

# History of Diagnostics in Dermatovenereology on Medical Faculty in Prague

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the history of diagnostics in dermatovenereology on Medical Faculty in Prague from 1875 to 1910. Medical Reports of General Hospital in Prague from those years were used as the source of data. Three dermatologic and venereal diagnoses from years 1875, 1881, 1885, 1890, 1895, 1899, 1906 and 1910 were used for a statistic comparison.

The article also contains short description of institutional background of dermatovenereology in Prague during this period.

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## Introduction

Diagnosis is an identification of the disease, a process of the patient examination. It is a key for successful patient treatment. In this paper I try to deal with dermatological and venereal diagnoses based on the series of Artzlicher Bericht since 1875 to 1910.

My paper also offers an initial insight to mutual relations between institutional and epidemiological changes in the dermatovenerology in Prague during the given period.

## Material and Methods

For statistic comparison I have used data related to three dermatological and venereal diagnoses: scabies, erysipelas, and syphilis. I have chosen scabies as a parasitic disease, erysipelas as a bacterial skin disease, and syphilis represents a venereal disease. Furthermore I have separately compared data for urethritis, which I consider strongly related to gender.

As source of data I have used contemporary medical reports called Artzlicher Bericht des k. k. allgemeinen Krankenhauses zu Prag from years 1875, 1881, 1885, 1890, 1895, 1899, 1906 and 1910 [1–8].

The time-span is given by published medical records. Hence the fact that the records were issued erratically affects slightly irregular distribution of research probes. The Berichte were not published on 1880 and 1900, therefore I have substituted them with nearest available resource. I use historical method of probe to otherwise extensive (and in this case incomplete) set of data. Although the initial set-up of resources is far from ideal for purposes of medical (not to mention statistical) analysis, it is still the best possible way to record long term development (called *longe duree* in French historiography).

In the first stage I counted the distribution of each diagnosis on Dermatovenerological clinic on Charles University in years 1875 and 1881. After Charles University was split to Czech and German part in 1883 I compared the frequency of distribution of these diagnoses on both newly created clinics in years 1885, 1890, 1895, 1899, 1906 and 1910. This approach allows me to follow two aims: frequency of diseases before and after the division of the university and to compare situation in language diverse ambient of German and Czech clinic. Based on available data I also take in consideration the gender differences.

## Results

The development of dermatological institutions in Prague is a bit difficult to describe. Certain pieces of information are presently unknown. However in the mid 70's there were two dermatovenerological clinics. The 1<sup>st</sup> Clinic of dermatology and syphilis led by Wilhelm Petters (1826–1875) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Clinic of dermatological diseases and syphilis with chairman Prof. Dr. Philipp Joseph Pick. Petters' clinic was disestablished shortly after his death in the year 1875 and hence

the only institution with uninterrupted continuity was that of Prof. Pick. Albeit the question 'from when actually this clinic existed' is difficult to answer. In the list of teachers of Charles University from school year 1872/1873 Ph. J. Pick is only a docent and chief of "Dermatological policlinic" which was probably the immediate predecessor of the clinic.

Pick contributed to dermatovenerology by discovering and describing dermatological disease erytromelie – acrodermatitis chronica atrophicans. He became a co-founder of *Vierteljahrschrift für Dermatologie und Syphilis* (1869) and German dermatological school (1889). He was a leader of Viennese Dermatological School and of the review *Vierteljahrschrift für Praktische Heilkunde*.

In the 1883 Prague University was divided into Czech and German section. As a result of this two separate clinics – Czech and German – were constituted. The chairman of the Czech dermatovenerological clinic was Prof. Dr. Vítězslav Janovský, the head of the German dermatovenerological clinic was again

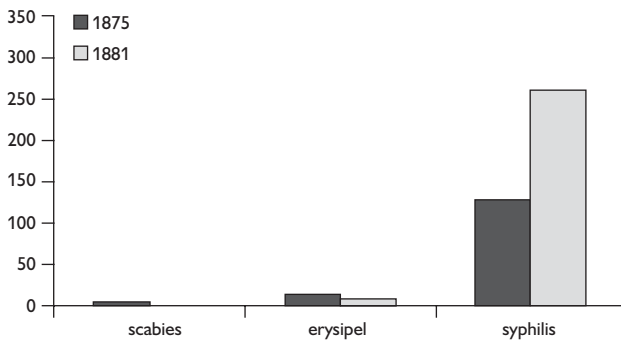


Figure 1 – Scabies, erysipelas, and syphilis before division of the university.

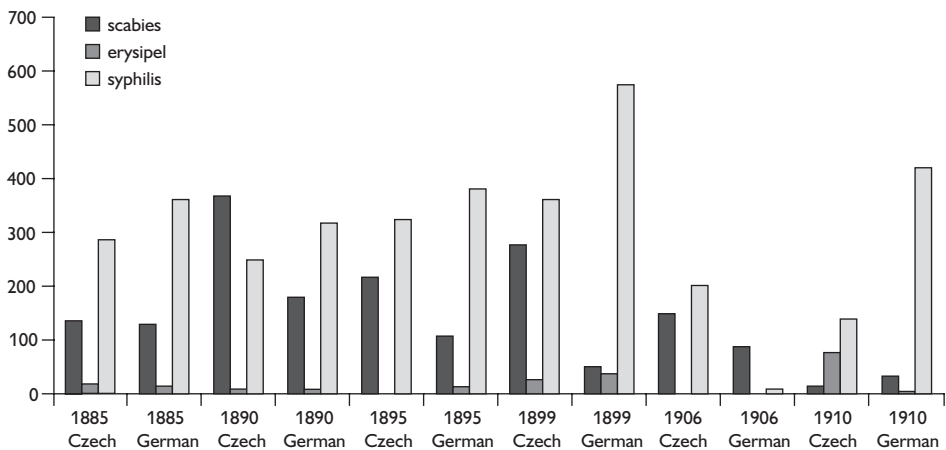


Figure 2 – 1885–1910 scabies, erysipelas, and syphilis on the Czech and German clinic.

