



## Nicolae C. Paulescu – Scientist and Politician\*

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### Abstract

The question of who discovered insulin is controversial. One of the scientists working on pancreas extracts was Nicolae Paulescu, the so-called forgotten man. In addition to his scientific research he was also active in politics. He was the father of the virulent antisemitic fascist movement "Garda de Fer" in Romania; he raved against the "Jewish peril," claimed in his writings that the Jews are a genetically degenerate people trying to cheat and poison the Rumanian people by alcoholism, and more. His name came up in 2003 when Romanian diabetologists initiated a move to honor him. But voices rose in protest, claiming that persons who incite hatred, support persecution and genocide and distort science as their political tools cannot be accepted or rewarded. The protesters won.

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The "Paulescu affair" began on 26 August 2003 in Paris with the cancellation of the Paulescu Award Lecture scheduled in the program of the 18th Congress of the International Diabetes Federation in Paris and the unveiling of a plaque at Hotel Dieu. The reason was an article in *Le Monde* [1] denouncing Nicolae Paulescu as a vicious antisemite. This was followed by a letter from Dr. Slama in the *Lancet* suggesting that Romanian authorities had deliberately hidden Paulescu's past [2]. Prof. Pierre J. Lefebvre, President of the International Diabetes Federation, initiated an investigation that resulted in the Federation's decision not to honor Paulescu, ever.

### Paulescu the Scientist

Born in 1869 in Romania, Paulescu went to Paris in 1888 as a young physician to work with eminent scientists Professors Lancereaux and Dastre. He obtained doctorates in biological chemistry and natural sciences at the University of Paris between 1897 and 1901, his interest being in the thyroid, adrenals and pituitary, and later the pancreas.

In 1901 Paulescu returned to Romania to take up the position of assistant professor of physiology at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest where he subsequently became chairman. In 1908 his book *L'hypophyse du Cerveau* was published in Paris, followed by

three volumes of *Traite de Medicine* [3] that he co-authored with Lancereaux. In volume 3, they write "Experimental studies of one of us seem to indicate that one of the internal secretions of the pancreas plays a role in the formation of liver glycogen" (cited from C. Ionescu-Tirgoviste [4]).

Between 1914 and 1916 Paulescu researched the isolation of pancreatic extracts (no original documents are available; ref. 4, page 53). In August 1921 Paulescu reported his experiments in normal and diabetic dogs that he conducted in Bucharest [5] on an extract he called "pancrein." The same year he published an article "Recherches sur le role du pancreas dans l'assimilation nutritive" [6] in which he reported that injection of pancreatic extract into the jugular vein of a healthy dog reduces blood sugar and urea. These effects were not observed with saline or other tissue extracts. Paulescu further reported that pancreatic extract injected into the portal vein of a diabetic dog causes reduction or transitory suppression of diabetic hyperglycemia, decreases glycosuria as well as blood and urinary urea. The effect was maximal at 2 hours and lasted for 12 hours [7].

Ionescu-Tirgoviste [4] wrote that the sense of responsibility prevented Paulescu from using his extracts in humans since the injection in dogs caused local inflammation. When introduced orally or rectally to humans it was inactive.

Paulescu registered his findings in Bucharest on 10 April 1922; he mentioned in his description that his extract was not purified or sterile.

It is commonly recognized that Paulescu contributed to the search for insulin, as did several others (Gley, Scott, Zuelzer, Allen, etc. [8]), but it was Collip, Banting and Best who produced a purified extract that was clinically active in humans.

However, he did not limit his writing to physiology.

### Paulescu the Politician

Nicolae Paulescu has been called the "forgotten man" [9]. But what *was* forgotten was his incitement of the public to commit crimes against humanity. So much so that the Romanian Academy and his colleagues decided to honor Paulescu on both the national and international scene by naming after him the Institute of Diabetes in Bucharest, a textbook on diabetes [4], an international prize and an award lecture. The latter was prevented

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by the previously mentioned article in *Le Monde* [1], and thus started the public excavation of Paulescu's past.

Paulescu was an active politician who used his medical background to promote his racist views in his articles and books. He was one of the founders in 1922 of the National Christian Union, which together with A.C. Cuza, a far-right politician, was transformed in 1923 into the National Christian Defense League (LANC) which subsequently led to the formation of the ultra-fascist "Iron Guard" within the National Christian Party. Its leaders, Cuza and Goga, formed a new Government, which adopted the first antisemitic laws in 1937. The writings of Paulescu, both his books and newspaper articles, starting in the early 1900s and until his death in 1931 constituted the theoretical basis for these laws [10,11]. The Iron Guard called Paulescu's writing "holy articles by Professor Paulescu – the unparalleled expert on judeo-masonic manipulations" [12].

