



The teaching of anatomy in Montpellier University during VIII centuries (1220–2020)

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Abstract

Since 1220 in Montpellier the human cadaver dissection had been used for the teaching of anatomy. In the first time the anatomy was based on animal knowledge. Vesalius student in Montpellier then in Italy, written the first book on human anatomy. Among teachers some of them made discoveries such as Pecquet on cisterna chyli, Vieussens on brain and hearth. Wax anatomy was used for teaching and Laumonier and B. Delmas presented some very nice pieces. Progressively a lot of anatomical preparations were exposed in a conservatory with 2330 human cadavers' dissections obtained during a lot of examinations. Anatomy and pathology were developed by Delpech about growing of bones with laws. In 1953 two anatomist surgeons, Rapp and Couinaud, described the segmentation of the liver with using techniques of corrosion. In the conservatory 250 corrosions of the livers are exposed, this is certainly the most numerous in the world and it represents a huge basis for surgery and liver transplantation. Since 1900 the teaching of anatomy continued with blackboard lectures and Human cadavers dissections. Therefore, a new approach of anatomy with computer is going to be used in the future.

Keywords Anatomy · History · Montpellier · Museum · Patrimony · Century

Introduction

The teaching of anatomy deserves a special mention in the history of our School because it was in honor very early and allowed medicine to leave the dark voices of empiricism to become a rational art. Since the origins of the city in the tenth century, individuals, Jewish traders of Iberian origin or Christians of Salernitan formation, each in isolation, at home, "*in scholis*", agreed, against fees, to read to anyone the works of Hippocrates of which they had translations. It was not until August 17th, 1220 that, in the face of the abuses born of the absence of any regulation, Cardinal

Conrad, legate of pope Honorius III, enacted the first statutes of the grouping of masters and students, literally "*Universitas Medicorum*". In this document, which is state recognition and not creation, the clinical teaching was considered, and the text stated that it was external to the University: the students could choose such master they wanted to follow the lessons before, as soon as they returned to the locality they came from, where they introduced to medical practice. An indispensable clinical formation was required at the same time (Fig. 1).

The teaching of anatomy was of all the fundamental sciences the one that required the greatest ingenuity to face all the questions because of the interdicts with regard to dissections of cadavers. It suffered myths, superstitions, popular and religious beliefs that for millennia forbade dissection: "the human body is untouchable and sacred if the man at his death wants to resurrect or win the world that is promised him, he must keep an intact carnal envelope". Faced with this dictate, coming from the depths of time and maintained by religions, the doctor was obliged, to circumvent it, to take refuge in the animal dissection and to emit erroneous opinions, transmitted and repeated for centuries.

The history of teaching anatomy through eight centuries in Montpellier University is described in two successive

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Fig. 1 Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier in continuity with the cathedral, initially the teachers of the faculty were designated by the officials of the bishopric



periods: a first period (1220–1800), and a second period (1800–1953).

First period: 1220–1800

The beginning of Teaching Anatomy: In the Middle Age, it began with Ricard Senior (Richard Anglicus) and his *Micrologus*, and Petrus Hispanus, who edited an *Anathomia* and a treatise: "*Quaedam of partibus corporis humani, of coitu, honesta and mala muliere*". Henri de Mondeville (1260–1320) made in Montpellier the first dissection in France presumably unauthorized in 1315 inspired by the *Canon* of Avicenna and the "*techne de Galien*" (Fig. 2). He learned anatomy in Montpellier under the authority of

Guillaume de Salicet. In 1340 Guy de Chauliac was able to use the dissections in his teaching "*it is a challenge to want to heal the body, if we do not know the structure of the organs, their reports, and their topography*".

The difficulties of obtaining human cadavers brought the Duke of Anjou, governor of Languedoc, by order of October 10th, 1376: "*to oblige the officers of justice of the Languedoc to furnish every year the corpse of a tortured to the University of Medicine, in accordance with the article of the statutes of 1340*". By a letter Charles Le Mauvais, King of Navarre, confirmed to the medical school the privilege of obtaining annually from the royal officers of Montpellier the corpse of a tortured (Pamplona, June 11th 1377).