Prof. Pick and later since 1906 Prof. Dr. Karl Kreibich. Prof. Dr. Vítězslav Janovský was the founder of the first Dermatovenerological Clinic, one of the first authors of Czech medical dermatological literature and author of the first Czech school book of venereal diseases (1911–1920). He described new disease: Acanthosis nigricans and became the author of many texts about history of medicine. He stayed the chairman in years 1890, 1895, 1899 1906 and 1910 [9, 10].

Prof. Dr. Karl Kreibich was author of about 200 publications, for example: Textbook of Skin Diseases, Skin Tumors, Eczema and Dermatitis, etc. He was the member of Medical association in Vienna, President of Czech Dermatological Association. He had friendly contacts with Czech dermatologist Prof. Janovský and Doc. Šamberger. His hobbies were music and theatre; he was the author of 2 theatre dramas [9, 10].

The institutional development can be compared with the available data from “Berichte”. I focus on two main problems: Firstly I analyze an incidence

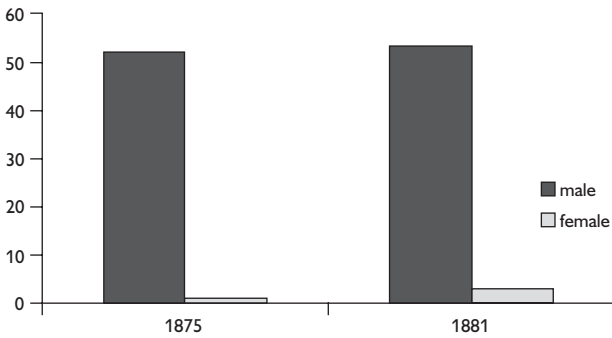


Figure 3 – Urethritis 1875 and 1881 (before the division).

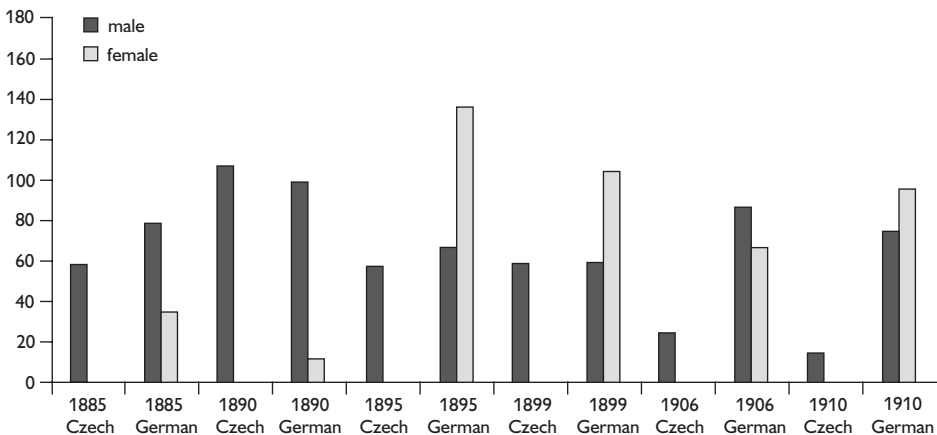


Figure 4 – Urethritis 1885–1910 (comparison of Czech and German clinic).

of scabies, erysipelas, and syphilis. During the first era (1875–1881) before the division of the Charles-Ferdinand University the incidence of the three illnesses does not represent anything unexpected (Figure 1). Nevertheless in comparison with following years the incidence of scabies is very low (actually zero in 1881). After the division we can see numbers as high as 555 cases (1890) on both clinics together (i.e. 375 the Czech and 180 the German clinic, Figure 2). Another interesting trend related to scabies can be observed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when scabies slowly withdraws from the statistic.

Later on after the division the data offer certain interesting differences between the Czech and the German clinic (Figure 2). Namely the difference of amount of scabies between the Czech and the German clinic is striking. The number of scabies diagnoses in the Czech clinic is almost six times greater than in its German counterpart (282 patients on the Czech clinic; 48 on the German one).

A very impressive difference can be also seen in case of syphilis. The incidence syphilis is continuously higher in the German clinic. This could be observed especially in 1906 when there were only four patients on Czech side and 205 on the German side. It is however important to realize that this is not a difference between nationally Czech and German patients but between two clinics and perhaps two different diagnostic procedures.

Secondly I compare frequency of urethritis in men and women (Figures 3 and 4). My initial presupposition was that this disease is very easy to diagnose in male patients and rather difficult to diagnose in female ones. Correspondingly there should be continuously greater number of men with this diagnosis. This is true but only in the case of Czech clinic. The German one offers rather different view. In 1895, 1899, and 1910 the amount of female patients is surprisingly higher than that of males.

## Conclusion

The data available for years 1875–1910 suggest that the institutional development of the dermatological facilities in Prague affected the diagnostic process. Apart from simple rise of numbers of patients, two points are especially striking:

- 1) The gender related incidence of urethritis which turns unexpectedly “in favor” of female patients in German clinic.
- 2) The differences in scabies and syphilis between the Czech and the German clinic.

It is important to remember that there was not a difference between patients; they were actually admitted strictly on basis of coincidence both Czechs and Germans into both clinics. The rule was politically given and it had nothing to do with individual preferences of patients of physicians.

The pathogen of syphilis – *Treponema pallidum* – was discovered in the very year when the difference between number of Czech and German diagnoses is the greatest (1906). But the treatment using Salvarsan drug was commercially available not until 1910.

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