

PROF. DR. ALEXANDRU OBREGIA AND ROMANIAN PSYCHIATRY: EUROPEAN PIONEERING IN MENTAL HEALTH, NEUROSCIENCES AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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Scientist Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia (1860-1937) is the founder of scientific psychiatry in Romania (Bucharest). He managed the Psychiatry Service and the Clinic for Mental Disorders for 41 years (1893-1934), the Histology Department for 18 years (1892-1909), the Psychiatry Department for 25 years (1909-1934) - both departments of the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine. He conducted a titanic work for 45 years (1892-1937) in order to execute and perfect the Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders, Bucharest. The hospital was inaugurated in 1923, while Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia managed it without interruption for 12 years (1923-1935), until retiring at 75. Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia achieved a series of national and worldwide pioneering firsts. Neurosciences. In histology (for brain research) he discovered the celloidin embedding method (superior to paraffin), in the medical-surgical clinical practice he introduced the suboccipital puncture, while in the diagnosis of stage 4 - nervous syphilis he identified the dental obsession syndrome and the pill sign/tic. The Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders (1923) - founded by Al. Obregia, in terms of conception, execution and functioning - is what we would today define as a modern integrated Neurosciences Institute. Social psychiatry, mental health and public health. He stood out in Romanian medicine as one of the greatest organisers of social psychiatry, public health and social medicine: specific legislation, General Manager of the Sanitary Service of the country (Minister of Health), financial resources (assistance fund, epidemics fund), a National Plan of building 32 rural hospitals, fighting epidemics, 2 (two) urban hospitals of psychiatry-neurology: Socola - Iași, Central - Bucharest etc. The Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders - founded by the Romanian scientist Al. Obregia was upon its inauguration in 1923 the largest in Romania, Europe and possibly the world: 34 pavilions, 2,000 patients. The scientific concept, the organisational management, its placement nearby the capital, the prognosis studies, the multi-functional, interdisciplinary and integrative structure of the hospital - all accomplished by Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia - were firsts in the area. Only in 1998 was the triple historical, moral and patrimony restitution finalised, becoming "Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia" Clinical Hospital of Psychiatry. It is the number 1 public psychiatric (speciality) hospital in Romania, with 90 years of continued existence (1923-1912).

Key words: Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia, psychiatry, mental health, neurosciences, public health.

PERSONALITY AND WORK – SUMMARY

Alexandru Obregia was born in Iași on July 20, 1860 and died on July 24, 1937 in Bucharest. As a medical student, he obtained the 1st place in the external and internal contests; he became a university preparator and then assistant and was elected President of the Medical Student Body.

In 1888, at only 28, he presented his PhD thesis in medicine – Experimental study on the motor and visual cortical centres, at the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine. Between 1888 and 1891 he specialised in psychiatry and neurology in Berlin and Paris, with Professor Doctors: Otto Westphall (psychiatry), Mendel (criminal psychiatry, forensic medicine), Bernhardt (neurology, electro-

diagnosis and electro-therapy), Wilhelm Wundt (physiologist, psychologist, linguist, philosopher), Valentin Jacques Joseph Magnan, Jean Martin Charcot (nervous disorders), Bell, Alexis Joffroy, Joseph Jules Déjerine, Louis Gilbert Ballet and Pierre Marie.



Professor Doctor Alexandru OBREGIA lecturing, portrayed by caricature artist Eugen TARU (1913 - 1991).

In 1890, he attended the International Medicine Congress in Berlin, as a delegate of the Hospital journal, together with doctor Gh. Marinescu. Between 1892 and 1909, he was the titular manager – for 18 years – of the Histology Department of the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine. In 1893 he became a primary psychiatrist at the Marcuta Hospital/Mental Asylum and in 1905 he became its manager. In 1909, through contest, he became a titular Psychiatry Professor at the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine, in the Psychiatry Department, which he ran – for 25 years – until 1934. In 1922 he was elected President of the Romanian Psychiatric Society and in 1923 he inaugurated the Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases of Bucharest, a pioneering and one-of-a-kind institution in Europe, the

achievement of this life¹. He managed the Psychiatry Service and the Clinic for Mental Disorders in Bucharest for 41 years (1893–1934).

