REFERENCE BOOKS IN THE HISTORY OF DENTISTRY (I)
PIERRE FAUCHARD AND HIS HANDBOOK OF THE TEETH (1728)
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ABSTRACT
With this begins a series of articles dedicated to knowledge of reference books, by Romanian and foreign, and
of the authors who have made significant contributions to the history of dentistry. This first article is dedicated
to the life of Pierre Fauchard, French dental surgeon, who practiced for 50 years in France, particularly in Paris.
In adulthood, he published the book Le chirurgien ou le Traité des dents (1728), which lays the scientific
foundation of odontology. His pathology, surgery, prosthesis and implantology, prescriptions that have been
proven effective and the invented instrumental set and manufactured by him, brought him the value of the
posterity, which honoured him by calling him the „father of dentistry”, re-publishing his work, which has
circulated in Europe and the U.S.A..

Keywords: the history of dentistry in the 18th century, history of orthodontics, history of odontology,
prosthesis, Pierre Fouchard, Le chirurgien, dental instrument set, dental technique and technology, French
dentistry

The transition from the „old woman’s” medicine - as Nicolae Iorga calls it – or that
used by the famous „barber”, both with a character of improvisation, nonscientific to
the specialized medicine, exercised by physicians with diplomas issued by
universities, has been quite slow, just as the specialized education was developing. As
slowly it switched to a higher stage, marked by writing of the specialized books, in our
case, of the dentistry books or, as it is referred to as modern dental medicine.

Romanian medical history nominates Pierre Fauchard (1679-1761) as being the „father” of dentistry, sometimes is mentioned
his most important book. Despite the developed research, we could not find any
one in the libraries that we have sought, nor an article detailing his intended subject. This
leads to the conclusion that the author, the book and its scientific importance are not yet
known in sufficient detail and offers the reason of this paper.

Not only we discover Fauchard later, but the French themselves have done this,
because only in 2011 Société Française d'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire and the city hall of
his birth city (Saint-Denis-de-Gastine) have installed a plaque in commemoration of 200
years after the disappearance. However, in France, there are numerous articles, theses,
and books about the live, medical activity and his book entitled Le Chirurgien dentiste ou
Traité des dents. We have already a concise
title, which recommends the book. The subtitle brings no disappointment, but it urges the reader from reading a book that looks interesting: Où l'on enseigne les moyens de les entretenir propres et saines, de les embellir, d'en réparer la perte et de remédier à leurs maladies, à celles des gencives et aux accidents qui peuvent survenir aux autres parties voisines des dents. Moreover, the reader is notified that the volume contains observations and reflections on the rare cases. The knowledge of the contents is aided by 42 drawings.

At the time of publication of the book, the author was „chirurgien dentiste a Paris”. It is true that the 1st edition appeared in 1728 (Paris, Avec approbation et privilège du Roi), and in 1786 appeared the 3rd edition („revue, corrigée et considérablement augmentée”), referred to in the present article, the only edition available at this time. The 2nd edition was published in 1746, when the author was still alive.

Up to reach the famous surgeon in dentistry in Paris, Pierre Fauchard practiced dentistry a fairly large period after he took his degree of doctor („expert”), before 1708, then the degree of surgeon (1711 or 1712). The interest in dentistry was formed in the period when he was a sailor in the Royal French Navy (since he was 15 years old), as a sailor in the Service de Sante de la Marine, in the team of the well-known specialist in „dental diseases”, Alexander Poteleret. He was a medical personality of his time and held the rank of chief doctor of the Navy. To him will Fauchard show a great gratitude in the preface of his Handbook of the teeth, but also to his predecessors in medicine, Hippocrates, Galienus, Avicenna and Aristotle. Among his contemporaries he quotes on Rivièrè, Lommius, Gordon and B. Martin. Here he remembers - and the information is very important – the book of his forerunner, Urbain Hémard, published in 1582, today still insufficiently known, Recherches de la vraie anatomie des dents ..., about which we would write, maybe some other time more.

Trying to complete the biography, Xavier Deltombe, in his article entitled Nouveaux éléments biographiques (www.bium.univ-paris5.fr.sfhad/iahd/iahd07f.htm), mentions that he made „exercice itinérant” not in a cabinet, as in our century, but going from one place to another, from one town to another, as it was usual at that time, giving advice. It was a period in which he operated, has accumulated experience; was forced to build the necessary instrument set for surgical interventions, he invented prescription and practiced various drugs in an era in which there were no antibiotics. Moreover, seeing that the results are good, that people heal, he thought to gather all the knowledge gained and he noted them. In 1696 we find him in Angers, at the University Hospital, in 1713 in Montes, in 1715 in Rennes. Even before it has been moved in the country's capital, he had built a very serious reputation.

