Introducing a Series of Notable Notes About Historical Figures

As the oldest English-language dermatology journal in continuous publication, it is appropriate for JAMA Dermatology to acknowledge the English-language publication of a landmark text of dermatologic medical history: Pantheon of Dermatology: Outstanding Historical Figures by Christoph Löser, Gerd Plewig, and Walter Burgdorf, published by Springer in 2013. The text and over 2200 illustrations provide insight into the lives of 209 outstanding dermatologists who developed dermatology over 6 centuries. Since the founding of JAMA Dermatology in 1882 as the Journal of Cutaneous and Venereal Disease, the journal has published definitive manuscripts by the leaders in our field. It is a privilege to be able to give a glimpse into the lives of some of these leaders with Notable Notes derived from the Pantheon of Dermatology.

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Take Your Pick

There once were 6 great physicians named “Pick.” They were Jewish and practiced contemporaneously near one another. Their names are still mentioned in many epynoms. We honor the Picks and their important contributions to medicine and dermatology.

Of greatest interest to dermatologists is Filipp Josef Pick (1834-1910), who was professor and chairman of dermatology at the German Charles–Ferdinand University in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He and Moriz Kaposi were the most prominent students of Ferdinand von Hebra. Pick first described acrodermatitis chronica atrophicans but called it “erythromelia.” This late stage of cutaneous borreliosis is also known as “Pick-Herxheimer disease,” as Karl Herxheimer also wrote extensively on it. Usually caused by Borrelia afzelii, it is seen almost exclusively in Europe.

Filipp Josef Pick was a master administrator who founded both the main German-speaking dermatological society, the Deutsche Dermatologische Gesellschaft, and the leading journal, Archiv für Dermatologie und Syphilis, which still appears as Archives of Dermatological Research. His son, Walter Pick (1874-1932), a dermatologist, also started a journal, Zentralblatt für Haut- und Geschlechtskrankheiten.

There were other medically famous Prague Picks. Alois Pick (1859-1945) was an internist and military physician who described a Mediterranean febrile illness as Hundskrankheit or “Pick fever.” It later was called Pappataci (Italian for sandfly) fever, since it is caused by arboviruses and transmitted by Phlebotomus sandflies. He survived the Nazi period in Vienna, Austria, living in a Jewish home for the elderly and working in an adjacent hospital for Jewish slave laborers.

Arnold Pick (1851-1924) was a neurologist and psychiatrist who described a rare form of senile dementia and aphasia called “Pick disease.” The detailed microscopic changes were presented later by Alois Alzheimer.

Friedrich Pick (1867-1926) was an internist who described the association of chronic constrictive pericarditis with congestive hepatomegaly and ascites. This clinical constellation was also termed “Pick disease” in the older medical literature.

Unlike the other Picks, Ludwig Pick (1868-1944) achieved his medical fame in Berlin, Germany. He was a pathologist who helped describe the sphingolipidoses now known as Niemann-Pick disease. Albert Niemann was a pediatric colleague. Ludwig Pick also coined the term “pheochromocytoma.”

Pick was a common family name among Jews of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It may be derived etymologically from the Biblical name “Pinchas” (Numbers 25:11), or perhaps from “byk,” the Czech word for bull.

Jews were a small minority in Prague but dominated German-speaking intellectual life, whether one considers science or culture, with representatives like Franz Kafka. Certainly Filipp Josef Pick had a major impact on the development of dermatology as a specialty.

The Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague was split into German and Czech universities. All of the Pick physicians were associated with the German university except for Ludwig Pick. Tragically, both he and Karl Herxheimer died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp near Prague.

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