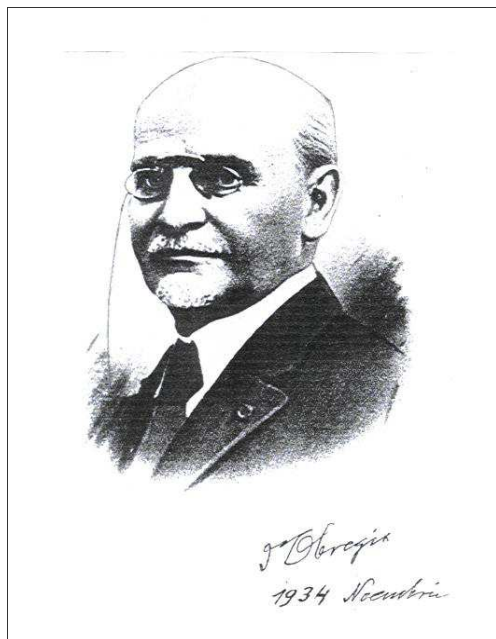
He is the figure who undoubtedly assigns European and international standards for Romanian psychiatry. A bright character and an utter professional, he brings an important contribution, covering in a productive and unitary manner all sectors of psychiatry: medical, scientific, university, academic, institution-administrative and legislative⁷.

His contemporaries considered him a living encyclopaedia. He conducted valuable studies, methods and profoundly original and innovative works, including firsts in the area, in what we would today define as neurosciences, mental health and public health. His works on neuropathology, neurology, biological psychiatry, psychiatry, prophylaxis, health organisation were presented at congresses/international exhibitions and published in prestigious journals from Germany and France, they were eulogized by the scientists of the time, while his contributions to excellence were included and quoted in the treaties of reference at the time^{1,3}.

As a titular Professor of the Psychiatry Department, he taught future eminent professors and heads of clinic: Acad. Prof. Doctor C. I. Parhon, Prof. Doctor C. I. Urechia, Prof. Doctor P. Tomescu, Prof. Doctor A. Badenskisi, Dr. A. Popea, Dr. A. Pitulescu, Dr. I. Constantinescu, Dr. Gr. Odobescu, Dr. M. Bruteanu, Dr. A. Vasilescu, Dr. A. Dimolescu, Dr. Tr. Demetrescu, Dr. S. Constantinescu.

On an international level, this distinguished representative of Romanian medicine and science was especially valued by renowned people of those times such as: Clerambault, Claude, Lhermitte, Weigand, Laignel Lavastine, Wagner von Jauregg, Pittard, Buven, Waldeyer.

In 1901, the President of the French Republic grants him the Decoration and National Order of the Legion of Honour „Honneur. Patrie”, while in 1913 King Carol I of Romania awards him the „Sanitary Merit” Cross, 1st Class. In 1935, on his 75th anniversary - as a sign of appreciation for the progress he brought to the development of the Romanian society – the scientist is honoured in a ceremony personally presided over by Minister of Health Dr. I. Costinescu, by unveiling the bust of Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia. The bust (now a historical monument) was made by sculptor Frederic Storck and placed in front of the central pavilion of the hospital – built, organised and managed by Al. Obregia.



PhD Professor Alexandru OBREGIA (1860 - 1937) - the founder of Romanian modern psychiatry and of the Central Psychiatric Hospital.

The major coordinates which attest his talent, work, sacrifices, giving, patriotism, inter-disciplinarity and creation encompass a wide range. The work, personality and life of Professor Doctor Al. Obregia define and evoke for posterity the pioneering contribution to excellence in laying the foundation and in developing Romanian psychiatry and integrating it in European medicine. They are comparable to those achieved by great psychiatrists in other parts of the world: in France – Phillipe Pinel and Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, in the US – Benjamin Rush and Isaac Rey etc.

This is why, Alexandru Obregia – Romania is a national and European figure, an encyclopaedic spirit, a creator of progress in science and medicine, in social activity and for the common good⁷. Only several dozens of works and some well deserved monographs could highlight and prove the overwhelming contribution brought by Professor Doctor Al. Obregia to the development of psychiatry (as science, education and medical practice), as a European precursor in mental health and neurosciences, in the creation of the specific legislation and its institutionalisation as public health.