It is necessary to emphasize that Pierre Fauchard practiced the dental surgery during the end of the reign of Louis XIV, when medical knowledge were still slightly advanced. Today it is known that the prescriber of the Sun King himself, Guy Fagon, great botanist and avid supporter of the blood circulation, was diagnosing with gangrene the sciatica from the king’s leg. All the more worthy of appreciation is not only the medical practice of Fauchard, but especially his vast surgical experience accumulation in writing as an important legacy for his homeland.

The medical practice brought him - it seems - not only professional recognition, but also substantial incomes, because once he came to Paris, in 1718, he opened a cabinet in rue de l' Ancienne Comédie (distric 6). After a while he takes disciples, to whom he transmit the accumulated knowledge, in modern terms
it can be said that it is the creator of medical school. Moves in a bigger cabinet, in rue de l'Ecole de Médecine (also in distric 6) and takes a partner, André Leroux de la Fonde (1724-1789). It is possible that the 3rd Edition, in 1786, was published by care of the partner, although no name appears on the title page, because it was considerably improved when its author was already dead for 25 years, and his associate lived 3 years after the appearance of the book.

The professional successes brought him not only fame, but also a substantial fortune. Nobody's child, the poor from Saint-Denis-de-Gastine, has forged a name admirably even in the country's capital, and in 1734, he bought an old seigniorial domain with castle (Grand Mesnil), which belonged to the aristocracy and the high clergy since 1382, located in the western part of Paris. The doctor, who normally belonged to the bourgeois class, is now becoming nobly, it changes his name from Fauchard in the senior Grandmesnil, which leaves him unto death. In 1919 the heirs will sell the domain which today is included in the Hôpital d'Orsay.

At the time of book’s publication doctor Pierre Fauchard was 49 years, then as now considered biological and professional maturity age. The fact that throughout his life he noted the case studies, the experiences and the treatments, proceeded to the interpretation of the data, he concluded from the medical practice. It all ended with the writing of a book that she wanted to be an amount of theoretical and practical knowledge of that time. His professional achievements, transposed onto the paper, are truly amazing and revolutionary. For a revolution achieved Fauchard when it wants to write a handbook on dental surgery, though, after the publication of the first edition, in 1728, he lived another 33 years. The more difficult it is to appreciate the wide contribution and the great influence in the medical profession that will achieve his handbook.

After the fashion of that period, the book is dedicated to Jean de Maurepas (1701-1781), which, during the period 1723-1749, was Minister of the Navy, famous Freemason, intelligent and spiritual refinement, interested in the sciences. The volume opens with a phrase of percussive lucidity through its spirit of analysis: „Les dents font leur état naturel, les plus polis et les plus durs de tous les os du corps humain; mais elles font en même temp(p)s le plus sujettes à des maladies qui causent de vives douleurs et deviennent quelques fois très dangereuses: nous en faisons tous la triste expérience presque aussitôt que nous voyons le jour. Ceux qui conservent toutes leurs dents saines jusqu'à un âge avancé font en très petit nombre: les uns doivent cet avantage à un heureux tempérament, les autres à une attention et à des soins particulières; au lieu que la plus grande partie des hommes ont les dents viciées dès le premier âge ou les perdent avant le tem(p)s.” (p. IV-V)

The experience of 50 years of practice and medical thinking, synthesized in his handbook, is easy perceived even by today's reader, in spite of the difficulties between today's literary French and that from the beginning of the 18th century. We cite only the titles of the first chapters of the 1st volume: Chapitre I: De la structure, situation et connexion des dents, de leur origine, de leur accroissement...; Chapitre II: Des maladies des enfants à la sortie des dents de lait et des remèdes qui y conviennent et dans lequel on parle de deux livres nouveaux sur cette matière. Chapitre III: De l'utilité des dents et de peu de soin que l'on prend pour les conserver; Chapitre IV: Le régim et la conduite que l'on doit tenir pour conserver des dents... The 1st volume (38 chapters) ends with Six observations sur le diagnostic qui se tire de l'inspection des dents. The general conclusion is that the teeth are falling ill, are
decaying and become infected, causing diseases and pains due to the lack of hygiene: „Lorsque l'on néglige d'avoir soin de ses dents, ces mêmes indices deviennent équivoques. La négligence detruit souvent des dents qui auraient duré longtemps pour peu qu'on se fût donné le soin de les conserver”.

