

HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Professor Julius Alexander Ledenyi-Ladziansky – centenary of a personality

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Professor J. A. Ledenyi-Ladziansky, academician, anatomist, researcher, scientist, author, beloved and disliked by others at the same time, a personality in a true sense, was born 100-years ago. (Fig. 3, Ref. 8.)

Key words: Ledenyi-Ladziansky, history of medicine, anatomy.

Július Ledényi was born on 19 November 1903 in Dolný Ďur near Levice (then Alsógyőröd, during the 1st Czechoslovak Republic renamed to Dolný Ďúrad; today a part of Veľký Ďur called Dolný Ďur). His father was a teacher – director of a small local roman-catholic village school.

Ledényi finished his secondary education at the State Reform Secondary School in Levice, where he passed a school-leaving examination on 19 June 1922. In the academic year 1922/23 he began to read medicine at Budapest University Faculty of Medicine. Here he met professors of anatomy Lenhossék and Kiss, who made a very strong impression on him. The interest of professor Kiss in the young gifted student probably became a momentous turning point in the direction of Ledényi's career as an anatomist. In the academic year 1924/25, Ledényi moved to Comenius University in Bratislava. In Bratislava, his interest in anatomy intensified. Professor Frank, then the Head of the Department of Anatomy, noticed this and admitted medical student Ledényi to his Department as an Assistant Lecturer – entrant in 1927. In 1929 Ledényi, still a medical student, published his first scientific paper (Ledényi, 1929). Ledényi graduated on 25 January 1930 and was awarded the degree of the Doctor of Medicine (MUDr.). After graduation he continued his career as Lecturer at the Department of Anatomy. At that time, after an untimely decease of Professor Frank, his successor Professor Frankenberger was appointed as a new Head of the Department.

During his work at the Department of Anatomy, MUDr. J. Ledényi had an opportunity to visit some Departments of Anatomy abroad and got acquainted with their activities and scientific problems which were dealt with there. As soon as one year after graduation, in 1931, he pursued a study stay at the

Professor von Eggeling's Institute in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). This visit was very important for his further professional and scientific development. At the Institute in Breslau he worked as a visiting Lecturer, and was fully involved in scientific and educational activities of the Institute. Professor von Eggeling entrusted him with lectures on anatomy of typical surgery operations for adepts of surgery. This work required a great effort and a demanding professional and language training. In spite of a huge workload, he enjoyed his work very much and long recalled his stay in Breslau.

Under the supervision of Professor von Eggeling, MUDr. J. Ledényi published three scientific papers in the renowned journal „Anatomischer Anzeiger“ in 1931 (Ledényi, 1931 a, b, c). At that time he gradually matured to become an independent scientific worker, who was able to precisely define his research problems and to solve them with a scientific accuracy.

After termination of his stay in Breslau he returned back to Bratislava. At that time, he was interested in problems of locomotion of man in relation to anatomical structures of a human body. He clearly realized the limitations of a simple descriptive anatomical approach and therefore he made a great effort to look for new ways. He understood anatomy as a dynamic discipline, which had to study interactions between form and function, follow their mutual interrelations and changes during development

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Fig. 1. MUDr. J. A. Ledényi. Picture taken in August, 1933.

of an individual. He also focused his interests on anthropology and comparative anatomy. However, his relationship to anthropology was not permanent.

On the basis of his habilitation thesis „Foramen transversarium of cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebra in man“ he was awarded *venia docendi* at Comenius University Faculty of Medicine in the field of normal and topographical anatomy on 22 January 1934. Though Ledényi was relatively young, Head of the Department of Anatomy, Professor Frankenger, esteemed him high and prepared him to become his successor. Associate Professor Ledényi really deserved the trust of Professor Frankenger. After habilitation, he even more intensified his scientific work. By publishing further scientific papers and by high lecturing activity he not only acquired a good professional reputation as an anatomist, but he also became a coordinator of development of the Slovak science in a broader context. He regularly attended the popular Monday session of the Association of Czechoslovak Physicians and almost always contributed to the presented theme by his bright factual remarks. His remarks were based on his broad background of rich knowledge, which enabled him to professionally discuss on lectures concerning paediatric, internal, surgical, orthopaedic and other clinical problems. Equally passionately, but at the same time factually he discussed on lectures concerning theoretical fields of medical science, of course, except for medical chemistry.

A very important deed of Associate Professor Ledényi was his contribution to establishing accepted anatomical nomenclature. In 1935, he published the book *Nomina anatomica* (Ledényi, 1935), where he introduced the Latin and Slovak terminology of anatomical and medical expressions (note that the problem of full and complete Slovak morphological terminology has not been satisfactorily solved even till now).

