The European Society for the History of Dermatology and Venereology
The story of its foundation

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Dermato-historians and dermatologists with special interest in the history of their field regularly convene on the “History Day” of the (American) History of Dermatology Society (HDS), our venerable older sister, the day preceding the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Dermatology. This has become somewhat a tradition since this society has been founded 29 years ago (see chapter by L C Parish and JT Crissey in this book).

The foundation of the Société Française d’Histoire de la Dermatologie (SFHD) followed suit in 1989, providing a parallel ground for such enthusiasts on this side of the Atlantic. Proper credit must be given to Messieurs (Drs.) Daniel Wallach and Gérard Tilles from Paris who have devoted much effort into the establishment of this body in the best tradition of French excellence in the field. Both gentlemen serve as officers of this society, president and secretary (see the respective chapter). Similar to the meetings of the American Society, the French Society regularly meets on Friday afternoons during the French annual national congress, the so-called Journées dermatologiques de Paris. In 1995, the Hungarian Society for Dermatological Tradition, (HSDT) was founded by Bertalan Lengyel of Budapest, who also served as first president. Today’s president is Mme. (Prof.) Sarolta Kárpáti, also from Budapest. So far the “elder sisters” and their foundation

Occasional talks between would-be historians, connoisseurs and all the above personalities, had repeatedly alluded to the foundation of a European Society in the subspecialty of history but, in its early phase, were not productive. Eventually, one of the two mentioned enthusiasts from Paris (Dr. Daniel Wallach) and Drs. Richard Staughton and Andrew Griffiths and others from London went into action and decided to go forward with the plan to found such a European Society for the History of Dermatology and Venerology (ESHDV). This took place on occasion of a session of the dermatology branch of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, on Tuesday 23rd February 1999 when the “dermatologist of the millennium” was chosen (Wallach favored Jean-Louis Alibert, but, alas, the Britton made it: Robert Willan 1757-1812 ). To be specific, the idea began to be realized at a
Dinner in a typical London Club where Drs. Dick Staughton and Daniel Wallach deliberated on this matter. Some days later Karl Holubar of Vienna was asked if he would be willing to consider presiding such a future society, an honorable suggestion he agreed to. Several other personalities from various European countries were contacted and it was decided to convene for a founding session during the 8th Meeting in Amsterdam of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venerology (EADV) in September 1999. This memorable event took place Thursday, 30 September 1999, in the Hotel Victoria, Damrak, Amsterdam.

To the best of my knowledge this is the first and so far only supranational society for the history of a clinical discipline of medicine. The German-speaking society for the history of ophthalmology, the so-called Julius-Hirschberg-Gesellschaft “Deutsprachige Vereinigung für Geschichte der Augenheilkunde”, is not an European body (statutes approved on 28 August 1987, first assembly 7 November 1987, seat in Vienna).

A History Group of the British Association of Dermatologists informally exists already. A German Group within the Deutsche Dermatologische Gesellschaft (DDG) is in construction and is to be formally founded in Munich in 2002. The establishment of a Japanese History of Dermatology Society has been suggested by the author at the Centenary of the Japanese Dermatological Association in April of 2001.

The following persons were present at the founding session of the ESHDV: John Cotterill, Richard Staughton, UK, Gérard Tilles, Daniel Wallach, France, Albrecht Scholz, Germany, Xavier Sierra-Valenti, Joaquin Calap-Calatayud, Spain, Jean Goens, Belgium, Nikolai Tsankov, Bulgaria, Stella Fatović-Ferenčić, Croatia, Monika Harms, Switzerland, Lawrence Charles Parish, Anthony V Benedetto, USA (liaison to the American Society), and Karl Holubar, Austria. (Jana Hercogova, Czech Republic, Sarolta Kárpáti, Hungary, Sarah Brenner, Israel, Torello Lotti, Italy, Andrew Griffiths, UK, were invited but unable to attend).