For today's reader, Fauchard’s affirmations are normal, true, we could even say that some of them are banal in their normality, but in the 18th century, seen from the perspective of the scientific progress made in the meantime, we should admit that they impresses through consciousness, balance and clairvoyance, hygiene or more precisely the lack of it does also nowadays too many victims. In addition to their own practical experience and specialized books, as many as were in his days, he read yearbooks, almanacs and the newspapers of the times to gain from the experience of other colleagues.

Synthesizing the knowledge Fauchard has wanted to leave his future colleagues, we must begin by highlighting the importance of dental hygiene given from infancy until the teeth illness, announced by changing of the color. His opinion that the food rests alters in the oral cavity, and determines the decay and after the total destruction of the tooth, is today widely recognized and became a fundamental axiom of the field, but for his time was a novelty. The baths of mouth with human urine, then practiced, are today contraindicated. What today we call medical marketing can be seen also at Fauchard, who was announcing in „Mercure de France” from March 1735, that „vend une eau singulière... dont la vertu est souveraine contre les affections scorbutiques des gengives”, that wants to be a disinfecting mouthrinse.

Although he appreciates the contribution made by predecessors in describing the teeth, Fauchard made the first detailed description of the anatomy of teeth and oral physiology. He is interested as well in the evolution of teeth, from the moment of appearance up to total edentation, and its pathology. If the first part of his handbook of teeth is a compilation of knowledge of the time, the second part is original and exposes his own experience. The consultation of doctor Fauchard is opened with a detailed analysis of the condition of the mouth and a questioning on the state of the illness before it happen. He remarks that tartar is one of the causes of the deteriorating the health of the tooth. To clean the dental infection, to drilled and smoothed the teeth, is forced to build numerous tools that he draw and describe them. Then he explains the different interventions techniques used in various dental diseases. The author describes the materials used in filling, in operative techniques, and moreover, is interested in creating a viable system of prosthesis. His attempt to replace lost teeth with implants made of bone or ivory is an extraordinary idea, and we enjoy today of this principle, at some point in our lives, even though the technology has tremendously improved in the 250 years that have passed. His prescriptions and treatments applied gave at that time good results in healing and, even though today it is no longer valid, their progressive role at that time cannot be denied. As in Iași, doctor Andreas Wolf condemn sarcastic (Beiträge zu einer statistisch-historischen Beschreibung des Fürstenthums Moldau, Sibiu, 1805) the medical incapacity of the doctor Testabuza, the same reacts the French doctor, in Paris, in front of the improvised medical practices and non-scientific practices of some contemporary colleagues. It was, apparently, very sensitive in matters of professional ethics.

His colleagues in the German states had appreciated the scientific contribution and, in 1776, they have translated Le Chirurgien... In Romania, not only that it has not been translated yet, but it is considered a very rare and almost inaccessible book.
Today’s dentistry unanimously recognizes doctor Pierre Fouchard scientific contribution, that founded the odontology and honors the memory of him by calling him „father” of dentistry. At the commemoration of the 200 years after his disappearance, the French launched a medal that remembers his effort to remove dental disease and human suffering. It was issued a stamp with his portrait, in 1961. The old Dental Art Museum, founded in the 19th century received the name of Pierre Fauchaud in 1937, but was closed in 2001, and the collections of art and history of medical technology are stored. The American medical research has also discovered the founding of odontology, by Fauchard and in 1936, is founded Pierre Fauchard Academy (International Honorary Dental Organization) (Minnesota, U.S.A.), with the publication the Journal of Pierre Fauchard Academy, whose subsidiary in India is particularly active. We appreciate that by translating his Handbook of the Teeth in Romanian language the history of dentistry could appreciate more deeply the contribution of Pierre Fauchard by founding of the scientific oral anatomy, oral pathology, orthodontics and odontology.

P. S. After editing the material, I received a copy of the article by Prof. Julien Phillipe, Le Chirurgien dentiste ou Traité des dents. Une comparaison des trois editions, professor at the Faculty of Dental Surgery, Paris VII, published in "Actes. Société Française d'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire", 2011, No. 16, pp. 37-40, for which I have all considerations and I consider that this issue cannot be addressed without reading it.