Fig. 2 Painting representing the course of the first anatomical dissection by Henri de Mondesville (1315)



On October 22nd 1401 and January 10th 1456, the medical school pronounced requisitions to have the body of a hanged man. The dissections were mandatory, at least from time to time, because it was necessary to find a victim and also that it is in the winter period, in summer it was not possible to preserve the human cadavers which were autopsied in a single time. Montpellier preceded in this field the University of Paris which will have similar privilege only in 1498.

In addition to theoretical teaching, public dissections were held with a certain ritual in 1526. Attendance was paying for anatomical demonstrations: 12 deniers per anatomy for students and 15 deniers for foreigners. The spectacle had the rare privilege of attracting in the sanctuary of Hippocrates, next to the doctors of profession, many laymen, men of the world, even churchmen, eager to learn the knowledge of the anatomy of the human body; and each to pay for the cost of the autopsy, paid the price of the place he occupied in the amphitheater.

The anatomy was in honor and taught especially by Rondelet (1507–1566), who was skillful in all the natural sciences and gave him a most fertile impulse (Fig. 2). He made demonstrations on the human body, which even the people of the world attended. His love for science went all the way to passion. He begged his friend and colleague,

Professor Fontanon, sick to be dissected after his death, and on his body discovered the bloated substance of the kidney; he studied in front of his students the common placenta of his two twins who died at birth, and even made a public lesson on the body of his son.

In his book "De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septimum" based on the human observation, André Vésale (1514–1564), so-called Vesalius, famous Professor of Padua (Italy), former student in Montpellier, gave him his nobility by affirming that the anatomy of the man could be constructed only from the minute dissection of his body and not from that of animals (Fig. 3).

The first chair of Anatomy and Botanic was created at the end of the sixteenth century, by two edicts of King Henry IV (August 1593) that completed the organization of surgical teaching at the University of Medicine: the four professorial chairs, or regencies, already existing, were completed by two creations, that of anatomy and plants (botanical) in 1593, and that of surgery. Richer de Belleval (1595–1623) was responsible for teaching anatomy during the winter and explaining plants, both foreign and domestic, during the spring and summer. He obtained from King Henri IVth the creation of the *Jardin des Plantes*, of which he was the first organizer.



Fig. 3 Vesalius during anatomy lesson

Creation of royal anatomical dissectors (1595)

In August 1595 the "Edict of Roy Henry IV appointed Cabrol (1529–1603) as the first Royal Demonstrator of Anatomy, with "the rights of Gloves and Drags of the graduates of the University". The practice of this anatomy by these demonstrators (royal anatomist, anatomical dissectors) obeyed a specific organization since the corpse were dissected into an anatomy amphitheater after the teacher had given a lecture. Because of the small number of available corpse, global dissections on all the regions were performed for using the bodies as much as possible. Although Pierre Richer de Belleval had performed his duties rather poorly, and despite the he had quarreled with his colleagues, he

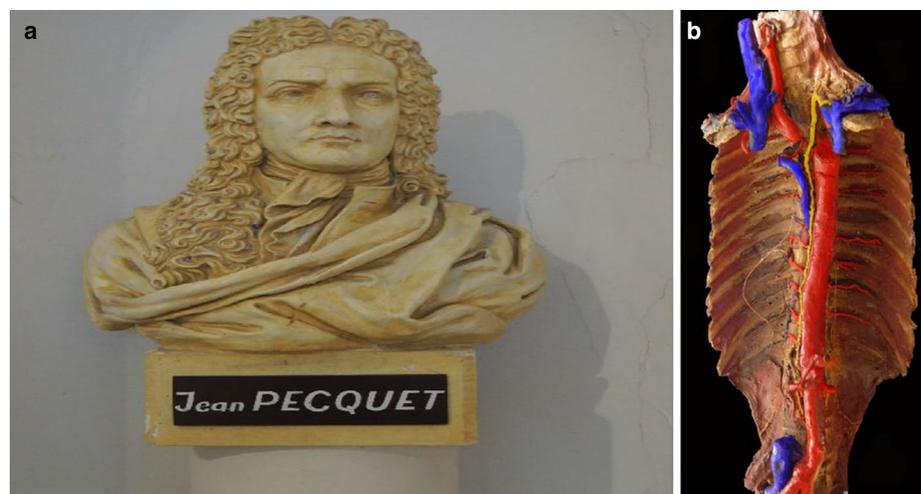
obtained from King Henry IV letters patent which enabled him to choose a successor: he yielded his office to Martin Richer de Belleval. After him the Professorship of Anatomy and Botany passed into a family that held it for almost a century: The Chicoyneau family, so-called the Chicoyneau dynasty (1664–1759).