In that period he had an opportunity of a short study-leave to the Department of Anatomy at Warsaw University. This Department was then renowned also by embalming of corpses of outstanding personalities of public life, Polish nobility and other prominent persons. Ledényi was not very much attracted by embalming methods; this way of conservation was not pursued in Slovakia. By chance, during his stay at the Warsaw Department of Anatomy, the body of a distinguished Polish statesman, Marshal Pilsudsky was embalmed, and Ladziánsky had a chance of a practical insight into secrets of the modern way of embalming. After returning from Warsaw he did not have any opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge concerning embalming for a long time. Only late in 1938, when he was recovering in Vrátna valley, he was sought and found by public radio broadcasting and called out to Ružomberok. Here, together with Prof. MUDr. Konštantín Čársky and Prof. MUDr. František Šubík – Andrej Žarnov, he had to embalm the corpse of Andrej Hlinka (an outstanding Slovak politician). The way of embalming was quite simple: a formalin solution was injected into blood vessels of cadaver and a paste containing arsenic was rubbed into the skin. An immediate cosmetic effect of this way of embalming was excellent, however, there does not exist any information about a long-time effects.

In 1936, Professor Zdeněk Frankenger left the Department of Normal and Topographical Anatomy in order to return to the Department of Histology and Embryology. After his departure, there were no problems with filling the post of the Head of the Department of Anatomy: Associate Professor Ledényi was in all respects able to fill the vacant post.

After being appointed the Head of the Department of Normal and Topographical Anatomy, Ledényi was fully aware of the extent of his responsibilities. He solved the problem of the lack of study literature in a typical way: in years 1936–1939 he wrote and published a very successful three volumes of Dissection Exercises, which were used also as a lecture book of topographical anatomy for almost half a century (Ledényi, 1936, 1937, 1939).

In the period of 1936–1938, Ledényi devoted his activity almost fully to teaching and educating young Slovak generation of medics. Nevertheless, he remained faithful also to his scientific ambitions. Apart from the already mentioned Dissection Exercises, he published 7 other scientific papers, focused mainly on functional morphology.

At the end of the year 1938, the Faculty of Medicine entrusted Associate Professor Ledényi with further educational and organizational responsibilities. After departure of Professor Zdeněk Frankenger to Charles University in Prague, the Department of Histology and Embryology in Bratislava was left



Fig. 2. Relaxed atmosphere of a down-town Bratislava café. Professor MUDr. J. A. Ledényi (second from right, smoking, with moustache) and his wife, Alexandra Štekláčová.

without its head. Lecturers at this Department did not have the required formal qualification to fill the post of the Head of the Department, therefore the management of the Faculty entrusted Associate Professor Ledényi – at least temporarily – also with this responsibility. Ledényi was not enthusiastic about this decision, but there was no other immediate solution. Ledényi did not show any particular interest in microscopical anatomy. He nevertheless took this entrustment, but he had no intentions to digress from problems of normal gross and special functional anatomy.

Ledényi was appointed Adjunct Professor in 1938. Later, he was appointed as a regular Professor of Normal and Topographical Anatomy at the already renamed Slovak University as from 1 April 1939. For Ledényi it was not a signal to take a rest. It is admirable that in spite of his demanding workload of simultaneous management of two Departments, he had enough time, enthusiasm, will and interests to involve himself also in scientific work.

He had to pursue much of educational activities himself, because at the two Departments he did not have a required number of qualified assistants and collaborators – professors, associate professors, senior lecturers. His closest collaborator and later the first assistant of the Department of Anatomy was the young MUDr. Eugénia Štekláčová. Nevertheless, Ledényi was the only person with formal qualification who was allowed to read lectures; he also was responsible for practical classes and dissections (over 20 hours of lectures and practical training per week), for examinations of medical students at examina rigorosa and for administration of Departments. It was a lot of commitments and responsibilities, which could be managed only by a very efficient person.

Ledényi was interested also in the history of medicine from the point of view of a Slovak. From among old publications, he

was attracted by medical transactions of an American Slovak, who under the pseudonym Július Carmen published a number of books with such a content. Ledényi did not succeed in tracing down neither the identity of this man, nor his roots in Slovakia. Obviously, Július Carmen was a man with no university education, but Ledényi used to spoke with appreciation about his instructions on correct regime and prevention of illnesses.

