

A Review of the Humoral Terminology in Romania

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1. Introduction: Humorism in Romania

This research study investigates the terminology built around the concept of humours emerging from antiquity in the Hippocratic writings. The focus will be on (but not limited to) the effervescent nineteenth century since it is when most changes took place in the process of modernisation and re-Romanisation.

The theories of naturalist Greek philosophers, who considered earthly life a balance between natural elements, intertwined with those of ancient doctors, who focused on the balance of the body humours (lat. *umor* = ‘moisture’). Close connections were established between the natural elements (earth, fire, air, and water), indispensable to life, and the humours of the human body (blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile). According to Galen, dyscrasia i.e., the disproportion of the body humours, resulted in illness and disease. The humoral theory had a salient influence on the evolution and practice of medicine from antiquity to the early modern era. In the late Middle Ages, the Arabs and Persians (most notably, Avicenna) passed on the concept from the Greeks to doctors and alchemists. Widespread throughout Europe by the end of the 16th century, the theory preserved the main ideas formulated by Hippocrates in the 5th century BC (*The Nature of Man*) and completed later by Galen. Starting from Hippocrates’s concepts, in the 2nd century AD Galen distinguished four main temperaments, each corresponding to the predominance of one of the four body humours: sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm), choleric (yellow bile) and melancholic (black bile). The four temperaments thus stemmed from a naturalistic concept that relied on affinities and attractions.

The humoral perspective on pathology, physiology and biology can also be found in the early texts of the Romanian chronicles and codes of law, in which the natural elements (water, air, fire, earth) are called *stihii*. A Romanian chronicle from the late 17th century mentions, in the Hippocratic tradition, the humoral anatomy: the man is composed of the four humours (*umori*) – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile: hot and wet, blood corresponds to the wind; phlegm, which is cold and wet, corresponds to water; the yellow bile, as it is hot and dry, originates in the fire;

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and the black bile, cold and dry, comes from the ground (Candrea 1999: 136). Based on Hippocrates's concept of humours, a similar description is made in 1652, in Matei Basarab's *Pravila* (Code of law). The four humours – blood, phlegm, yellow bile (*hiare plăviță*), and black bile (*hiare neagră*) – appear in this work as homologous with the four elements (heat, humidity, cold, and dryness), which have anatomical connections and correspondences to various internal organs (liver, spleen, kidneys, and lungs), and develop depending on the seasons and the age of a person (Bujoreanu 1885: 422).

2. *Umorele*: the humours in the Romanian terminology

The earliest scholarly medical book written in Romanian is considered to be the manuscript *Alegerile lui Ippocrat* (an accurate title would have been *Aforismele lui Ippocrat*, since the document comprises the translation of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms*, but with a different layout). Translated from Greek in the mid-eighteenth century, it includes loanwords like *melagholie* (archaic version of *melancolie*), *melagholicos* (today: *melancolic*). An earlier work, deemed to be the first printed book of medicine in Transylvania, is *Sanitatis studium ad imitationem aphorismorum compositum*, written in Latin by the city doctor Paulus Kyr and published in 1551 in Brasov (Kronstadt). It is based on Hippocrates's aphorisms, but also on other sources of inspiration meant to provide teachings on "traditional dietetics". The study greatly relies on the humoral theories, and the first part of the book focuses on the proper balance of the four humours. Since diet plays a crucial role in this balance, the second part of the book represents a compendium of treatments, plants and aliments meant to rebalance the humours, to restore or preserve health:

O mâncare bună produce fluide bune [...] altele însă, cu prea multă fiere neagră; de toate acestea trebuie să ne ferim. (engl. "good food produces good humours [...] some foods create too much black bile and need to be avoided") (Kyr 2010: 205).

A second important medical treatise published in Romanian is *Meșteșugul doftoriii*, a collection of medical writings from different periods, starting from antiquity. Translated from Greek between 1760 and 1770, the manuscript also featured an introductory part presenting a brief history of Galen's life and medical activity. These translations and many other prints that followed popularised humorism in Romania in a period when Western medicine started to cast it into the underside of science.

