

### **3rd International Meeting of the History of Medicine**

David Wright and Alain Lellouch

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Meeting of the History of Medicine was held in Patras, Greece from 11-14 September 2005. The two previous locations in this series of meetings (held in the years between the International Congresses), were Mexico in 2003 and Lisbon in 2001. The theme of this meeting was "Medicine and Water" and it turned out to be a very appropriate choice. The conference was held in the city of Patras, in a hotel overlooking the harbor, with the daily pleasure of watching large ferries maneuvering carefully in and out of the dock.

Water is well-known as one of the four Hippocratic elements (earth, fire, air and water), and many papers at the meeting drew on the rich philosophical, symbolical and mythological, psychological, religious, medical and sanitary aspects of water. A number considered its role in the cause of illness (for example via infectious diseases) or as a potential help towards health (for example, in hydrotherapy, spas, thalassotherapy, and with "eau de Quintan" and "eau de Javel"). As there had been so many offered contributions, a number of papers were limited in length to either five minutes or eight minutes. Although this clearly inhibited some speakers, in general it worked better than might have been expected and some of the best presentations managed to make all their points well and were beautifully illustrated while staying within the allotted time.

Another important feature of the meeting was the cultural and social program. On the first day, there was an opportunity to hear Greek choral singing and that evening there was a wonderfully atmospheric performance in the ancient Odeon of Patras of "Water the Saviour: Spring of Life-Force of Death". This was a beguiling spectacle of poetry, song, dance and instrumental music emphasising the dependence of mankind on water. On the following day, there was a trip to the beautiful Monastery of Nafpaktos (Lepante) which included a scientific session on the History of Uroscopy (co-organized with the International Association for the History of Nephrology) as well as a choir of monks singing a mediaeval medical work set to music. That afternoon, there was a visit to ancient Delphi. We moved around on these various trips by coach and there were plenty of opportunities to make friends with and to talk to fellow delegates, which is another reason why these meetings are so enjoyable.

We ate well and were entertained at various meals by Greek dancing which resulted in many of the delegates taking to the floor on one occasion.

On the last day, there was a visit to ancient Olympia and then, a memorable (because the atmosphere created was surprising and quite magical) closing ceremony on the way back, in a small candle-lit amphitheatre. There, some of the scientific papers and posters were given prizes by the Awards Committee and Professor J-P Tricot gave a vote of thanks in Greek to the organiser of the meeting, Professor Athanasios Diamandopoulos. Thanos and his wife Hilary and their daughters Emily and Sophie were wonderful hosts, entertaining the whole congress to a meal at home on one evening and looking after us all the time, day and night, in a wonderfully hospitable way. We were made to feel most welcome and will remember with great affection our time in Patras.

Our memories will certainly be of water but also of the history of medicine, of friends, old and new, and of the marvelous Greek hospitality and culture. Thank you very much, Thanos, your innovative, multi dimensional, friendly ISHM meeting was a great success and we are grateful to you, your family and your colleagues for all your efforts.