

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

Sunday, November 19, afternoon, at the Piazza San Marco in Venice (the 'Florian' was full, so I went opposite to the 'Quadri', more appropriate for an Austrian anyway even if this is intelligible only to those familiar with the intricacies of Austro-Venetian history)

'Entlang der Südbahn' (Along the Southern Railway) or Galilei, Brambilla, Auenbrugger and Schubert

The main hall of Vienna's Southern Station still displays a huge winged stone lion, symbol of St. Mark's and the Serenissima, reminding of the opening mid-last century of this railroad to Venice which constituted the link to Old Austria's only port (Trieste) and was the lifeline in a commercial sense. To travel to the sea unfortunately takes longer today than it took 100 years ago, but we all hope that our Croatian and Slovenian kin will soon be in the fold of the European Union again and border controls will be something from the past.

First I went to Zagreb where a memorable meeting was held, a 'joint conference' (not only meetings back to back) of the dermatovenereological and the medicohistorical society. The organizing professors and docents, Lipozencic (dermatology) and Dugacki and Fatovic-Ferencic (history of medicine), are to be congratulated. From the perspective of the newly formed European Society for Dermatology and Venereology (ESHVD) such endeavors are highly welcome. The sesquicentennial of the term 'lupus érythémateux' and the centenary of the *Kaposi-Festschrift* were my own topics to address. After 2 congenial days and a meeting with the editor of the *Croatian Medical Journal* I went on (on the same railroad) to end up in Padova, home of the magna mater of all the medical faculties in Europe, place of Vesalius, Mercurialis, Harvey, Morgagni etc. and seat of the Accademia Galileiana di Scienze Lettere ed Arti (gia dei Ricovrati) of 1599, of which Galilei was a founding member.

Sunday morning, November 19, I went to the 'Santo', church of S. Antonio of Padua, specifically to the 'chiostro della magnolia', adorned by a huge magnolia tree of more than 40 meters' height, where there is a memorial plaque of Giovanni Alessandro Brambilla (1728-1800) [1, 2], first director of what today is the Vienna Institute for the History of Medicine, then a military medical school (the Josephinum) [3]. He died and was buried there exactly 200 years ago. I managed to fix a rosebud onto the marble and murmured a paternoster, appropriately in Italian.

Thereafter I went to the seat of the above academy which officially started its 402nd year (in a hall used for this purpose since the summer of 1779). I was to be admitted as a 'socio straniero', a great honor indeed: the names of 3 Hapsburgs, 2 Bonapartes, Jean Baptiste d'Alembert, Caspar Bartholin, Bartolommeo Bizio (melanin) [4], Agostino Bassi (first fungus), Achille Breda (Hebra's pupil and president of the said body in 1912/14), Giulio Bizzozero and Jean-Louis Brocq greeted me from the files of only the first two letters in the alphabet. As a foreigner, I had the good fortune to reply with a thank-you address which allowed me to point out my appreciation of being admitted to such an age-old and reputable body and to mark the day also by two more facts. This 19th of November, day of St. Elizabeth in the Christian calendar, is also the date of birth, in Graz, of Leopold Auenbrugger (1722-1809), the man who

described percussion, in 1761, and the day Franz Schubert died in Vienna, in 1828 (representing the quintessence of Viennese music and so dear to me as an offspring of a Viennese musicians' family on my mother's side). These historical cross-links were widely appreciated by the 80-odd audience. [The academy consists of two classes with maximally 40 members each, which may have up to 10 associated/foreign members each. Founded on November 25, 1599, by the princely cardinal Francesco Cornaro, it comprised originally the president and 25 members suggested by Cornaro, Dr. Galileo Galilei (sic) mentioned in position 14.]

Over the centuries, Padua had very close ties, politically, culturally and academically, with Vienna. Gerolamo Mercuriale (1530-1606) author of the first treatise on skin diseases in 1572, was called to the Imperial Court in Vienna, in 1586, because the emperor (Rudolph II) fell sick. Or Paul de Sorbait (1624-1691), several times dean and one-time rector of Vienna University, in fact the first celebrity our University 'imported' from the Low Countries (from Montbliard near Mons), chose to study medicine in Vienna but for graduation he went to Padua (1652). And when, in 1819, the University of Padua was opened again after the fall of the Venetian Republic, professors from Vienna were installed, notably Anton Rosas (1791-1855), in ophthalmology, in the old chair of Antonio dalla Bona (1785). And Carl Ludwig Sigmund (1810-1883), Hebra's counterpart, holding Vienna's second chair of dermatovenereology, married off one daughter into an ancient noble family of Padua and died there in 1883, his grave being in the protestant corner of the Cimitero Maggiore in Padua. So far just a few aspects.

Personally I am linked to Padua through history and travel. After all, Livy was born there in 59 BC. Giotto started to develop perspective in the Scrovegni Chapel, Mantegna adorned the Eremitani Church and Donatello's Gattamelata presides before the Santo, the first equestrian sculpture after antiquity. Alone, with my wife, with my sons, with colleagues and with visitors, with the Sodalizio i Brambilla, I went there time and again, to admire the marvels of a city to which there are only few others alike - *not even in Italy*.

The sunny afternoon of this memorable day I spent in Venice, another wonder city, in aquis, as much admired, loved and visited by your 'voyageur enthousiaste'. Eventually I jumped into the overnight sleeper to Vienna, bringing me back to Brambilla's (or is it Plenck's - *it is both!*) desk in the Josephinum for a normal, i.e. busy Monday morning.

References

- Holubar K, Premuda L: Breve ricordo di GA Brambilla (1728-1800) a 190 anni dalla morte e a due secoli dalla morte del suo imperatore, Giuseppe II: *Acta Medicinæ Historiæ Patavina* 1988-1989 and 1989-1990;XXXV and XXXVI:21-28.
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