Initially, for the equivalence of *umoare*, the translators from Greek calqued the word *chymos* (engl. *juice*, *sap*), using Romanian terms derived from the root *umed-*: *umezeală* (engl. *moisture*), *natură umedă*, *umădătură* (eighteenth century), *umezăli*, *omezeli*, *umedéle*, *umezele* (early nineteenth century). With the original meaning of "umoare", the term *umed* is referred to in *Alegerile lui Ippocrat* (Serafincean 1997), where we find *omezeli crude* (I, 22), *omezeli cleioase* (IV, 72), *omezeli coapte* (IV, 15), *natură umedă*, *dietă umedă* (I, 16), etc. In 1825, in *Lexiconul de la Buda* (*The Lexicon of Buda*), *umed* is listed with its derivatives *umezeală* and the archaic *umedelă*, but *umoare* is not mentioned (LB 1825: 732). An

early and rare term used to designate humours was *mocrotă* (from Sl. *мокромл*), found in Coresi's writings, in the sixteenth century. The author describes a disease (*boală de lună*: literally, 'moon disease') caused by the moon cycles that influence the humours, "waking" or inflaming them: „întărită mocrota (ce se cheamă apă, udătură)”. Therefore, the light of the moon disrupts the balance of the bodily fluids, causing diseases: „fire are lumina ce iase den ea să turbure udăturile trupului” (Coresi 1914: 81). The disruption of the four humours („turburatulu ceii mestecături rea a macroteloru”) also accounts for mental illnesses, referred to as demonic possessions (Coresi 1914: 275).

The term *umoare* appears for the first time in a Romanian manuscript, *Gramatica fizicii* by Amfilohie Hotiniul (cca 1790). The text is a translation from Italian into Romanian (Cyrillic) and the lexeme can be found in several contexts and phrases: *umore steclită* or *umore stecloasă*; *umorii singelui*, *umore (albicios) în fundul ochiului* (Ursu 1962: 290). Another variant of *umoare* was *humor* (plural: *humori*), found in an example reminiscent of the humoral theory: „somnul cel prea mult înmulțește humorii și umezala” (engl. "too much sleep causes excess of humours and fluids") (Micu 1800: 374).

The term reoccurs in the following decades, along with its aforementioned synonyms, prevailing eventually as the only specialised scientific term. To understand to what extent the two notions – *umezeală* and *umoare* (meaning "liquid") – were overlapping, Negulici's 1848 dictionary is rather relevant. Here, the lexemes *umezeală* and *umoare* have separate entries, but the author mentions lat. *humor* as the etymon for *umiditate* („umezeală”), although lat. *humidus* is cited for *humid* („umed”). The same dictionary lists the word *umoare* (from lat. *humor*), with two meanings: „Substanța fluidă din corpurile organizate, zemurile. (fir.) Temperament; dispoziție a minții.” (engl. "Fluid substance in organised bodies, juices. Temperament; disposition of the mind") (Negulici 1848: 390). Nevertheless, in the second half of the nineteenth century, *umoare* becomes the consecrated medical term designating intercellular fluids and *umezeală* remained part of the common vocabulary in use, given its semantic plethora.

With its variants *umore* / *umóre*, the term *umoare* is listed in the most important dictionaries of the late nineteenth centuries and carries two or three meanings: 1. „substanță fluidă și mai aleessu fluidu care se află în unu corpu organicu” (engl. "fluid substance or liquid found in organic matter"); 2. „certa dispoziționē de temperamentu și de spiritu, fia naturale, fia accidentale: umore négra, umore atrabilia, umore melancholica (engl. "a certain mood or temperament, either natural or incidental: black humour, melancholic humour"); 3. „ilaritate fina, spirituale si ceva camu satyrica” (engl. "fine, spiritual hilarity, somewhat satirical") (Laurian, Massim 1876: 524). Of note, the definitions provided here by the two authors preserve the Hippocratic view on humours, indicating that medical understanding was still anachronistic even in scientific works: „alterationea umoriloru produce morbi; reuiu nu e in sango, ci in umori” (engl. "the disturbance of humours produces diseases; the harm lies not in blood, but in humours”).

3. Humours: the fluid temperaments

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, observation medicine in Western Europe rejected the theory of humours; nevertheless, humourism that lie at the heart of the four temperaments created by Galen still exists today in the vocabulary that designates personality types (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic). Humourism transgressed the boundaries of medical knowledge and reverberated in the artistic and literary fields (Corbin, Courtine et al. 2008: 545); in Romania, the term *umoare* (engl. *humour*) passed from the scientific to the everyday language. By the mid-nineteenth century, *umoare* had developed a second meaning, that of temperament, character, mood, as appears in various dictionaries and literary texts, such as the definition provided by Negulici (see above). With the popularisation of medical works, the second meaning of *umoare* entered common use and was gradually accepted into mainstream language.