The ESHDV was incorporated under the French Law of 1 July 1901 and its foundation was published in the Journal Officiel de la République Française on 12 February 2000. The permanent secretariat is located in the Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris. The society will be run by a president, a secretary-treasurer and a four-person directorate and the administrative council (four year terms).

Daniel Wallach was elected Secretary-Treasurer, Richard Staughton and Xavier Sierra-Valenti, Vice-Presidents, and Karl Holubar, President.
The other persons are to function as national or regional delegates. Membership dues will be 15,00 Euros or US$ per annum.

Two annual meetings and general assemblies of members were held already the day before the 9th and 10th EADV Congresses (Geneva, 11 October 2000, restaurant La Perle du Lac and Munich, 10 October 2001, restaurant Seehaus). The next such meeting is planned for 2 October 2002, in Prague. Future meetings will be held annually and the ESHDV will be listed as one of the many sister societies of the EADV in its programs. So far, this new sister-society, ESHDV, will also be present in the core program of the EADV being provided with a 90-minute slot for discussions of specific matters beyond what is addressed in the Alibert Oration.

A Historical Tri-Society Meeting (American, French, European) will take place right before the CID in Paris on 30 June 2002 and similar meetings are planned for future world congresses. After intensive discussions between these three societies it was decided (i) to have an Annual Alibert Oration at the meetings of the ESHDV (Lennart Juhlin, Uppsala (History of urticaria), in 2000, and Georg Stingl, Vienna, (History of Immunodermatology) in 2001, were the first two Alibert Orators) and (ii) to have a Buschke Oration in 5-year intervals before the world congresses (Jean-Paul Ortonne, Nice, will be the first Buschke Lecturer in Paris). This notwithstanding that the Tri-Society Meetings planned for future World Congresses and the annual events of the ESHDV within the framework of the EADV are entirely separate programs.

The logo adopted for the ESHDV was created by Karl Holubar and designed to give no preference to any national dermatological heritage. The word for skin is shown in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Spanish, Italian-Portuguese, Slavonic in Latin script, Slavonic in Cyrillic script, Hungarian, Arabic, Persian and Dutch (diacritic signs are stylized, or not given in Hebrew, Persian and Arabic), „é é è“ is standing for all other languages and idioms in the area between the Hindukush and the Pillars of Hercules, from Albanian and Basque to Estonian, Maltese and Icelandic. After all the European Union has, by now, 15 member states but only 12 golden stars flying in its flag.
As experience shows, about 1% of attendees of major meetings may be expected as visitors to dermato-historical symposia, workshops, lectures, which amount to about 60-70 persons at international world congresses. A small number indeed, but all dedicated and enthusiastic people who care for our rich heritage.

And Europe has the richest of them all.

Vienna, 28 November 2001, Joseph Plenck’s 266th birthday.

Fig. 2

Legends of the figures

Fig. 1: L to R: R. Staughton, D. Wallach., K. Holubar, X. Sierra-Valenti
Fig. 2: L to R: K. Holubar, T. Nishikawa, L.C. Parish, D. Wallach.

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Special credit is due to Pierre-Fabre-Dermo-Cosmétique who generously sponsored the foundation dinner in Amsterdam and the first scientific meeting in Geneva.

Fig. 1. The board of the ESHDV, after its election at the Amsterdam meeting in 1999. From left to right: Richard Staughton, Daniel Wallach, Karl Holubar, Xavier Sierra-Valenti, Vice-Presidents, and President.

Fig. 2. (from right to left) Drs. Daniel Wallach, Paris, Lawrence Charles Parish, Philadelphia, Takeji Nishikawa, Tokyo, Karl Holubar, Vienna, representing and being presidents of the Société Française d’Histoire de la Dermatologie, ESHDV, the (American) History of Dermatology Society, HDS, the Japanese Dermatological Association, JDA, and the European Society for the History of Dermatology and Venereology, ESHDV). This photograph was taken during the first ESHDV annual meeting in Geneva, October 2000.