Emergence of illustrious anatomists (1640–1742)

Gradually the teaching of anatomy became structured and men of quality emerged with famous works: J Pecquet, Chirac, R Vieussens.

Jean Pecquet (1622–1674) was born in 1622 in Dieppe (Normandy) and after classical studies at Dieppe and Rouen, where he knew Pascal (physicist), he came to Paris around 1642. He met François Fouquet, Bishop of Agde, brother of the Superintendent of Finances. He went to medical school where he dissected in 1647 and performed famous works on thoracic ducts (Fig. 4a, b). Chirac (1650–1732), professor of medicine in 1687, had done anatomy lessons with talent and left on the structure of the hair (1688) a small book very curious. Around 1684, Raymond Vieussens (1641–1716) dissected more than 500 C and published a magnificent treatise on the anatomy of the nervous system (Fig. 5a, b). After his medical studies in Montpellier, he became, in 1671, doctor of the Saint Eloi Hospital and taught anatomy. His name has remained attached to several parts of the encephalon. The "*Nevrographia universalis, hoc is, omnium humani corporis nervorum, simul ac cerebri medullae that spinalis descriptio anatomica*" is the capital work of Vieussens. He has published several works, among which the treatise "*On the vessels of the human body*" (1705), another "*On the structure of the heart and the causes of the natural movement of the heart*" and another "*on the structure of the ear*". In his work on the anatomy of the inner ear, he made a very precise description of all the elements

Fig. 4 **a** Jean Pecquet, student in Montpellier, highlighted a collecting tank for the lymphatic chyle. **b** Anatomic parts with dissection of the lymphatic duct with his cervical venous branching (1850 conservatory anatomy, Montpellier)