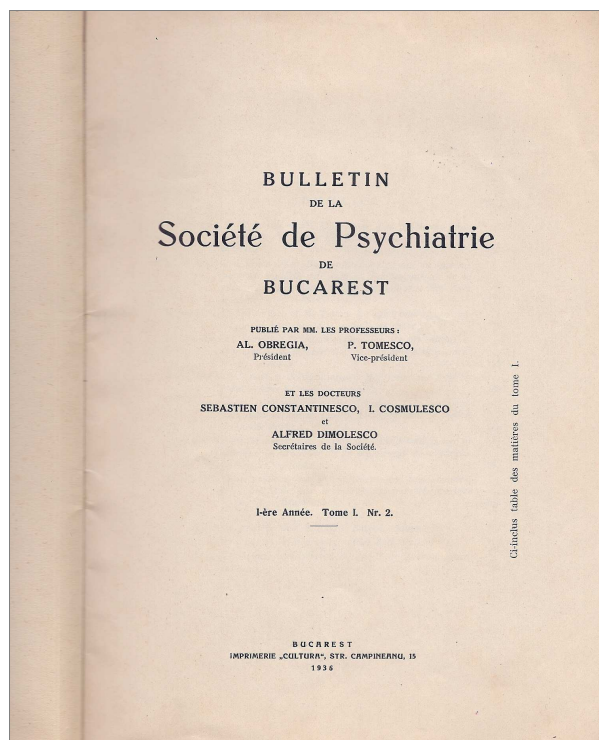
PROF. DR. ALEXANDRU OBREGIA – PSYCHIATRY AND MENTAL HEALTH

He greatly expanded the horizons of Romanian psychiatry, introducing perfected methods of

diagnosis and treatment, guiding psychiatry towards the anatomical and biological conception; he eliminated the pessimistic conception of degeneration and irreversibility from the Romanian medical belief system, supporting the possibility of healing mental disorders. He is well known for the introduction of the anatomo-clinical method and of the experimental methods in the area of psychiatry. An adept of the Kraepelian principles and nosology, he contributed to the knowledge and enforcement of mental illness systems in our country and, moreover, he defined cyclophrenia (mental disorder of a schizophreniform, affective, confusional and dipsomaniac nature - with periodic onset and the reversibility of symptoms).

In 1919, the Works of the mental diseases laboratory and clinic volume is published, reuniting materials gathered for more than three years from Al. Obregia, C. I. Urechia, Dem. Paulian and A. Popea. Among the most valuable researches, one must highlight the anatomo-clinical studies in progressive general paralysis (PGP) - the lesions of the sympathetic in tertiary syphilis, in pellagra, chronic alcoholism, senile dementia.

From his scientific works, the papers which stand out are those in respect to alcoholism (1930), progressive general paralysis (1895, 1923), paranoia (1899) and pathological anatomy in dementia praecox (1906).



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His scientific papers are published in national magazines: Spitalul (Hospital), România Medicală (Medical Romania), Bulletin de Neurologie, Psychiatrie, Psychologie et Endocrinologie (Bulletin of Neurology, Psychiatry, Psychology and Endocrinology), Bulletin de la Société de Psychiatrie de Bucarest (Bulletin of Psychiatric Society from Bucharest) etc. and international publications: Archiv für Anatomie und Physiologie, Physiologische Abtheilung, L'Encéphale etc.

In the university education area, integrating the preclinical sphere with the clinical one, he published histopathology (1908) and psychiatry (1916) courses.

In 1936 (at the age of 76 and only 1 year prior to his death), Professor Doctor Al. Obregia edits – in his capacity as President of the Psychiatric Society – Bulletin de la Société de Psychiatrie de Bucarest.

The journal has a wide European/international coverage: the works are published only in French, while the contents and abstracts of the papers are written in three other languages: English, Italian, German.

