping hand to heal, to guide, to support, to encourage and especially to teach. His professorship did not propel him to those academic heights, where frequently somebody's praises are sung and applause is waited-for on a laughable stage built on exaggeration. On the contrary, the title brought him nearer than ever to his patients, colleagues and his great professional love: orthopaedics. The people who in these years were lying on the 375 beds only in the Department of Orthopaedics in Baragwanath (a huge hospital in all aspects) can vouch for the above-mentioned facts. Thousands of patients still feel the healing touch of his hands; they know it, we know it. The hospital itself was and still is orientated towards traumatology the branch to which professor Valentin has dedicated himself from the beginning. Check-in and check-out of patients is extremely high, pathology overwhelming. He himself managed one of the four traumatology sections. Within traumatology, he was evidently interested in the surgical treatment of the pelvis and acetabulum - difficult tormenting chapters in the lives of all orthopaedic surgeons. He did not practice sports medicine as such, but he treated hundreds of injured people brought from the sports grounds. He functioned as lecturer and professor for thousands of students, as the hospital is academic and attached to *Wits University*. It is

estimated that more than 100 registrars were taught by him, all specialists in orthopaedics today. At the age of 74 professor Valentin still worked in the operation theatre and if in the following years he stopped practicing surgery he did it only because of health conditions, though with great sorrow and without hiding the sadness in his heart. The merciless disease aggravating progressively (diagnosed in 2000) did not prevent him from being present in orthopaedic clinics, examining patients, participating in all professional meetings, contributing to scientific papers and dealing with students, registrars, specialists to be or young orthopaedists at the beginning of their careers, the way he had done it along his 27 year-long activity in *Baragwanath* only. His vast erudition helped him to display his talents in the world of orthopaedics both in English and French. His last published scientific paper (*Retrograde reamed nailing of fractures and non-unions of the humeral diaphysis*) can be found in *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, volume 85-B, 2003. For us, fellow countrymen, he is forever an example and model since one among us reached high professional peaks in spite of the involuntary and voluntary obstacles raised by circumstances or the people around. Romanian orthopaedic school demonstrated its elevated quality on the African continent by professor Valentin. Particularly in South Africa he revealed that there are diamonds which are shaped and polished to ineffable brightness even between the Carpathians and the Danube" (well-deserved appreciations about prof. Valentin performed by dr. V. Sinevici, his student, collaborator and friend).

A great soul and physician, he was also a great Romanian. On January 28, 1990 he created *SARA - South African Romanians' Association*, as founding member and elected president. So, last but not least, to his complete dedication to patients and students he added his devotion to the people having Romanian roots.