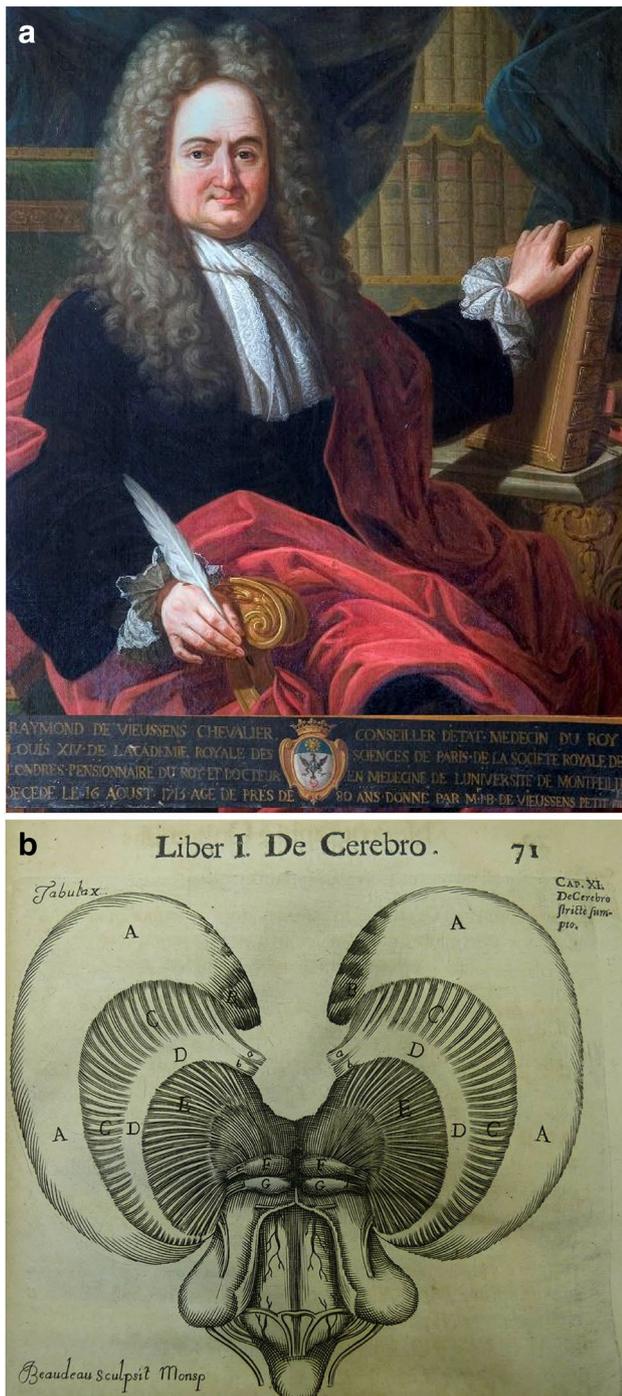


Fig. 5 a R. Vieussens; b Systematization of the brain on a series of 500 human dissections

of the tympanic cavity. It distinguished in the brain the white substance of the gray substance, described the oval center, the structures of the heart (ring of Vieussens), and the cerebral ventricles.

On August 18, 1792, after the French revolution, the Legislative Assembly suppressed "over the whole surface of the

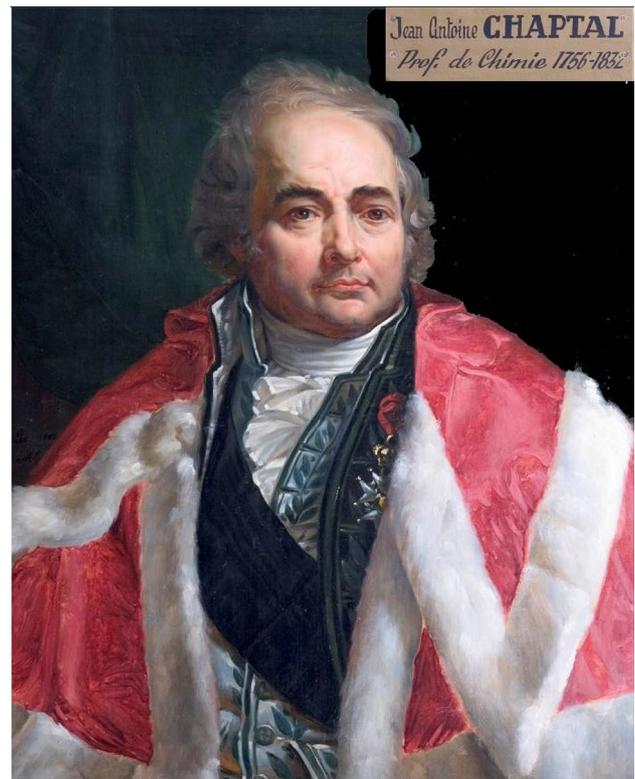


Fig. 6 J. Chaptal: Professor of Chemistry who was Minister of the Interior and benefactor of the medical school

Republic" the associations and corporations, including the two existing medical institutions in Montpellier. On December 14, 1794 (law of 14 Frimaire An V) the National Convention, noting that the armies of the Republic had incessant needs in doctors and surgeons on the battlefields, ordered the creation of three health schools (denominated "Schools of Medicine" in 1803 and "Faculties" in 1808) in Paris, Montpellier and Strasbourg.