As already mentioned, Ledényi was very active on the floor of the Association of Czechoslovak (later Slovak) Physicians in Bratislava. The result of this activity was that he was entrusted to become a responsible editor of the medical journal “Bratislavské lekárske listy” (Bratislava Medical Letters). The journal, founded in 1921, was published monthly by the Faculty of Medicine and it was (and still is) the oldest regular medical journal in Slovakia. Ledényi held the post of chief editor for two years (1940 and 1941), then he resigned because of his very demanding schedule.

On 7 June 1941 Ledényi married the sister of his first assistant, Alexandra Štekláčová, and shortly after wedding he changed his surname onto „Ladziansky“. Two months after the birth of their daughter Zuzana (born on 9 October 1942) his wife unexpectedly died (on 18 December 1942). Nobody anticipated that in a year's time, in 1943, also Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky, a 40-years-old dynamic man, full of strength and labour vitality, would be pulled out from the broad circle of his students, friends and colleagues by an untimely death. Towards the end of August 1943, he as a widower travelled to Tisovec, where he intended to marry Miss Tatiana Čípková, an English language teacher, on 21 August. Though subjectively he did not feel well in these days, he did not admit that he was ill. Persuaded by his friends, on the way to Tisovec, he let himself admit to the hospital in Banská Bystrica, where the senior consultant at the Surgery Department



Fig. 3. Professor MUDr. J. A. Ledényi with his sister-in-law MUDr. E. Štekláčová at the Department of Anatomy.

was MUDr. Daniel Petelen, his old friend. During his stay in the hospital he belittled his illness, joked and made fun of clinical physicians, saying that Nature is their best helper. In the evening of 28 August, in the best mood, full of vitality and optimism, he left for his room and went to bed. Next morning, on 29 August 1943, shortly after 7 a.m. he suddenly died. The cause of the death of a man of such a robust physical construction, who did not show any alarming symptoms of a severe illness, was a mystery. During hospitalization the exact diagnosis was not stated, therefore his sudden exit was inexplicable. The autopsy revealed the cause of death of a scarcely 40-years old professor: the death was caused by bleeding from a rupture of spleen and the illness was diagnosed as an ambulant typhoid fever. Typhus spleen ruptures certainly occurred very rare in our countries; therefore this case of death was analysed and described in the form of a case notice in "Bratislavské lekárske listy" journal.

With extraordinary large participation of mourning guests, Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky was buried on 1 September 1943 at the Martin cemetery in Bratislava next to his wife, who was his wife for scarcely two years. At the farewell at the Dean's Office, Professor MUDr. J. Fridrichovský parted with the deceased on behalf of the Faculty of Medicine. He appreciated the work of Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky and his extraordinary importance for Slovak science. MUDr. Milan Kratochvíl spoke on behalf of the staff of the Department of Anatomy and MUC. Gustáv Bárdoš delivered a speech on behalf of medical students. Prof. MUDr. Konštantín Čársky and Dr. A. Hirner

spoke over the open grave on behalf of the Health Department of the Ministry of Interior. In their mourning speeches, the speakers praised an extraordinary personality of Ledényi-Ladziansky, but the evaluation of his work and his scientific contribution to anatomy and to medicine in the broadest meaning was left for the next generations.

After the death of Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky, the management of the Department of Anatomy was taken over by his closest collaborator and sister-in-law, senior lecturer MUDr. Eugénia Štekláčová, who became later the Head of the Department until 1953.

The Slovak public immortalized the personality of Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky by two memories. The large Lecture Hall in the building of theoretical Departments of the Faculty of Medicine bears his name and recalls the activity of a man, who accomplished a great work of merit for the Slovak medicine. The second honour was rendered by giving his name to a street near the largest Faculty hospital in Bratislava, capital of Slovakia.

What kind of a person was Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky?

Professor Július Ledényi-Ladziansky was an extraordinary and peculiar personality. As concerns his appearance, he was an attractive and well-proportioned man. His health condition was excellent, and an illness was an unknown term for him. In an early childhood, however, he overcame an otitis complicated by a perforation of the eardrum, but it did not cause him any problems in practical life. Just occasionally at an uproarious party he inconspicuously leaned towards the person he talked to, in order to hear well. For his excellent physical condition he was duly conscripted to military service, but after some weeks he was discharged from the army by a super-arbitrary proceeding for the above mentioned perforation of the eardrum. With a Švejk's irony he recalled this period of his life; he was assigned to an office service, where he was occupied mainly by carrying furniture and cleaning office rooms.

