Lwów School of Dermatology at the time of the Austro-Hungary monarchy☆

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The University of Lwów was founded in 1661 by the Polish king Jan Kazimierz. The establishment of the medical faculty was restrained for many years due to protests from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, its major competitor. In its long history, the university was closed and reopened many times, mainly due to political circumstances. Different sorts of medical schools were affiliated with the university, but it was not until 1894 when the medical faculty was founded.1

From 1795 to 1914, Poland was partitioned by its three neighboring countries: Germany, Russia, and Austro-Hungary. There were strong political and economic differences between these three parts, with the Austro-Hungarian partition enjoying the most political, cultural, and educational freedom. Two major and progressive Polish universities with medical faculties, in Cracow (founded in 1364, just before the foundation of universities in Vienna in 1365 and in Heidelberg in 1386) and in Lwów (founded in 1661), offered most of their lectures in the Polish language. In comparison, the German partition of the Polish state had no universities at all, and Warsaw University in the Russian partition of the country was almost entirely under Russian influence, including the official language to be spoken.

In 1894, a faculty of medicine was established at the University of Lwów (known in the 19th century under the German name of Lemberg). Several years later, the position of the head of the dermatology department was offered to Włodzimierz Łukaszewicz (1860-1924), who was a professor of dermatology at the University of Innsbruck. Prof Łukaszewicz was a disciple and an assistant to Moritz Kaposi (Kohn), a renowned Viennese dermatologist. Thanks to the efforts of Łukaszewicz, a new impressive building housing an independent dermatology clinic was opened in Lwów in 1914.

Lwów dermatology in the 19th century

The first dermatology department, named the syphilology and skin department, was established in 1836 and headed by Dr Edward Kellermann (?-1875),2,3 whose successor was Franciszek Neuhauser, later an assistant professor of syphilology at Lwów University. Not much is known about their work and the department. The second department of dermatology in Lwów was established in 1871 in the Public General Hospital and was managed by Józef Różański (1841-1907). Różański published occasionally in Polish journals, mostly on venereology, and in the form of hospital departmental reports.4,5

Later, the department of dermatology was divided into a men’s department, managed by Różański, and women’s unit, chaired by Bolesław Głowacki (1831-?). Głowacki graduated from the Medical Department at Vienna University in 1860 and subsequently worked in the General Hospital in Vienna, the Paediatric Hospital of Saint Sophia in Lwów, and in the Public General Hospital in Lwów.6,7
Głowacki became the head of the hospital in 1873 and was succeeded by Jan Chądżyński (1824-1904). Chądżyński had graduated from the medical school of University of Paris; his doctoral thesis was on uterine tumors. After several years of work in France, he moved to Lwów. He was the head of the dermatology department during 1873-1889.

The main paper by Chądżyński was devoted to the prophylactic excision of the initial syphilitic sclerosis (ulcus durum). He started the paper with a lengthy discussion on the time of appearance of initial sclerosis and developing generalization of syphilitic infection, depending on the patient’s immune condition. He presented references to the various studies on the early appearance and the duration of syphilitic initial sclerosis. He believed that the infection remained localized during the incubation period, as established by histologic studies that disclosed only changes in the blood vessels at the place of contagious contact. Later, the lymph glands became locally enlarged. He quoted results of experimental studies of various authors on excision of the initial sclerosis for prevention of the generalized infection, referring prevalent positive results; however, no details were given on the exact time of infection, the appearance of syphilitic sclerosis, the lapse of time between excision and the first clinical signs of general syphilitic infection.

This controversial paper has been sharply criticized by several international authors, who stressed high percentage of errors in his study. Of 30 patients examined by Chądżyński, 16 were a complete failure, 9 were lost for a further observation, and 7 were regarded by the author as positive, although the follow-up of those patients was not complete and was entirely unreliable. Very imprecise data on the course of the disease made impossible objective evaluation of the method. An assessment of the study made by Auspitz was particularly critical, because he expressed his disagreement to the value of excision of initial sclerotic ulcer as a therapeutic procedure to prevent the generalized syphilitic infection.

There was also additional diplomatic problem. The paper by Chądżyński was published in French, and he claimed to know the paper by Auspitz only in a French translation, which was an offense because Chądżyński, living in Austria (Lemberg), had a perfect command of German. The disagreement was more serious, however. The studies, although performed in no strictly defined conditions, showed that excision of the initial sclerotic ulcer does not prevent the generalization of syphilitic infection that occurs before appearance of any visible lesions.

In the subsequent years, the dermatology departments were headed inter alia by Żegota Krówczyński, Michał Świątkiewicz, and Józef Świątkiewicz, and in the 20th century by Jan Lenartowicz, Roman Leszczyński, and Stanisław Ostrowski.

Ignacy Żegota Krówczyński (1848-1893), who was born in Lwów, started studying law at Jagiellonian University in 1865. After 2 years, he decided to move to medicine, which he graduated from in 1873. He then worked at a venereology and dermatology department of Saint Spirit Hospital in Cracow. In 1974 he moved to Lwów, where he established a private dermatology practice and worked at the dermatology department for women at Public General Hospital. In 1879 he became the head of the department. He published about 60 papers, mainly related to venereal diseases, including a textbook.