Jean Antoine Chaptal (1750–1832) (Fig. 6) favored the establishment of this school in the former monastery of St. Benedict and St. Germain that had been requisitioned by the Convention at the Bishopric of Montpellier. He had bought, with the support of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), 50 anatomical pieces made in Florence by Felice Fontana (1730–1821), curator of the museum "la specola" on the palace of the Duke of Tuscany. These wax anatomical pieces are still stored in the conservatory.

Creation of the Professorship of Anatomy and Physiology (1794)

The anatomy which, from 1593 to 1792, had been associated with botany, changed from 1794 to be twinned with physiology. A full-fledged Professorship was assigned in 1824, after Lordat (1773–1870), who was a professor of

operative medicine since 1811 and hold the Professorship of Anatomy and Physiology, obtained to teach only physiology. On December 12th 1824, Joseph-Marie Dubrueil (1791–1852), a naval doctor, was appointed Professor of Anatomy in Montpellier and taught there for 29 years. During the first half of this century, anatomy was honored in the Faculty with Jacques-Mathieu Delpech (1777–1832), a famous surgeon who had been a particular professor of anatomy in Paris. During this period, surgeons and anatomists travelled a lot, and Delpech, edited “*law on growing bone*”, scoliosis, he could speak Italian and Spanish, visited Scarpa and translated in French his book about the aneurysms.

In 1825 Cruvelhier, an anatomy teacher in Montpellier, was appointed to the Professorship of operative medicine on the advice of Dupuytren and occupied it for 15 months.

In the reports of the medical school’s work on November 1st, 1874, Professor Boyer was offended by a certain assertion concerning anatomy: *“It has been repeated for 50 years that anatomy is very neglected among us, that we do not can learn it because of the lack of anatomical material, the subject of dissection. This reproach refuted every year by facts, by the successes of our students, who have become excellent anatomists, and first-rate surgeons, is banalized by men who ought to be convinced of their error. The average of the subjects delivered to the amphitheater is 95 per year, it is not luxury but it can be enough when it is used well and used well known means of conservation. All in all, we do not have better in Paris. We also seek to increase our resources by bringing prosperity to administrations that could come to our aid. The taste of anatomy is spreading here more and more.”*

On the death of Dubreuil, the Professorship was attributed to Vincent Paulet in 1888 who collaborated in the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Medical Sciences with 22 articles and wrote a remarkable treatise on topographic anatomy, with color atlas from the hands of his friend Sarrazin, physician-major of the Squadron of the Hundred Guards of the Emperor.

This last period must be considered as fundamental in the context of teaching, research of anatomy as well as the promotion of prestigious anatomists under the direction of Gilis Jean-Louis-Paul-Marie Antoine (1857–1929), received in the competition of aggregation on September 1st, 1886 in the section of anatomy. He taught at the Regional School of Fine Arts with which the laboratory was in constant relationship, and under his authority, 200 anatomical plates were made in the gouache painting by the students of this school after personal dissections. Nevertheless, his researches on the spinal cord (1895), his treatise on embryology published in 1887 and 1891, and his anatomy of the nervous and sympathetic centers (1927) marked his passage in this Professorship. He set up an organization of courses and practical work which continued until 1960.

Creation of the “Conservatory” (1794)

Article 6 of the decree, considering the importance of anatomy in the course of medical studies, created a “Conservatory” on 26 Frimaire year III (December 26th, 1794) including a “Cabinet of Anatomy, a series of instruments and surgical devices and a collection of natural medical history”. It was an incomparable work tool for a large number of medical students, eager to learn about their art, at a time when modern means of exploration of the human body did not exist. The management was entrusted to a curator charged with annually demonstrating the usual drugs and surgical instruments in two separate courses. What contributed the most to reinforce the teaching of the anatomy was the decision of the 4 Brumaire year VII (1798) of the School, which unanimously adopted that from the opening of the courses of the year VII (1798), “no pupil may be admitted to the final examinations that he has presented an anatomical piece natural or artificial, to be deposited at the Conservatory”.

Second period from 1800 to 1953: the golden age!

