Short Communication

Ioannis Chrysospathis: The Eve of the Modern Orthopaedics in the Hellenic Republic

Gregory Tsoucalas1* and Markos Sgantzos1,2

1History of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Thessaly, Greece
2Laboratory of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Thessaly, Greece

Abstract

Although the evolution of orthopaedics started since the Homeric era in the Hellenic peninsula, it was the French surgeon Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard who introduced the term “orthopaedics” inside his treatise “L’ Orthopédie” (Orthopaedia) during 1741. In modern Greece, it was Ioannis Chrysospathis who supported orthopaedics to be an independent medical branch. Chrysospathis studied in France, Germany and Austria to return in Greece during 1901. He was appointed as the first professor of orthopaedics in 1925 in the Athenian University. Despite his significant work, still remains rather unrecognized, as orthopaedics was certified as a separate medical speciality during 1947, almost a decade after his death.

INTRODUCTION

Bone fractures, dislocation and reconstruction were a well known medical subject among physicians and surgeons and folklore practitioners since the Homeric era. Inside the epic poem of Iliad, a summary of 157 different types of combat injuries were described, presenting a plethora of bone and joints traumas [1]. Hippocrates gathered and systematized the knowledge of the pre-Hippocratic era, composing inside Corpus Hippocraticum various chapters on orthopaedics, “About fractures and dislocations” (Greek: Περί αγμών), “On joints” (Greek: Περί άρθρων), and “On the bone restoration” (Greek: Μοχλικός) [2].

Some eons later Paul of Aegina, in the early byzantine period, lived in a era when the preservation of the ancient Greek tradition was for him almost a necessity. Eager to follow the dogma of “ορθοπο(ε)δώ” (orthopeodo: pace with no malformation), he had introduced a series of surgical operations of reconstructive-cosmetic-plastic-orthopaedic nature to confront any disfiguration of the human body. In his work an extensive reference to the bone congenital anomalies and acquired fractures and luxations of the human skeletal was thoroughly presented, depicting the views of the era on the management and treatment of the motor system [3-5].

Although the main concept of orthopaedics was founded by the ancient and Byzantine Greeks, it was a French physician who firstly introduced the term “orthopaedics” in medicine. Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard (1658-1742) from Lyon, named his two volume masterpiece “L’ Orthopédie” (Orthopaedia) during 1741, while when depicting a malformed tree which needed to be supported, he had spread among the common people the sense of orthopaedics (Figure 1) [6].

In modern Greece, the genesis of Orthopaedics and its truly independence from the Department of the General Surgery in the Athenian University began during 1925, when for the first time a new branch was created, the “Department of Orthopaedics”. The eminent surgeon of the era Ioannis Chrysospathis (1873-1938) (Figure 2), was appointed as the first professor of Orthopaedics in Greece [7].

Ioannis Chrysospathis, life and work Ioannis G. Chrysospathis (Greek: Ιωάννης Γ. Χρυσοσπάθης), was born in the provincial city of Kalamata (Greek: Καλάματα) in June the 2nd 1873. His strong desire for a better education forced him to travel to Leipzig for medical studies, where he had obtained his Doctoral title. He had been further trained in German, Austrian and French

Figure 1 (From left to right) Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard (1658-1742) by Jean François de Troy (1679-1752). Andry’s treatise “L’ Orthopédie”, London. Andry’s crooked tree, frontispiece of the “L’ Orthopédie”, 1741.
Chrysospathis was married to Marika Patsidi (Greek: Μαρίκα Πάτσιδη). His daughter Anna was married to the Irish physician and later famous surgeon and Professor Charis Toole (1897-1980) from Argostoli, Kefalonia [9]. Among his substantial work stand his treatise “Orthopaedics” in 1932. He was the writer of a plethora of manuscripts in orthopaedics, “Chronic Ankylosing spondylitis” in 1907 (thesis), “Bone tuberculosis of the vertebral spine” in 1910, and “Kyrtopodie” in 1936. Apart from his love in the bone and joint diseases; he was very font of the history of medicine. He had published among others the “Orthotics from antiquity until nowadays” in 1909, “Hippocratic Orthopaedics” in 1910, and “The evolution of orthopaedics during the last years” in 1917 [8].

DISCUSSION

Chrysospathis founded the first Orthopaedic Clinic that included laboratory and for making orthopaedic devices. He even was so familiar with the laboratory, that he was constantly giving instructions on how to build specialized devices to fit properly to his patients. Thus he had introduced a more personalized approach to a group of the general population which was partially neglected until his innovative creation of such a pioneering laboratory [7]. He was the first to publish around 1901 a private advertising in orthopaedics inside the public press of the era to promote further a rather unknown medical practise in Greece. From his advertising text we may assume that he was an expert in the deformities of the vertebral spine, of the fractures of the extremities, in congenital lameness, in lumbar radiculopathy, in rheumatism, in the deformities caused by chronic arthritis, in rachitic disease, and in the paralysis due the central nervous system impairment (Figure 5). From his rich catalogue of works, it is clear that he was able to write scientific essays in three languages, Greek, German and French (Figure 6).
Chrysospathis remains still today a rather unrecognized medical figure and it is difficult for the historians to compose a more detailed biographical note. Orthopaedics was recognized as a medical specialty in Greece during 1947, some years after his death. He died in 1938, 9 years before his greatest love to be certified as an important branch in the Hellenic state [7,10].

EPILOGUE

Ioannis Chrysospathis was the Greek physician who completely understood the importance of orthopaedics in medicine. He fought for his ideas to modernize a branch which until then was under the patronage of the general surgery. Unfortunately, he wasn’t alive to join in his success in the eve of Greek orthopaedics in the early 20th century. He remains forgotten inside the archives of the Athenian University, waiting for his work to be unveiled for the contemporary scientists to ascertain his magnitude.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

Acquisition of data: Gregory Tsoucalas, Markos Sgantzos.
Writing: Gregory Tsoucalas
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REFERENCES


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