The theory of temperaments, also derived from humorism, was well known and attested since the sixteenth century, but it needed a suitable term. In 1551, Paulus Kyr (2010: 211, 223, 229) wrote about melancholy and identified sleep deprivation as one of its causes; as treatment, he recommended sexual intercourse or aquavit (as well as for excess phlegm), among other beneficial procedures. In a 1756 thesis on melancholy published in Latin, the Transylvanian doctor István Mátyus wrote about the aetiology and symptoms of melancholy, extensively citing Hippocrates: "Si longa tristitia cum longo timore et vigilia est, atrae bilis morbus sub est" (Mátyus, Oosterdyk 1756: 3). This connection between prolonged sadness, fear, worries and black bile (atra bilis or, its Greek equivalent, melan-khole) and the humour-rebalancing therapies was at the core of the thesis. In his 1829 work, *Filosofia cuvântului și a naravurilor, adeca loghica și itica elementare, carora sa pune înainte istoria*, Eufrosin Potecă (Soare 2013) wrote about the close connection between propensities and temperaments, referring to „Haractir al holerilor, sîngeroșilor, melanholicșilor, flegmaticilor” (“Characters of choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic people”). Of note, since his text is a translation, the term he chooses to designate fluids/humours is not *umoare/umezeală*, but the generical *sînge (blood)*. In *Alegerile lui Ippocrat*, the phlegmatic temperament is referred to as *umedos*: „va fi de folos celor umedoși din fire” (engl. “it will be beneficial to those with a humid nature”) (Serafinceanu 1997 I: 14). In the nineteenth century the term *flegmatic* becomes widely used (e.g. Vasici-Ungurean, 1830: 223), but we also find its variant *flegmaticos* at times (Popp, 1821: 21). The variants circulating until the twentieth century for *sangvin(ic)* were mainly *sancvinic*, *sîngios*, *sancainic*, *sanghinic*, but a more expressive phrase is *temperamentu sangeraticu* (Laurian, Massim, 1867: 1047). *Sanguin*, the term coined by Negulici (1848: 354) was defined as „în care sîngele domnește” (engl. “in which blood prevails”). *Coleric* is listed in Alexi’s 1894 dictionary (Alexi 1848: 54) as *choleric*, but it is hardly found in any other dictionary in the nineteenth century. We do find the phrase „colerici și bilioși” (“choleric and bilious”) in the early eighteenth century (Samaritan 1938: 411). In the nineteenth century, *cholericu* is described as „temperamentulu lesniciosei impresionabilități și a puternicei reacțiuni, mai alesu in

ceia-ce privește aparatul biliosu” (engl. ”the temperament of easily impressionable and highly reactive bilious people”) (Fetu 1871: XVII – XVIII).

The onomasiological field of bodily fluids offered a relatively wide array of alternates, as we have seen, but for temperaments (this term being itself a neologism) and psychological types, the lexical field was narrower. Therefore, once *umoare* entered the everyday vocabulary and use, it immediately and naturally added the second meaning, temperament, and then, by extension, mood, whim, state of mind, and disposition. The process of this semantic enrichment is visible in a condensed form in the definition provided by Laurian and Massim (1876: 524), starting from the second acceptance of the term *umore*: humoral temperaments („dispositione de temperamentu și de spiritu”) → „umore negra, umore atrabiliaria, umore melancholica” → mood, state of mind („ellu e de bona umore”, engl. ”he is in a good mood”) → caprice, moody disposition „disposition capritiose”. *Temperament*, *character* and *umoare* prevailed over the vaguer terms *fire*, *natură*, *feldeință*, *naturel*, *nărav* etc., but *umoare* is a scholarly word rarely used nowadays. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, however, *umoare* appears in literary works bearing various and nuanced meanings: „o lume de siniori curioși și de o umoare dulce și familiară” (engl. ”a world of curious, familiar, positive elderly people”) (Heliade Rădulescu 1846: 295). A visit in the wine-producing town of Panciu is for Gheorghe Sion (1860: 256–257) an occasion to observe the cheerful disposition of the inhabitants:

vinul care se varsă pe acolo cu atîta îmbeșugare, care se găsește atît de efin, a comunicat lăcuiitorilor o umoare de-a pururea veselă (”the abundant and cheap wine has given the locals an eternally good mood”).