During the last seven centuries, the teaching of anatomy and dissections have formed the solid foundations that have definitely sealed the anatomy in our school. All the actions of the first period were without real channeling. Private initiatives both in education and innovation needed more rigorous codification and coaching. The cyclical necessities on the training of doctors had become obvious to all those responsible. This second period will be rich in decisions and achievements with the creation of a Conservatory of Anatomy, the practical school of Anatomy and Surgery and the Chair of Anatomy. For each entity, high-quality officials contributed to an exacerbated teaching explaining the many achievements. Thus, collections of normal and pathological anatomy were formed little by little, which were soon enriched by new gifts of greater importance. During this period, the 17th germinal year XII (April 17th, 1804), the school received from Laumonier (1749–1818) (from Rouen, Normandy) a first shipment of anatomical pieces modeled in wax. B Delmas (1778–1847) was sent to this city, to learn from this skillful master the art of modeling wax, become chief of anatomical work, he made of this substance, several preparations of the lymphatic system (Fig. 7).

EF. Bouisson (1813–1884) drew a very beautiful picture of the progress of anatomy in Montpellier (1836) and endow in 1868, the Faculty of an anatomical pavilion worthy of its reputation, and Alquié, a surgeon, recommend the study of the anatomy (1845–1850) (Fig. 8).

The success of the practical school was great and it did not depart throughout the nineteenth century. This practical teaching required that the school had appropriate and sufficiently enlightened premises. It is on the ground floor

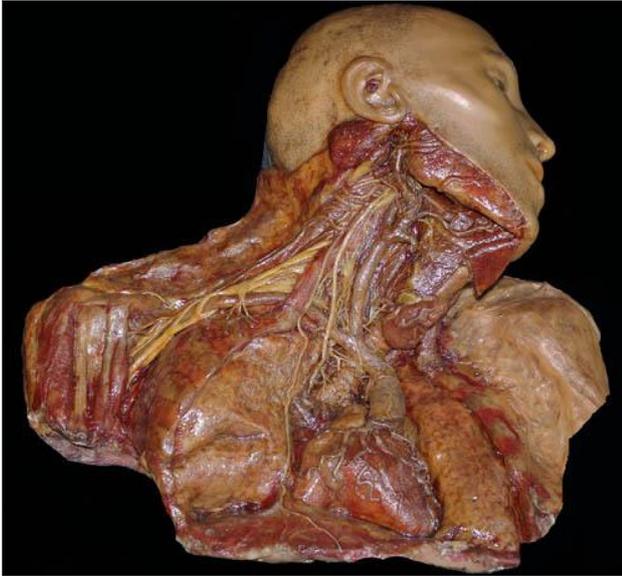


Fig. 7 Pieces in wax showing the cervicocephalic region, made by B. Delmas during his staying in Rouen with Laumonier

of the facade building that a first room was built which was formerly the sacristy of the cathedral. It had been separated by the construction of a wall. However, this sacristy commanded access to the cloister gallery, which had thus been incorporated into the field of anatomy. While the preparation of the lessons was done in the sacristy, the dissections of the students were arranged in the cloister, which triggered very strong protests from the chapter of the cathedral which will not cease to demand vehemently the restitution of all these premises, however, the impossibility of finding others within the confines of the school, will postpone any decision for a long time. Finally, the solution will be found by Bouisson who obtained from the city the necessary sums and undertook immediately after the construction of a magnificent anatomical room. This realization was born in 1868, that is to say, well after the construction of the new wing along this same boulevard and whose anatomical space will be an extension. With Bouisson all students (150–180) could now be admitted to anatomical dissections.

