

N E R V A L ' s D I A R Y

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

Island of Kos – The place of Hippocrates, venue of the 35th Congress of the International Society for the History of Medicine (ISHM), September 2–8, 1996

μη βλέπειν – nil nocere

The oldest and central dogma of our profession is said to have originated here – an appropriate setting for this meeting which celebrates the 75th anniversary of the ISHM's foundation. Originally planned for 1914, the foundation had to await the end of the First World War in Europe to be established. Today it comprises the representatives of 64 countries, altogether some 700-odd members; attendees of 49 countries made it to Kos.

Kos – an island in the sun, an amiable and amicable place, harboring the so-called plane tree of Hippocrates, the Asklepieion and many more witnesses of the ancient world. All lovingly preserved by the Greeks. But due to the nature and the history of the ISHM, a meeting not without innate problems, seen at least by a clinician who is accustomed to the American type of razor-sharp guidelines for congress programs and their setting into practice, the up-to-the-minute schedules, the one-language uniformity and efficiency.

National heritages must be preserved and recently I have engaged myself in stimulating readership of the *Annales* and the *Hautarzt*. International congresses must have but one language otherwise communication is impeded, and exchange across (speech) borders is what international congresses are all about. The same principles apply to an international journal, e.g. the ISHM's newly launched (and beautiful) *Vesalius*. Painful as it may be, some historical ballast will have to be dropped. The ISHM will have to learn this lesson or remain in the shadow of its competitors. And otherwise? I have not been on a beach in the South of Europe for quite a time because of my complexion (phototype I). I am stunned to see how little our

message of sensible sun protection has come through. Thousands of square meters of European skin grilling in the sun, 12 h per day, a surprising percentage topless. Alas, dermatoheliosis with all its manifestations of elastosis, keratoses, lentigines, spotty hypomelanosis, later cancers and melanomas can be foreseen. We will remain busy in the profession for some time to come.

At the end of the meeting, a ceremonial declamation of the Hippocratic oath was performed by actors in ancient costumes in the Asklepieion. Many of the physicians present raised their hands and joined in, myself included. Therewith, I repeated my pledge after 36 years, in a sacred site, an unforgettable moment. It was September 7, for a Viennese dermatologist a hallowed date, Ferdinand Hebra's 180th birthday.

Island of Patmos – Place of one of the great visionaries of mankind, Sunday, September 8, 1996

To conclude my trip to the Aegean Sea, I visited the monastery of St. John the Divine. Compare it to what? Incomparable. But the memories of Bodhgaya, the place where Buddha was enlightened, flash through my mind. An equally unforgettable day.

καί εἶδα ἄλλον ἄγγελον
ἰσχυρόν νά κατεβαίνη ἀπό
τόν οὐρανόν ... Apocalypse X:1

à bientôt,

K.H., Vienna