

Dr. Jonas Uro Basanavichius – Regular Member of the Bulgarian Literary Society and Founder of Anthropological Researches in Bulgaria

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In the early period immediately after the Liberation of Bulgaria, a number of foreign representatives of different branches of science – medical doctors, archaeologists, historians, humanitarians, who reside in different time periods in Bulgaria, contributed to Bulgarian scientific and cultural development. Between them shines particularly the name of the great son of Lithuania, Dr. Jonas Uro Basanavichius (Basanavičius) (23 November 1851 – 16 February 1927) – physician, scholar encyclopaedist, politician. With brief interruption he spends 25 years of his life in Bulgaria. He has huge contributions to the development of health and medical science in Bulgaria. He published scientific papers on Archaeology, ethnography and linguistics of Bulgaria. With his fundamental work “Materials for sanitary ethnography of Bulgaria. I. Lom County /1880-1889/”, Dr. Basanavichius became founder of the first established representative anthropological study of the population in Bulgaria.

Key words: Basanavichius, Anthropology, Town of Lom, Town of Varna, Ethnography.

Dr. Jonas Uro Basanavichius graduated from Medical Faculty of the Imperial Moscow University (1879) [1, 2, 10]. On January 24, 1880 arrived in Bulgaria [10]. On February 7, 1880 began working as a county doctor and as the chief physician of the hospital in Lom. For a short time he significantly enhanced the work of the hospital. His first concern was to attract local people to be treated in the hospital, because during this time the people believed that one must be going in the hospital, just to die [1, 10]. Due to political intrigues in May 1882 he left Bulgaria for almost two years. In this period he specialized medicine in Prague and Vienna. In 1884 he got married in Prague to Eleonora Gabriela Mohl – a German woman from Bohemia [10]. In 1884 he returned to Bulgaria with his wife [10]. Dr. Basanavichius was appointed county physician and head of the hospital in the town of Elena. And there he used to make a lot of efforts to attract urban and rural population to be treated in the hospital [10]. In 1885 he held position of district doctor in Lom. This coincided with the Serbian-Bulgarian War. The hospital of Lom was designed to accommodate wounded soldiers, whose number reached 200 people per day [7]. February 18, 1886 he became ill with pneumonia and fever [1, 10]. After his recovery, Dr. Basanavichius continued to perform his medical duties.

On August 7, 1887 against him was committed assault and he was wounded with two bullets, but remained alive [10]. He practised medicine in Bulgaria and Vienna, but regardless of this incident that almost cost him his life; he remained loyal and sincere friend of the Bulgarian nation and continued to work with the same dedication. In the town of Elena his wife fell ill with pulmonary tuberculosis. Due to financial difficulties and lack of resources he wasn't able to send his wife to be treated abroad. On February 16, 1889 she died at the age of 26 years, 2 months and 23 days. She was buried in the cemetery in Lom [10]. After this worst ordeal of his life he fell into a deep depression and melancholy or almost a year.

In 1891, in vol. V of "SbNUNK" was published extensive monograph of Dr. Basanavichius "Materials for sanitary ethnography of Bulgaria. I. Lom district /1880-1889/" (Fig. 1) [2]. This is the first fundamental study of the health status of a region of Bulgaria. Erudition and encyclopedic knowledge of the author allowed him to go beyond the ordinary sanitary survey and he gave an extensive description of the geographical, geological and climatic characteristics of the Lom County, its flora and fauna, exploring their impact on population's health status. Furthermore, he made a very accurate description of the lifestyle, habits, customs and beliefs of the Bulgarians from the region, which is a valuable contribution to the Bulgarian ethnography. The author for the first time in Bulgarian scientific literature reported data from representative anthropological study of the Bulgarian population and some minority groups living in Lom County, received from own measurements on a large contingent, including data from surveys of recruits [10]. For the first time Demographics of Lom County were brought, based on a conscientious and competent study [2]. In a letter to Prof. Konstantin Jireček, Prof. Ivan Shishmanov wrote: "In the forthcoming book (Vol. V of SbNUNK, remark GM) will print the following major works: 1. Ethnographic-sanitary description of the Lom County from Dr. Basanavichius. Huge and diligent work. Will volume about 15 [printer's] sheets. Here you will find a lot of things (that you are missing ...) ...: cranial-metric tables (yes, yes!) (indices, mindices etc.), a description of the color of hair, of eyes, on the basis of the stat.[istical] data, etc. - what do you think ... is there no progress? But Basanavichius is not Bulgarian. No harm! ... " [8]. Responding to Prof. Ivan Shishmanov Prof. Konstantin Jireček writes: "The article of Dr. Basanavichius for Lom County ... will be the first experience; nation needs such materials in order to enable to make anthropometric reasoning ... " [8]. In a review of the work of Dr. Basanavichius published in the journal "Medicine" [5, 9], the author of which is probably Dr. Stefan Vatev, is stressed that "the book of Dr. Basanavichius is a kind of encyclopedia, in which the reader will find information on all kinds of things ... The work of Dr. Basanavichius to few are known, but the way he deserves greater spread not only among doctors but also among the intellectuals at all. The author has used too much time and effort to write this work, and this is honor for him." [9]. The work of Dr. Basanavichius began often to be cited in the literature.

On September 16, 1891, the 6th National Assembly of Bulgaria accepted Dr. Basanavichius for Bulgarian citizen, which he considered to be a memorable event in their lives [10] and in 1892 received the "Order of Civil Merit Grade IV" [3]. In October 1892 he moved to work in Bulgaria, where he lived until his return to Lithuania in 1905. In Varna he continued his tireless work as a physician, scientist and public figure. He published a series of scientific works, among which are "To epigraphy and archeology Upper and Lower Moesia" (1894), written on behalf of the Ministry of Education, "Instruction collection anthropological materials in Bulgaria" (1896), published materials on anthropology and the healthy status of the population (1897), on national drugstores (1898) and others. He was elected a member of the Varna City Council (1899-1903) [2] and on his motion the Council decided to establish a museum in Varna, to collect "archaeological objects and materials for anthropology and ethnography of the current



Fig. 1.

population.” In 1899 Dr. Basanavichius was involved in the resumption of activities of Varna Medical Society [6]. Co-founder of the Varna Archaeological Society [2], took part in the Bulgarian Medical Association. For his contribution to the Bulgarian science in 1898 was elected a corresponding member, and in 1902 – a real member of the Bulgarian Literary Society (today Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) [3, 10]. When he was elected a member of the Bulgarian Literary Society, he wrote to Society President: “With my election as a corresponding member of the Society proved me great honor, which allow me, Mr. Chairman in your face to speak of Management Committee my heartfelt gratitude” [4].

In the mind of Dr. Basanavichius was always his homeland Lithuania, on which at that time he dedicated a number of works [10]. Dr. Basanavichius had hypothesis about the relationship between Lithuanian and Thracian ethnicity that runs throughout its life. In his autobiography he wrote that at the first trip to Bulgaria found some words that exist in Lithuanian, but they are not present in other Slavic languages [10]. In 1989, Dr. Basanavichius published “Lithuanian-Thracian studies” and then returning to Lithuania

in 1925 published the monograph “Language kinship between old Thracian and today’s Lithuanians”, co-authored with A. Srba, which was evidence that more than twenty years after his departure from Bulgaria it still speaks to his mind and heart.

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