The prosectorate: 1794–1902

As soon as the school of health was established, it was decided to equip it with three prosectors (appointed for 3 years) instituted from 15 Ventose year III (August 15th, 1794). The post of Heads of works in anatomy was created on 2 fructidor year X (August 2nd, 1803) by the transformation of one of the two positions of prosectors. The heads of works will be important characters who will enter this place not only after a special competition but also after being received at the aggregation (associate professor position). This competition was open in front of the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier, on Tuesday, May 1st, 1832. The candidates had to be able to enroll in the secretariat of the faculty of medicine, until April 20th inclusively. To be admitted to the competition, it was not necessary to justify the doctor's degree. The competition was distributed in the following order:

1. Prepare in a given number of days and by a process that allows the preservation of one or more pieces of human anatomy, one or more pieces of comparative anatomy, part of which will be publicly demonstrated by the preparer, and the other by the competitor.
2. Prepare a fresh piece of human anatomy, which will be demonstrated by the preparer itself.
3. Prepare A cool piece of comparative anatomy, which will be demonstrated by a competitor.
4. Improvise in writing a question of general and pathological anatomy.
5. Perform one or more surgical operations and write the manual.

The assignments of the head of anatomical work consisted of demonstrations of anatomy, repetitions of the manual of surgical operations, to supervise the dissections of the students of the practical school, and to prepare anatomical parts for the conservatory of the faculty. The duration of the duties of the head of anatomical work was 6 years.



Fig. 8 General view of the conservatory of anatomy with its plan where are exposed 2330 anatomical pieces following competitive examination and collections of pathology for teaching students

Creation of the practical School of Anatomy and Surgery (1811)

The teaching of anatomy had to be essentially practical, but the difficulty of obtaining human cadavers prevented from considering dissections for all. This disadvantage was remedied by creating, on November 28th, 1811, a practical school of Anatomy and Surgery in which ten anatomy students and ten surgical students could have the privilege of being able to learn about dissections and the basics of surgery. Their presence was required 4 h a day, from 10 am to 2 pm, from November to April. These students were recruited by competition, ten per year, and their internship duration was 2 years.

Creation of anatomy aids (1811)

To make the practical school work, it was necessary to have a supervisory staff, the supervisor and the prosector were not enough. On November 19th, 1811, the Practical School created two anatomy assistants whose holders were appointed to the competition for a period of 2 years. These were students who were called to these places, and among them, many made a brilliant academic career.

It is in this context and under his impetus that among 70 students from competitions, five could stand out and train generations of teachers and students throughout France.

Mouret (1805–1928), by the quality of his dissection work on the skull, became essential and was at the origin of the individualization of the service of otorhinolaryngology.

Vallois Henri-Marie-Victor (1889–1981), son of Léon, professor at the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier, joined the Faculty of Sciences of Montpellier in 1905, and then became Aid of anatomy in 1909, prosector in 1914, and doctor in 1914. In Montpellier, he worked in the laboratory of the anatomy of Professor Paul Gilis and especially with Louis Vialleton. He became Professor of Anatomy, then went to Toulouse then Paris. His works concerned the knee joint (medical thesis, 1914), then dorso-vertebral muscles or episomes (science thesis, 1922), and compared anatomy with functional aspects of the scapula in its relationship with locomotion in primates and humans (1926).

Jean Delmas (1882–1966) was a full professor of anatomy in 1927, replacing Paul Gilis. He is the author of many works of anatomy, most of them large volumes written, for many, with his associate professor Georges Laux or with his nephew André Delmas. The whole anatomy has been his field of observation as well as embryology, but he has been distinguished above all by his research on the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. He also wanted to pay a warm tribute to his colleague and friend Henri Rouvière, doctor and associate professor in Montpellier before going to the Professorship of Anatomy in Paris.