Though he enjoyed sports, he anxiously avoided swimming. He had a bad experience with penetration of water through his perforated eardrum – it caused him a vertigo, followed by disorder of motor coordination. Perhaps this caused his aversion towards cerebellum as an organ, he hated it, and, as an anatomist, he never found a positive relation to it. He enjoyed lecturing about structure of any other organ, but in his lectures he usually avoided cerebellum.

His social behaviour frequently seemed rough, ironic, and perhaps even unworthy of his social position. He developed a theory, that people understand the speech in an individual way. A coachman, for instance, would interpret and understand a speech in a different way than an educated person, who considers himself/herself for a gentleman/lady. He also verified this theory by practical experiments, though it quite often put him into a position of a rough fellow. His method of verification lay in using unsuitable wording. For example, in a company of ladies he tried to use expressions appropriate to coachmen. Ladies did not understand or did not want to understand such a speech

at all, and claimed that Ledényi-Ladziansky was a lout. And conversely, he addressed coachmen by a fine speech of gentle ladies, provoking similar reactions. He could not bear hypocrisy and dissimulation, and he could not help a loud protesting against such behaviour.

He liked folk songs for their melodious sound and melancholic moodiness, but he also studied elements of simple folk philosophy expressed in the lyrics. Opera and symphonic music was perceived relatively indifferently by him, but he used to be sometimes fully absorbed by folk songs. His favourite song was “Zalet' sokol, biely vták” (Fly, falcon, a white bird), which could make him thoughtful and sentimental. He was not a regular theatre-goer, but sometimes he went to watch a performance at the Slovak National Theatre.

He perceived great contrasts between the so-called common sense and outgrowths of the civilization he lived in. He frequently reacted to these contrasts by his inimitable wit. His wit and his remarks were always original, arising immediately as a reaction to a concrete situation. Typically for him, he deliberately created situations, which frequently evoked a tension, when considered from the point of view of common social conventions.

He was socially a much engaged man, who was quickly drawing attention of any society. He could find a relationship to people with poor education as well as to highly educated intellectuals. Ledényi-Ladziansky liked the society and the society liked him. Almost every evening, after fulfilling his job obligations, he went to a café, where he met the broad circle of his friends and acquaintances. He frequently visited the café Štefánka, where in an environment full of noise and smoke he was writing his papers. He enjoyed visiting Bratislava wine bars, which at that time belonged to most attractive places in the town, where all the social, religious, national, political and economic differences disappeared by a glass of wine. He was never absent at social events organized by the University, at academic balls, medical student May festivals and other similar events.

The pace of his work was admirable. Even in time when nobody demanded from him any extraordinary performance, he from his own initiative intensified his work engagement. Though sporadically, he assigned a scientific work also to his collaborators. But the basic problems were usually solved by himself, and the scientific conclusions were usually fruits of his own abilities.

By his work he did not pursue personal aims and benefits. He realised and openly claimed that the Slovak nation, though small in number, has a satisfactory creative potential and abilities to compete with the most developed nations of the world. This personal conviction he expressed to his students by the words: “Great nations raise their sons, but sons of small nations have a sacred obligation to raise their own nation.” He set an example himself to prove this, and by his work he raised the level of scientific research, and through his subject also the level of the whole Slovak medicine.

Some people ridiculously reproached him for his – as if – Slovak nationalism, because he did not acknowledge the concept of the single Czechoslovak nation as formulated by political leaders during the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939). He never admitted that the Slovak nation should deliberately relinquish its self-determination and independence. His strong national consciousness led him to the decision of changing his surname from “Ledényi” (in fact a Hungarian name) to “Ladziansky” (sounds very Slovak) in 1941. In this connection, it is really paradoxical that earlier, when Ledényi was considered as a possible Head of the Department of Anatomy, some zealots accused him of Hungarian nationalism.

For his temperament, intense spiritual activity and broad scientific and social interests, Ledényi-Ladziansky can be declared a positive personality. Just for this, he sometimes met misunderstanding, even animosity from some people. As he was ready to react to a misunderstanding or to an attack in a violent and impetuous way, his enemies either avoided or flattered him, in order to prevent a possible collision.

His true friends knew him as a deeply emotional man, who was not ashamed for tears in his eyes. Nevertheless, his internal world was inaccessible, and only few people were able to overcome this barrier. He remains an unforgettable personality.

In this article, personal memories of some contemporaries and colleagues of Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky were used: MUDr. Ladislav Dohnány, Prof. MUDr. Rudolf Korec, DrSc., and MUDr. Igor E. Kutlík. My special thanks go to the daughter of Professor Ledényi-Ladziansky, RNDr. Zuzana Ladzianska, PhD.

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