

In honour of Wilhelm Doerr

On the occasion of his 70th birthday



On 25 August 1984 Wilhelm Doerr – em. o.ö. professor for general pathology and pathological anatomy and former head of the pathological institute of the University of Heidelberg – will be 70 years old.

The editors and the publisher would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the scientific merits and achievements of this many-sided personality. His intellectual strength and his great depth of knowledge have played a major role in the development of the journal.

Looking back over the work of Wilhelm Doerr one discovers that his two very first articles appeared in *Virchows Archiv* in 1938; he was 24 years old at the time and had just completed his inaugural dissertation, which, taking two malformed hearts as an example, provided a contribution to Spitzer's phylogenetic theory on heart development. This dissertation was published in Volume 301 [1]. In the same year, a further work was to appear, this time on the transposition of the great arteries [2]. In 1943, Wilhelm Doerr presented a thesis (published in Volume 310 [3]), which proved to be the climax of this stage of development. A masterly and comprehensive analysis of deformations of the human heart, this work represents an early example of Wilhelm Doerr's inimitable style, which is characterized by two outstanding features: a conciseness of presentation, founded on a broad classical education and a wealth of general and cultural knowledge in the Renaissance sense, in combination with the extravagance of a Baroque form. Wilhelm Doerr is genial in his formulation and a brilliant orator. To read his articles or listen to his lectures is always an aesthetic treat, for they are a veritable mine of profound insight into a wide range of complex problems.

By the time he became editor of *Virchows Archiv* in 1966, Wilhelm Doerr had published numerous other articles in the journal [4–11] on a variety of pathological subjects. When it was decided in 1968 that the journal should in future appear in two separate parts, Wilhelm Doerr became Managing Editor of *Virchows Archiv A* together with Erwin Uehlinger. From the latter's death in 1980 to the present day, he has performed this task with great discretion, tireless devotion and admirable resoluteness. In an extensive foreword to Volume 400, he outlined the further development of the journal [20].

On reviewing the articles by Wilhelm Doerr that have appeared in *Virchows Archiv* since he became Managing Editor in 1968, one is impressed by the variety of topics, the force of expression and critical analysis.

Even before the age of computing and electronic data processing Wilhelm Doerr was concerning himself with the important role of the autopsy protocol in the solution of problems concerning modern research into illness and indeed suggested new forms of plain text analysis [12].

Wilhelm Doerr's editorial on the pathogenesis of cardiac infarction appeared in 1977 [14]. In 10 guiding principles – comparable with the doctrines of Martin Luther – he gives a precise summary of both classical findings and questions on research into infarction that remain to be answered. In a fascinating manner, this article combines historical data with the then current results of basic research, demonstrating not only the extent of his personal experience but also his wide knowledge of the literature. The “small print” is just as important for an understanding of the problem dealt with in this article as the guiding principles with which it begins.

In 1978, Wilhelm Doerr wrote about the fundamental questions of arteriosclerosis [16], a subject in which he has had a life-long interest (e.g. his monograph on the "perfusion theory of arteriosclerosis" in 1963, and his paper on the "pathways of arteriosclerosis" in 1964). It is always fascinating to observe how Wilhelm Doerr vividly describes different complex problems and how he notes for the future new principles of nosological classification. This is especially true of the key role of vascular endothelium.

Volume 383, which appeared in 1979, contains Wilhelm Doerr's article on the concept of homology and its relation to pathological anatomy [18]. Covering a wide range from Plato's theory of ideas, to Goethe's works on "typology" and the "gestalt philosophy" of Christian von Ehrenfels, he vividly establishes the criteria of homology, explains the concept with the aid of numerous examples, and demonstrates the value of homology for the classification of diseases. The assimilation of humanistic knowledge into pathology has repeatedly given Wilhelm Doerr fresh motivation and represents a pillar in his total concept of "theoretical pathology".

A further problem, which has its roots in the philosophy of Aristoteles, is the concept of heterochronia, particularly with respect to general pathology. Wilhelm Doerr's article which appeared in 1983 in Volume 401 [21] contains a wealth of knowledge and acts as an incentive to those interested in this field. It analyses closely the development and differentiation of different organ systems, taking the heart as an example.

Heterochronia within the cardiac muscle occurs as the result of the organic linkage of phylogenetically old and young parts of the heart and is a fundamental reason for variations in pathological changes in cardiac infarction or dysrhythmia. In a broad sense, these considerations form the basis of "anthropological pathomorphology".

For many years, "theoretical pathology" and its relation to pathological anatomy has been a topic close to Wilhelm Doerr's heart. An up-to-date report on this subject is given in an editorial that appeared in Volume 403 at the end of April 1984. Under the title "Gestalt theory and morbid anatomy", he summarizes in brilliant fashion the ideas, views and knowledge necessary for a perceptive interpretation of the concept of "gestalt theory" in all its profundity.