Henri Rouvière (1876–1952) entered the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier as a student at 18 years old (1894). On May 4th, 1896, at the age of 20, he presented the Anatomy Aid Contest with 5 competitors. He had to prepare 10 dissections of the "upper maxillary nerve" to be deposited at the conservatory. Extemporaneous dissection concerned the "radial nerve in the forearm and hand". The theoretical presentation with drawing on the blackboard had as its theme the "abdominal portal system". Despite the quality of his dissections he was not retained. Far from being discouraged, he postulated May 24, 1898 (22 years) for being aid in anatomy and prepared anatomical pieces on the "joints of the hand and foot" with several pieces on the ligaments and synovial wrist. The dissection test focused on the "carotid region" and the theoretical presentation on "the maxillary bone". The result was favorable and he ranked first. On April 21st, 1902 (26 years old) he entered the contest of prosector. The pieces to be prepared had for theme the "pericardium (human and comparative anatomy)" including one on the pericardium of the dolphin supplemented by a dissection of the sympathetic cardiac nerves. The oral descriptive anatomy test, prepared without any document, focused on the "optic nerve origin and central pathways". Extemporaneous dissection on the "extra-pelvic crural and obturator nerves" was followed by a topographic anatomy presentation on "perivesical fasciae". At the end, he was proposed as prosector. Despite his anatomical knowledge, he had an attraction towards surgery and it was the justification on May 1, 1911 at the assistance contest of Anatomy and Operative Medicine. For the first test, the pieces to be preserved were in anatomy "tracheo-bronchial tree" and in operative medicine "cranio-vertebral topography". The second didactic test in anatomy was on "Palatine bone" with chalkboard drawing and operative medicine on "indication and technique of pericardial puncture". The third practical test included "ulnar ligation to the lower third of the forearm" and "astragalectomy". At the end, he was promoted "*Aide de médecine opératoire*". The course of his career was prolifically surgical during the 1914–1918 in the cares of the wounded soldiers. In Paris from 1916 or after competition he was appointed Associate Professor as successor to Professor Nicolas. From his arrival in Paris, his anatomical knowledge and his practice of dissections acquired in Montpellier allowed him to publish his "*Traité d'Anatomie*" in three volumes (Masson Editions) in 1920. In the foreword, he specified that his work was the experience of his personal dissections and was distinguished from other works published at the same time. Professor André Delmas, a former student of the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier who succeeded him, continued his work by highlighting the museum "Orfila, H. Rouvière, A. Delmas", in Paris University, and updated the "Book on Anatomy, H. Rouvière-A. Delmas".

Advances in surgical and digital technology have benefited from the fundamental works carried out in France in the 1950s by two anatomist surgeons PE. Rapp (1930–2010) in Montpellier with 134 livers, and Cl. Couinaud (1922–2008) in Paris with 110 livers using the same method of corrosion. All these original anatomical pieces are on display at the Faculty Conservatory and represent the most important collection in the world. Before the advent of numerical methods with vascular injection *in vivo*, vascular corrosion castings represented the best method for the study of vascular systematization, Rapp used three "vinylchloride-acetate resins" in the form of a white powder. The dissolution of these resins in acetone was complete in a few hours. The results of the analysis of the vascularization of the liver by Rapp are of a remarkable precision combining the global morphology, the variations and the intrinsic vascular segmentations oriented towards the techniques of hepatectomies. The muscels obtained showed that the distribution of the Glisson's pedicle, portal vein, hepatic artery and bile duct divides the liver into a number of independent territories, lobes and segments with well-individualized pedicles, drained by vessels that flow into the main hepatic veins located in the planes separating the main lobes. Rapp provided informations on the systematization of the spigelian hepatic veins on 134 casts (Figs. 9, 10).

Thereafter the teaching of anatomy was provided by Pierre Rabischong, Jean Bossy, Robert Paleirac.



Fig. 10 Piece of corrosion of the liver by Couinaud (Paris) who contributed in 1953 to the description of the segmentation used for surgery in the world (Montpellier Museum)

Conclusion

The retrospective on the teaching of anatomy in Montpellier has shown the pedagogical requirements and the



Fig. 9 Pieces of corrosion of the liver by Rapp (Montpellier) who contributed in 1953 to the description of the segmentation. The number of anatomical pieces grouped together by 250 with those of Couinaud represents the largest worldwide collection on this subject

interest shown to this fundamental discipline by all university officials in training in the anatomy of doctors. For the accession to the university career in anatomy, the tradition of the ancients continues with oral pedagogical tests, blackboard lectures and extemporaneous dissection. Anatomy is a living science that delivers its secrets only through dissection coupled with observation. The Conservatory of Anatomy played a major role in the history of the school in the nineteenth century. A challenge is addressed to future generations to ensure that this teaching of the anatomy of the living man with all its mysteries is as effective.

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