

NERVAL'S DIARY

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

Vienna, in the month of February 2001

From the Home Front or Ophthalmology versus Dermatology

Rajasthan good-bye – participation at the Meeting of the IADVL in Agra became impossible due to procedural reasons. Jodhpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, Bikaner should have followed.

Work on the history of ophthalmology for a book in Pavia [1] – next to Padua one of our closest sister universities in historical perspective – keeps me busy. And, invariably, the calendar has its say. And a remarkable birthday is to be celebrated (vide infra).

The question who has been the first professor appointed for the specialty discipline of dermatology cost a lot of sweat 10 years ago. I could name Vincenzo Chiarugi (1759–1820) in Florence, 1802 and 1815 [2]. To unravel the same question at least for Central Europe and for eye diseases was no less tiresome. In the West, in Paris, it may have been Louis-Florentin Deshais-Gendron in 1765; further east it was Joseph Barth (1745–1818), a Maltese, appointed October 23, 1773, in Vienna (anatomy, eye diseases, eye surgery). Then followed Pietro Antonio dalla Bona in Padova, September 24, 1784, effective 1 week later. Thereafter came Georg Prochaska (1749–1820), successor of Barth at Vienna University in 1791, and after him Beethoven's physician Johann Adam Schmidt (1759–1809). The *Trio opus No. 38*, transformed by the master himself from the *Septetto opus No. 20, E Flat Major*, bears his name with the titan's compliments. Schmidt worked where I sit today, at the ancient Josephine Medico-Surgical (military) Academy. And then came Georg Joseph Beer (1763–1821), Barth's apprentice (and drawer of spectacular patients). He was the first appointed professor and at the same time head of a special university department for eye diseases. Of his pupils, his son-in-law, Eduard von Jaeger (1784–1872), his successor Anton von Rosas (1791–1855), Rosas' successor Ferdinand Arlt (1812–1887) and his grandson Friedrich Jaeger (1818–1884) are noteworthy. Still two other giants fit into this corona (as pupils of Arlt), Ernst Fuchs (1851–1930) and Karl Koller (1857–1944), one of the three in the 'Judeo-Viennese Cocaine Trio' (Sigmund Freud and Sigmund Lustgarten were the other two). Koller and Lustgarten eventually served on the staff of Mount Sinai in New York [3].

What about the birthday?

Mme H. Koller B., soft-spoken lady as she is, will enter her 100th year this month. *She is the cocaine-heroe's daughter. Believe it?*

Many details about her father I was entrusted with, I could see the Koller papers in the Library of Congress and hear much more. 'Le voyageur enthousiaste' conveys his most sincere wishes and cordial congratulations. *Mazel tov!* I wanted to come over again in person, but at the intended date the snowstorms in the Midwest thwarted that plan. 'Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben', as the German proverb has it, I will take opportunity anytime soon.

For us dermatologists, ophthalmology is the venerable older sister (as a clinical specialty discipline). Professorial appointments (1765/1773–1802/1815), university departments (1812–1849), internationally recognized text books (1792/1813/1817–1798/1817), paintings

(water colors) and copper plates (1785/1792–1798), societies (1857–1869), journals (1802/1854–1839/1866) and international congresses (1857–1889) illustrate that seniority. (The years given in the parentheses refer first to ophthalmology, then to dermatology.) In one instance, however, dermatology was first: semantically [4]. *Dermatologie* (1764), *dermatologia* (1776), *dermato-pathologia* (1792) preceded *ophthalmosology*, *ophthalmiatrics* (1802) and *ophthalmology* (1801). And with regard to the illustrators, interestingly, the eye diseases were painted early on rather by the (later) professors, the skin eruptions rather by physician-underlings with a special talent and/or relation to the *sense of sight*. Georg Joseph Beer, both Eduard and Friedrich Jaeger as well as Albrecht von Graefe, the great German ophthalmologist, are examples for the professors. Dr. Anton Elfinger and Drs. Carl and Julius (brothers) Heitzmann and Dr. Carl (father) and Theodor (son) Henning are representatives of the second group, who painted, lithographed and made moulages for Ferdinand Hebra and Moritz Kaposi, well preserved by the dozens, by the hundreds, by the thousands, in our vaults. (The latter is no wild exaggeration: 2,358 moulages, the 2nd largest collection after Paris, we have here, and the Henningses' part is the major one.)

I must come to an end. I did plague you today with so many dates and numbers indeed. Indigestible for the ordinary mortal. Crazy voyageurs-dermohistorians like me however literally *live* in different calendars, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Chinese – between figures, numbers, years, dates etc. Finally, permit me a last word which has little to do with one or the other specialty, rather with them all: life.

We started a new millennium, mes chers confrères, 26 centuries separate us now from the destruction of Solomon's temple, 25 from Marathon, 20 from Christ, 10 from the days of Avicenna. Let us be aware at the outset of this new millennium how much we, the physicians, are able to contribute to society by having the guts and determination to resist authoritarian practices, inhuman treatment in prisons and in society (i.e. female circumcision) and restriction of individual liberty. Dante Alighieri sang (*Paradiso*, canto V, 19–24):

Lo maggior don che Dio

.....fu della volontà la libertate...

Er gab sie uns allen, doch nur uns allein.

We alone got this gift. We alone bear the responsibility for all, for radioactive dust as much as for BSE, for carbon monoxide and for the species becoming extinct every single year.

References

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à bientôt,

K.H., Vienna
kh.histmed@univie.ac.at

KARGER

Fax + 41 61 306 12 34
E-Mail karger@karger.ch
www.karger.com

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