In a piece of news from 1877 the reader of the newspaper *Telegraphulu de Bucuresci* (1877: 2) reads about „urîta umoare a populației musulmane [...] ostilă” față de recrutările în curs din Mostar (”hostile reaction of the islamic population, ... reluctant” towards the recruitments taking place in Mostar at that date).

In the twentieth century, some dictionaries of the vocabulary in use gradually exclude the second meaning of the word *umoare*, since this is perceived as a specialised medical term – e.g., dictionaries published by Hodoș (1929), Șăineanu (1939), Candrea (1931), Macrea (1958). Interestingly, the 1929 Dictionary (Hodoș 1929: 203), defines *umoare* only in its technical acceptance („temperament” is omitted), and *umor* is listed with a very concise definition: „duh glumeț” (”wit”).

4. The humour of language and the language of humour

In *Deutsch-Rumänisches Wörterbuch für Schule und Umgang* published in 1894, both *umor* and *umoare* are translated into German as *Humor* (”the quality of being amusing”) (Alexi I 1894: 318). The second edition (Alexi II 1905: 470), although ”modified and completed”, does not change the definitions either. It is an example of how these etymological doublets were sometimes used interchangeably, especially during the nineteenth century, when the term *umor* entered the everyday language and was registered in dictionaries as well. Another example is Laurian’s *Glossariu* (1871: 367) where neither *umor* nor *umoare* are listed; however, they appear as synonyms for *mâzgă*: ”succus, glarea, humor, saliva [...], in genere: umore

glutinosa, viscosa...”, which shows that *umor* was not yet perceived with its present connotation (“the quality of being amusing”). Later, Laurian and Massim (1876: 524) list a third meaning for the term *umoare*, but mark a different etymology (“angl. humour”): “fericita dispoziție de spirit, ilaritate fină, spiritual și ceva cam satirică”.

In the mid-nineteenth century, *umor* was already assimilated and used in press and literature with nuanced meanings – wit (GS 1877: 78): „A amesteca cuvintele nemțiesci fore vreo trebuință, încă nu va să dzică – umoru” (engl. “Using German words randomly and in vain doesn’t mean – wit”); sarcasm (Heliade Rădulescu 1863: 5): „Noi nu ne simțim nici în umore satirică când avem a tracta o materie atât de serioasă” (engl. “We do not feel like mocking such a serious matter”); playfulness (Codru Drăgușanu 1865: 132): “a’i arunci cu ore-care umore mestecată de afectu” (engl. “he told him in a playful, affective manner”), etc. In the twentieth century, the concept of humour was completely integrated and assimilated; we can find it properly delineated from its doublet (Niculescu 1943: 3): „un stil [...] subtil și familiar, plin de umoare și de umor” (a subtle and familiar style [...] temperamental and witty”).

5. Conclusions

The process of adopting the humoral terminology along with the concepts it defined was long and sinuous, partly because printed texts were not available to popularise medical teachings, and partly because, when they started to circulate in Romania, these theories were being replaced by the scientific vocabulary emerging in a period of continuous discoveries. However, the Romanian language integrated these terms (*umoare*, *temperament*, *sangvin*, *coleric*, *melancholic*, *flegmatic*) and they are still in use today, after fluctuations and morphological changes. The loanword *umoare* (“intercellular fluid”) doubled the existent familiar terms *umezeală*, *umădătură* and their variants, and it prevailed over them, since it was perceived as more appropriate for uses in the scientific register, but, with the connotation “character”, it disappeared in favour of *temperament*. *Umor*, the term that does not follow from the Hippocratic medicine, was borrowed altogether with its complex meanings, from French and English (indirectly). Its plethora of connotations doubled the existing terms and enriched the vocabulary. Future studies will investigate in more detail the impact of the four terms (*sanguine*, *choleric*, *melancholic*, *phlegmatic*) had in the Romanian culture.

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the terminology designating humours as it appears in Romania. From medicine to literature, from the Hippocratic theory of the four humours (*umori*) to the etymological doublet *umor*, this research paper will investigate the semantic and onomasiological fluctuations of three lexical fields: *umoare* (fluid), *umoare* (temperament) and *umor* (humour). The study does not aim to provide a comprehensive inventory of the terms (and their contexts) belonging to these semantic categories, but to identify the terms denoting the three concepts and their evolution in the Romanian language in its process of modernisation.