Theoretical pathology has nothing to do with "natural philosophy" but rather depends on principles of "gestalt philosophy" for the recognition and identification of morbid processes. According to the Ehrenfels criteria, "space gestalt", "time gestalt", "tone gestalt" and "sensation gestalt" can be distinguished from each other. The principles of gestalt theory find methodological application in several areas of pathological anatomy. Examples such as homology, specific inflammations, pathomorphosis and other disease phenomena are cited, even pathological-anatomical diagnosis, including the laws of mathematical logic. In the "gestalt circle" the examination of facts and of "substance" in the philosophical sense are united. "All lawfulness and order originates from a principle of the mind. The visible manifestation of this principle is the innermost nature of the gestalten". The work of Wilhelm Doerr must be seen against this background.

In addition to his works on scientific theory and those of an epistemological nature, Wilhelm Doerr has repeatedly seized the opportunity on special occasions to write about the history and development of pathology: for example, his article to mark the 100th birthday of Robert Rössle [13]; his thoughts on the fundamental aspects of pathology on the 100th anniversary of the death of Rokitansky [15], which included a comparative analysis of the life-works of Cruveilhier, Rokitansky and Virchow; and his warm-hearted, personal tribute on the 80th birthday of Erwin Uehlinger [17].

Erwin Uehlinger, the great nestor of European pathology and the oldest member to serve on the editorial board of *Virchows Archiv*, died only a few months after his 80th birthday. The obituary written by Wilhelm Doerr [19] is a reflection of their close relationship and an expression of his sorrow over the gap left by the death of Erwin Uehlinger.

To mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Rokitansky, Wilhelm Doerr wrote: “We now remember Rokitansky. He never published in our archive. However, the fact that we are now devoting our attention to him is a matter of intellectual ‘justice’. “From this point of view, it is more than fitting and “just” that we should devote our attention to Wilhelm Doerr on the occasion of his 70th birthday, for as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, he has published a major part of his scientific works in *Virchows Archiv*, repeatedly expressing his thoughts on fundamental questions of general and systemic pathology. Moreover, as Managing Editor he has had a considerable influence on the standing of the journal as well as on its direction. He has only been able to accomplish these immense tasks because he possesses certain qualities that are rarely found in combination in any one individual: originality and clarity of thought, the ability to synthesize, tireless dedication in everyday activities and, perhaps most important, good health. May Wilhelm Doerr retain these attributes for many years to come – for his own well-being as well as that of *Virchows Archiv*.

Works by Wilhelm Doerr that have appeared in *Virchows Archiv*

1. Zwei weitere Fälle von Herzmißbildungen. Ein Beitrag zu Spitzers phylogenetischer Theorie (zugleich Inaugural-Dissertation). 301:668 (1938)
2. Zur Transposition der Herzschlagadern. Ein kritischer Beitrag zur Lehre der Transpositionen. 303:168 (1938)
3. Über Mißbildungen des menschlichen Herzens mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Bulbus und Trunkus. 310:304 (1943)
4. Pathologische Anatomie der Tularämie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung primärer Lungenbefunde (M. Nordmann und W. Doerr). 303:66 (1944)
5. Über Frostschutzvergiftungen. 313:137 (1944)
6. Über das Myxödemherz. Erarbeitung der basophilen Degenerate (W. Doerr und K. Holl-dack). 315:653 (1948)
7. Alloxanwirkung bei Fischen. 318:175 (1950)
8. Indikatoruntersuchungen an der Niere mit Triphenyltetrazoliumchlorid (nebst Bemerkungen zum Problem der sogenannten akuten Nephrose). 321:537 (1952)
9. Pneumonokoniose durch Zementstaub. 322:537 (1952)
10. Pneumonokoniose durch Getreidestaub. 324:263 (1953)
11. Über die Ringleistenstenose des Aortenconus. 332:101 (1959)

12. A standardized autopsy-protocol. Problems and solutions (A. Brust, W. Doerr, W.-W. Höpker und K. Kayser). 364:1 (1974)
13. Zum 100. Geburtstag Robert Rössles. 371:1 (1976)
14. The pathogenesis of cardiac infarction. A few comments on some unanswered questions. 373:177 (1977)
15. Jean Cruveilhier, Carl v. Rokitsky, Rudolf Virchow. Fundamente der Pathologie. 378:1 (1978)
16. Arteriosclerosis without end. Principles of pathogenesis and an attempt at a nosologic classification. 380:91 (1978)
17. Zum 80. Geburtstag Erwin Uehlingers (W. Doerr und H. Götze). 383:1 (1979)
18. Homologiebegriff und pathologische Anatomie. 383:5 (1979)
19. In memoriam Erwin Uehlinger (W. Doerr, H. Götze und C. Hedinger). 388:245 (1980)
20. Geleitwort zum 400. Bande. Preface to the 400th volume. 400:1 (1983)
21. Heterochronia and general pathology illustrated by the example of the human heart. 401:137 (1983)
22. Gestalt theory and morbid anatomy. 403:103 (1984)

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