PROF. DR. ALEXANDRU OBREGIA – NEUROSCIENCES

Professor Doctor Al. Obregia's avant-garde and innovative spirit in biomedical experimental

research is also demonstrated by the fact that, in histology, he established the celloidin embedding method - a new method in making and processing the tissular samples (fragments) for optical microscopy, at a time when only paraffin embedding (a mixture of solid hidrocarbures, separated from the residues resulted from distilling petrol) was used. Celloidin (cellulose dinitrate), used for histological embedding, presents the great quality – superior to paraffin – of producing minimum reactions. Consequently, it is used for embedding the nervous system and the embryo nervous system^{7,8}.

In 1908, Professor Doctor Al. Obregia is the first in the world who – with the aim of improving the biological exploration methods in neurology and psychiatry – foresees, introduces and publishes the suboccipital puncture in the medical-surgical clinical practice, which he consistently uses. It is his most important finding, inspiring Toma Ionescu in the rachianesthesia of the superior regions of the spine. The chronology of the world medical progress in investigating the cerebrospinal fluid bears witness to the introduction of the puncture in the following stages: in 1891 – the lumbar puncture by Quincke and in 1908 – the suboccipital puncture in Romania, by Al. Obregia, while on an international level it was performed in 1913 (after 5 years) by Antonio and V. Bramman and in 1919 (after 11 years) by Wegeforth, Ayer, Errik. Thus, the history of universal medicine chronologically confirms the world priority of the Romanian scientist in finding the suboccipital puncture^{7,8}.

Professor Doctor Al. Obregia conducted thorough (neuropathological and clinical) studies on nervous syphilis. Stage 4 of the disease – progressive general paralysis – is a specific chronic meningoencephalitis with polymorphic onset, reuniting psychiatric syndromes and neurological signs. He found the dental obsession syndrome and the pill sign/tic – which bears his name, perfecting the neuro-psychiatric diagnosis for this condition.

Unfortunately, these 3 (three) world priorities of Professor Doctor Al. Obregia – Romania are not seen as relevant:

- in his own country – Medical Dictionary, Medical Publishing House, 1969;
 - V. Rusu, Medical Dictionary, 3rd edition, Medical Publishing House, 2007;
- abroad – The Random House College Dictionary, 1980;
 - Nouveau Larousse Medical, 1993;
 - The Oxford Compact English Dictionary, 2003;

– Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, 30th ed., 2003;

– Le Petit Larousse 2010, 2009.

Since the beginning of the 19th century, Professor Doctor Al. Obregia introduced anthropological measurements⁴ in his psychiatric clinic. It was the substantiation of the constitutional type, of the temperament, behaviour and personality – on a psychopathological level, on anthropological grounds. One century later – this would become behavioural sciences (biological, constitutional grounds, morpho-physio-psychological behavioural typologies).

Professor Doctor Al. Obregia was convinced that psychological suffering was the consequence of a series of biological, endocrinological and biochemical changes, occurring at various levels of the central nervous system. Due to his visionary beliefs, he introduced an endocrinology ward, the first in the world, in the structure of his establishment – the Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases. Thus, the hospital included individual wards of psychiatry – neurology/neuropathology – endocrinology. The establishment of a new interdisciplinary science – psycho-neuro-endocrinology – is hence demonstrated, to be born at the end of the 20th century.

The Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases – 1923 was from the start – through conception, execution, functioning – of what we would now call at the beginning of the 21st century – a modern integrated Neurosciences Institute².



Panoramic view - close up of the central building of the Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Prof. Dr. Alexandru OBREGIA – Bucharest upon 90 years of continued activity (2012).

The mental illnesses category is comprised of mental disorders, psychiatry and mental health, while the nervous illnesses category includes

neurology. The nervous-neurology/function-psyche-psychiatry structure-system complementarity is organised from a management and medical standpoint in the same structure.

The Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases became identified in the medical science and practice with countless pioneering-firsts:

1) the integrative organisation of the institution: medical assistance – university education – scientific research; the fact is also confirmed by the document on the 2nd cover of the Psychiatric Society Bulletin in Bucharest: *Le siège de la Société de Psychiatrie de Bucarest et le secrétariat du Bulletin de la Société de Psychiatrie de Bucarest se trouvent à la Clinique de Psychiatrie de la Faculté de Médecine, à l'Hôpital Central des Maladies mentales et nerveuses. Berceni Rd. – Bucarest V;*

2) the multifunctional and interdisciplinary structure of the hospital, in its bio-psycho-social dimension³:

- pavilion – type system – joint regime (2nd class) and pensioners (1st class);

- male/female separation; observation pavilions for quiet and semi-agitated patients;

- separate pavilions for children, tuberculosis patients and insane criminals;

- medical tests laboratories, pathological anatomy/morgue;

- wards for clinical psychiatry, neurology, infectious-contagious diseases, endocrinology, neurosurgery (at a later time);

- therapies: malaria therapy, hydrotherapy, ergo-therapy, agricultural colony – offering the freedom to work – the open door system for patients¹³, a European and international system for over 50 years;

3) the continuous progress-development in futurology of the unit, based on an ultramodern – across decades – conception regarding plasticity, extensibility and modernisation³.

PROFESSOR DOCTOR ALEXANDRU OBREGIA – SOCIAL PSYCHIATRY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Professor Doctor Alexandru Obregia stands out in the history of Romanian medicine as one of the most remarkable social medicine/public health organisers in 20th century Romania – by chronological summary:

- together with doctor Al. Brăescu, he consistently supports the need of establishing new and modern psychiatric hospitals, both in Iasi and Bucharest, as well as throughout the entire country;

- between 1899–1901 and 1905–1907 he is Manager of the Health Department with the Minister of Interior (General Manager to the Health Service of the country – a position equivalent to that of the Minister of Health), a position through which he fully contributed to the establishment and development of the medical and health care network in Romania and ensured the cease of delays, the remedy of construction negligence and the equipment of the Socola Hospital - Iasi, resulting in its opening in 1905;

- in 1900, he launched the National Plan for building 32 rural hospitals, one for each county – the "King Carol the I" Jubilee Hospitals;

- at the 1900 Paris Exhibition, the Romanian Sanitary Service - which he personally organised – was granted the High Honour Diploma;

- between 1900 and 1901, he created a sanitary assistance fund attached to the state Lottery and an epidemics fund destined for fighting epidemics, funds to prove their usefulness in later years;

- he takes on a fierce fight against syphilis and alcoholism;



Bust of Prof. Dr. Alexandru OBREGIA, made by sculptor Frederic STORCK, located in front of the central pavilion (1935) of the Hospital which he created and managed.

- in 1913, he actively takes part in the campaign against the cholera epidemic, alongside Professor Doctor I. Cantacuzino;

- for his patriotic attitude, he was arrested during the First World War (1914–1918) by the Germans, and at almost 60 years old he was imprisoned in the camp at Săveni, in Bărăgan;

- he comes into his own during the interwar period (1918–1937) and continues his prodigious medical, scientific, academic and social activity.

Scientist Professor Doctor Alexandru Obregia remains a visionary spirit, a bio-medicine inventor, an exceptional professional and an absolute organiser in the history of universal medicine.

His European excellence is demonstrated by his establishment: he is – of fact and law – the founder of the Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases of Bucharest. In the 1951–1998 period, the hospital was called Gh. Marinescu, in total disparity with the historical reality. As of 1998 – after 75 years of continued existence – it regained its rightful eponym, as restitution: Clinical Psychiatric Hospital "Professor Doctor Alexandru Obregia"⁹.

In fact (from a historical standpoint), the Hospital was legally and legislatively argued (1892–1906), established (including prognosis studies) and conceived (1893–1906), located (outside of the town), designed (1905–1907), built (1907–1923), organised, inaugurated (1923) and managed (1923–1935) by Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia, through a continuous and titanic work of 45 years (1892–1937).

The Central Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases of Bucharest – 1923 is the accomplishment of the largest and most modern Specialised Public Hospital in Romania and Europe (at that time, possibly the world): 34 pavilions with 2,000 patients. It is the most significant social work brought to life by Professor Doctor Alexandru Obregia.

In 1927, through a High Royal Decree, Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia is appointed Superior Technical and Administrative Manager of the Central Hospital. In 1929, at the International Exhibition in Barcelona, the Central Hospital and the Psychiatric Clinic of Bucharest are showcased on several panels at the Romanian Stand.