Czesław Uhma (1862-1904) started his medical studies at Jagiellonian University in 1881; then he took several years’ break in which he visited the USA with a group of friends. He graduated from the medical department in Cracow in 1891 and was advised by Aleksander Zarewicz, a professor of dermatology at Jagiellonian University, to specialize in dermatology. He was accepted by Krówczyński and worked at the dermatology department of the Public General Hospital in Lwów until 1897. He also helped Krówczyński in his private dermatology practice, which he continued after Krówczyński’s death. He was mainly interested in venereology and published a textbook devoted to the field.

Alfred Biesiadecki (1839-1998) was an internationally known scientist who was highly regarded by authorities of that time as medical educator and was one of the pioneers of histopathology of the skin. He was born in 1839 in Lwów (Lemberg), studied at Vienna University, and completed his medical education in 1862 with the degrees of a doctor of medicine, surgery, and gynecology. Biesiadecki was a student of Rokitansky and therefore became interested in anatomy and pathology. Up to 1865, he was active in the department of skin diseases established by Hebra and became expert in this new, only developing, not widely known domain of medicine. In 1868, already as a recognized researcher and educator, Biesiadecki was appointed the professor of anatomy and pathology at Cracow University. Leaving Vienna he continued his studies on the skin anatomy and pathology, which have been presented in a book (edited by Salomon Stricker) The Tissue of Men and Animals.

Not able to continue his work in Cracow, Biesiadecki moved to Lemberg in 1876, where at that time there was no medical faculty at the university. He was appointed a desk officer for sanitary problems in Galicia; however, he was able to continue his studies. In Lwów and Cracow, he was a prolific scientist and made important contributions to the histology and histopathology of skin, hair, and nails. Especially original were his papers on blood and lymphatic vessels, both in inflammatory diseases and neoplasia. His picture of lymphangioma multiplex tuberosum was reproduced in a highly acclaimed textbook of Kaposi.

Biesiadecki described the anatomy of the nervous system of the skin, histology of muscles, sebaceous, and sweat glands, and some data on hair. In his description of acne vulgaris, he stressed the primary changes in hair follicles and sebaceous ducts filled with keratotic plugs, whereas rosacea was found to differ considerably by a great number of dilated blood vessels and hypertrophy of the sebaceous glands. This
study was of special interest because of a disagreement of leading authorities on the relationship between acne vulgaris and rosacea. Biesiadecki was also interested in the process of inflammation and epidermal repair, which he observed producing blisters in the skin of frogs. Those studies provided grounds for his further projects on the study of transplanted skin. His interest in venereology was limited, but also in this domain, Biesiadecki had some original observations in a newly born syphilitic baby and in very unusual syphilis of intestine. His search for etiologic factor of syphilis was unsuccessful, as was the case for all other researchers, until discovery of Treponema pallidum by Schaudinn and Hofmann in 1905.

Following the life and achievements of Biesiadecki, it should be stressed that this creative medical researcher was one of pioneers of skin histopathology and had important contribution to histology of the skin, diseases of lymphatic glands, acne vulgaris, and rosacea. He was also widely known as an educator, and his students continued in some way his input to the anatomy and histology of the skin.

**Dermatology in Lwów in the 20th century**

The University Clinic of Dermatology, with 40 beds, was founded in 1892, but started activity in 1898. It was headed by Włodzimierz Łukasiewicz (1860-1924), professor of dermatology. The infrastructure of the department, however, was not satisfying, and Łukasiewicz tried very hard to acquire a new location. Finally, a completely new and modern building with 100 beds was finished in 1914, but because of the outbreak of the World War I, the opening of the department in a new place was delayed until 1920. The University Department of Dermatology in Lwów in the 20th century was linked with the names of many professors of dermatology, including Włodzimierz Łukasiewicz, Roman Leszczyński, Jan Lenartowicz, Stanisław Ostrowski, Stefan Kwiatkowski, and Henryk Mierzecki.

Włodzimierz Łukasiewicz (Figure 1) was born in Hołoszyńce village at Podole. Łukasiewicz studied medicine from 1877 to 1883 at Jagiellonian University and then worked in the syphilology department of Professor Isidor Neumann and gynecology department headed by Professor Joseph Späth in Vienna. After 1 year of military service, he was in the years 1885 to 1887 a “Sekundararzt” in the department of dermatology (headed by Mauritz Kaposi) and in the department of urology (headed by Leopold Dittel), and in the years 1887 to 1892 an assistant in the department of dermatology (headed by M. Kaposi).33-38

When the chairman position in Innsbruck became vacant in 1892, he was appointed—with the help of very positive recommendations of his teacher Kaposi—extraordinary professor of dermatology (“ausserordentlicher Professor für Hautkrankheiten und Syphilis”) and became head of the department in Innsbruck. Under Łukasiewicz, the department was moved to a new building, the same used by the department of dermatology today (planned by Łukasiewicz’ predecessor Adolf Jarisch). He used the title of nobility “Ritter von Lada,” although it was not possible to confirm the origins of his nobility in the Austrian State Archive in Vienna.39 During his Innsbruck years (Figure 2), he published on Lichen scrofulosorum, Erythema multiforme, Folliculitis exulcerans, Mycosis fungoides, and Xeroderma pigmentosum.