The influence that Paulescu and Cuza exerted on the Romanian public has been described by historians as "ideas that kill" [13]. Paulescu reinforced the dormant hatred against Jews, and encouraged the public to harass, beat and kill them in horrific ways, such as throwing individuals from trains, among others [10,13,14]. The Iron Guard regime and Romania's Prime Minister Antonescu collaborated with the Nazis. This led subsequently to the expulsion of Jews to labor camps and the death of half a million in Transnistria, Ukraine [15].

### Citations from Paulescu's political writings

*Jidanii*<sup>1\*</sup> si *Alcoolismul* II: *The Poisonous Jews* [16]

"If the Jews are not drunk, they poison by alcohol the Christians, who were crazy enough to receive and feed them in their country. In hidden pubs they teach the silly ones to drink and once they are stupefied, take all their property and finish by killing them (p.4)... They do this without paying attention that they will lose the backbone on which they live as parasites (p.4)."

In the book *Spitalul, Coranul, Talmudul, Cahalul, Francmasoneria* published in 1913 [17], Paulescu writes: "The Jews have a prodigious patience and a diabolic stubbornness. These blessed people defy time, cross all obstacles, to fulfill their hate, today as it was at the time of Jesus." "We Romanians are faced with a capital question: What shall we do with these uninvited guests who suddenly installed themselves in this country, or rather, with these evil parasites who are both *thieves* and *assassins*? Can we exterminate them just as, for instance, bedbugs are killed? This would be the simplest and handiest way of getting rid of them; if we were to act according to the laws of the Talmud, it would even be legitimate" [17, p. 55].

Claiming that his medical discoveries should be differentiated from his political theories, as suggested by the President of the Romanian Academy in a letter to the International Diabetes Federation President Prof. Lefebvre, is not feasible in Paulescu's case since Paulescu himself declared that his antisemitic theories have a medically scientific basis. Based on his medical back-

ground he forged, twisted and invented genetic data to prove the satanic murderous mind of the Jews who are determined to kill the Romanian Christian population. Paulescu saw the conflict also in religious terms as a struggle between "Godly Christians" and "Devilish Judaism." He explained that the Jews are preparing to create a country of their own in Eastern Europe by "exterminating the native people" [18].

To present Paulescu as a prisoner of the *Zeitgeist* (ideas of those times) is to diminish his political activities. He should be considered a creator of hostile theories in an attempt to influence the public to hate the Jews and to act brutally against them.

Referring to the invented accusations that Jews kill Christian babies at Passover, Paulescu writes in an article in the newspaper *Apararea Nationala* ("National Defense") No. 20, 15 January 1923, "We are invaded by a strange Asian race, with bloody customs, who during the last one and half century are silently infiltrating our borders ...."

### Conclusions

There is no doubt that there must be an ethical and moral red line that no scientist, including physicians, be allowed to cross. After the Second World War, the German scientists and physicians who had collaborated with the Nazis were removed from their positions and some were treated as criminals. Nicolae Paulescu crossed that red line and, had he lived long enough, would have been dismissed and put on trial.

He may be acknowledged for his scientific work, but unquestionably should not be feted and honored. Quite the contrary – he should be unequivocally censured for his contribution to the dark pages of Romanian history.

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<sup>1</sup>*Jidanii* is a pejorative term, similar to the English "kike."

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*It was our own moral failure and not any accident of chance, that while preserving the appearance of the Republic we lost its reality*

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE), Roman statesman, lawyer, political theorist, and philosopher, and widely considered one of Rome's greatest orators and writers

## Capsule

### Chromosome X inactivation and RNAi

The silencing of one of the two X chromosomes in mammalian females is regulated by the non-coding RNAs Xist and Tsix. These RNAs overlap for at least part of their length, leading to the speculation that RNA interference (RNAi), a pervasive gene-silencing mechanism that targets double-stranded RNA, might be involved in X inactivation. Ogawa et al. show in mouse cells that Xist and Tsix do indeed form an RNA duplex that can be targeted by Dicer,

the RNA endonuclease at the heart of the RNA interference machinery, and give rise to small RNA species. Knocking down Dicer prevents Xist from coating the inactive X chromosome, which would generate heterochromatic marks. Thus X inactivation and RNA interference are mechanistically linked.

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## Capsule

### From impulsive to compulsive

Individual differences in impulsivity and sensation-seeking are related to vulnerability to drug use and abuse. Compulsive cocaine use has been thought to result from a failure in top-down executive control over maladaptive habit learning. However, whether the enhanced impulsivity observed in drug addicts predates the onset of compulsive drug use or is a consequence of protracted

exposure to drugs is not clear. Belin and co-workers show in rats that an impulsive behavioral trait that is associated with reduced dopamine receptors in the nucleus accumbens predicts the switch to compulsive cocaine use and addiction.

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