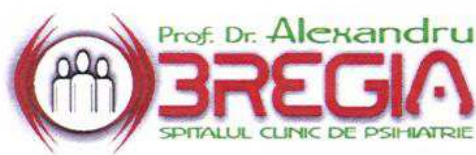
In 1935 – at the 75-year anniversary of the founder, as a sign of respect and tribute, the Bronze Bust of Professor Doctor Al. Obregia is unveiled, a work of art of the reputed sculptor Frederic Storck (1872–1942).

The foundation of Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia marks an important European progress¹⁴ in medical assistance and public health, as well as countless excellence firsts/pioneering achievements in the

area, making this hospital unique: 1) the scientific conception and the unitary organisational management of all stages, from ensuring a legislative framework and up to inauguration and management; 2) the location of the hospital - near Bucharest – due to the type of specialty and in order to serve both the capital and the county; 3) the size of the hospital – based on research regarding the statistics of morbidity attributed to the mental diseases, as well as prognosis studies on the perspectives of morbidity and psychiatric developments in Romania; thus, the Central Hospital is the first medical institution in Romania made based on prognosis research, to later become European practice; 4) the multifunctional, interdisciplinary, integrative and futurological structure of the hospital³.

TRIPLE REPAIR-RESTITUTION: HISTORICAL, MORAL AND PATRIMONY

Even though the first proposal and official procedures of naming the hospital after its founder are made in 1927, they will be repeated in the 1967–1969 period⁵ (daughter of the Professor – Maria Romana Obregia), and in 1976 (Psychiatrist Paul Cortez), only after 75 years since inauguration and 71 years since the first proposal is the triple repair: historical, moral and patrimony carried out – on March 4, 1998, by regulating the titlature of fact and law: “Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia” Clinical Hospital of Psychiatry.



Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia Clinical Hospital
of Psychiatry LOGO.

The failure to make restitution to Al. Obregia lasted for 75 years (1923–1998) and included 2 stages: the period of intentions – 28 years (1923–1951) and the period of injustice – 47 years (1951–1998). During the injustice period, the hospital had the eponym Gheorghe Marinescu, by Decree and Decision of the Council of Ministers. The situation – which lasted for almost half a century – was in complete flagrant with the historical reality.

As a sign of tribute, respect and honour for the figures and patrimony, for the national values and

history created by our forefathers, it was appropriate and necessary to make restitution-repair to Alexandru Obregia¹⁰.

The authors, executors and coordinators of the restitution (1995–1998) to Alexandru Obregia were the first two authors of this paper. Dr. Sorin RIGA and Dr. Dan RIGA are specialists in neurosciences, psychiatry and neurology, conducting their activity in the building founded by Al. Obregia since 1981. The (rightful) substantiation of the restitution was demonstrated through 3 Thematic Files submitted with the Ministry of Health^{6,11}: No. 1 – History, patrimony, foundation, representativeness; No. 2 – Toponym, eponym, foundation culture; Nr. 3 – Eponyms, Romanian medical precedents. The process of the restitution strategy (1995–1998) was finalised through Order of the Minister of Health no. 342 from March 4, 1998. The justice - triple repair: historical, moral and patrimony was thus institutionalised¹².

1923–2013: 90-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF PROF. DR. AL. OBREGIA'S FOUNDATION

This paper is a signal for the inauguration and opening in 2013 of a Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia Jubilee Year. This occasion is brought forth by the 90-year commemoration of continued existence in medical assistance, university education and neurosciences of the Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia Clinical Hospital of Psychiatry. The anniversary should also include a compensatory dimension. Clearing the injustice of contemporaries and history would be appropriate. Normality compels us to make Alexandru Obregia the scientist, the personality, the educator, the patriot and the Man – in 2013 –75 years since his demise (1937), a part of the Romanian academic world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We hereby especially thank Prof. Dr. Al. Obregia's descendants for the professor's documents/collection and our distinguished colleague Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mihai Ardelean, psychiatrist, for the original copy of Bulletin de la Société de Psychiatrie de Bucharest, 1936.

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