Lichen scrofulosorum has been regarded as related in some way with tuberculosis, although the search for bacilli was repeatedly negative.40 Histologic studies showed epithelioid and giant cells, thus the tuberculosis-like changes, however, without caseification.40 The benign course and self-healing also differs from tuberculosis. Only in single cases the lesions could be highly inflammatory, even with presence of pustules. The pathogenetic factor was believed the bad general condition, cachexy due to severe tuberculosis, which induced such histologic features. Some relationship with internal tuberculosis is in part accepted also today.40

Łukasiewicz, as did almost all authors of the 19th century, recognized four stages of mycosis fungoides: the first, eczematlike; the second, characterized by the presence of nodules; the third, tumors; the fourth, cachexy.41 The disease has been given different names by various authors. The name of mycosis fungoides, given by Ailbert42 is a misnomer, because there is no mycotic infection. The name is preserved,
however, because it is widely used by most dermatologists. Łukasiewicz described in great detail his cases of the first two stages, which are variable in their clinical and pathologic morphology. The tumor stage, which usually develops slowly within several years, sometimes precedes the disease (mycosis fungoides d’emblée). According to Łukasiewicz, the tumors in mycosis fungoides are due to inflammation and development of granulomas; therefore, the term granuloma fungoides was proposed by Auspitz.45

Łukasiewicz did not discuss the most important problem of how related are malignant tumors to the granulomas of mycosis fungoides.41 He described a 24-year-old woman with disseminated papular and small nodular lesions, perifollicular pustules, and plaques; interestingly the face, neck, breast, and external parts of arms were not involved.43 The disease started suddenly, without any evoking factor, and the morphology was of the type of bromine-acne, but the patient did not take bromine. There was also similarity to acne cachecticorum; however, the patient was not cachectic. The glands were not involved. Bacilli were not found, and inoculations of guinea pigs were negative; thus, tuberculosis as etiologic factor was not confirmed. After excluding all other possible etiologies, Łukasiewicz believed that it was an entity described by Henri Leloir (1855-1896) as perifolliculitis suppurativa conglomerata, a special variety of folliculitis et perifolliculitis of staphylococcus origin.43

Xeroderma pigmentosum was described by Kaposi in 1870, and this name reflects well the variety of pigmented lesions—ephelides, lentigines, nevi pigmentosi, mottled appearance of the atrophic dry skin with multiple telangiectasias, which he compared with skin in senilitas praecox. Characteristic are epidermal proliferations, wartlike lesions, precancers, and cancers. The sun and ultraviolet irradiations were established as key damaging factors. The author believed that the disease is genetic because there are familial cases, the onset is usually in early infancy, and the course is more severe by early onset.44 Histologic study disclosed accumulation of pigment in the striatum basale and rete ridges. Epidermal proliferations transforming into carcinomas are usually multiple. All this conforms with the present knowledge on malignancies in xeroderma pigmentosum. Molecular studies up to now have not solved the problem of therapy and prophylaxis.44

Łukasiewicz was given the position of the head of dermatology department at Lwów University in 1898, which he kept until his death in 1924. In those years he published mainly in Polish, and mainly clinical cases. At the end of the 19th century, he also published an interesting
review on the achievements of the 19th century dermatology and the role of dermatology in medicine, including the role of histopathology and microbiology, also on skin changes in systemic diseases.46

He was an amateur painter and collected old furniture. He possessed a collection of old sculptured busts and old tapestries. In 1921 Łukasiewicz donated 12 paintings, including that of John Holbein the Elder (Figure 3), to the National Museum in Cracow.47

Conclusions

It could be said that Lwów (Lemberg) had a special position in Polish dermatology of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Lwów was linked with the best European dermatology centers: Vienna, Innsbruck, and Paris. The outstanding dermatologists were educated mostly in Vienna, as Łukasiewicz by Kaposi. Thus, Lwów dermatology succeeded in the preservation and development of Polish dermatology, although the best papers were published in international languages: German and French. Some of the Lwów dermatologists of that period were internationally acclaimed, such as Łukasiewicz, Chądzyński, and Biesiadecki. The name of Chądzyński will be remembered for his failed attempt to prevent generalization of syphilis by excision of ulcer durum. Biesiadecki was well known in his time for his study on transplanted skin, especially his evaluation of the histologic features of the graft.

Lwów (Lemberg)—a provincial city of Hapsburg monarchy in turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries became an important dermatologic centre of Central Europe.

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47. Protocol from National Museum in Cracow confirming the donation of paintings and furnitures by Władzimierz and Róża Lukasiewicz dated Sept. 17, 1921 [kindly supplied by National Museum in Cracow].