
History of Contemporary Medicine in Iran

Professor Joseph Tomasch, the Founder of the Anatomy Department of Shiraz Medical School

Mohammad-Hossein Azizi MD*, Ghanbar-Ali Raees-Jalali MD**,
Seyed-Mohammad-Reza Tavakoli MD***



Professor J. Tomasch.

Abstract

Shiraz Faculty of Medicine was officially inaugurated in 1952. In 1958, an eminent Austrian anatomist Professor Joseph Tomasch joined Shiraz Medical School. Professor Tomasch was a great teacher and an active researcher. He published about 40 original papers mainly on neuroanatomy in some reputable international journals. Presented here is a brief account of his fruitful academic efforts in Iran.

Historically the first modern higher educational institution in Iran, known as *Dar al-Fonun* (House of Techniques), was founded in 1851. Among the teachers in *Dar al-Fonun*, there was an Austrian physician Dr. Jacob Eduard Polak (1818 – 1891) who came to Tehran on November 24, 1851. He was appointed as a teacher of medicine and surgery at *Dar al-Fonun's* Medical Department. He spent nine years in Iran and learned Persian. Dr. Polak

was the author of the first modern anatomy textbook in Iran, which was translated into Persian and published at *Dar al-Fonun Press* in 1852.¹

Over a century later, in 1958, another Austrian medical teacher, Professor Joseph Tomasch, the former professor of anatomy in Austria, Switzerland, Canada, and the USA joined the Faculty of Medicine at Shiraz University in Fars Province, south of Iran. He founded the department of anatomy and was its first head. He taught human anatomy, histology and embryology to Shiraz medical and dentistry students for over two decades.

Shiraz Faculty of Medicine was officially inaugurated in 1952.² It replaced the former "*Medical Auxiliary Training School*" (*Amouzeshgah-e A'li Behdari Shiraz*) that had been founded in 1946. At that school, anatomy was taught to the first-year students and the only associate professor of anatomy was *Dr. Abolghassem Sehhat* (b.1918), a graduate of Tehran Medical School. In addition, *Dr. Mohammad-Taghi Mir* (1913 – 1996) and *Dr. Mehdi Saifi* (b.1915), associate professors of surgery and obstetrics and gynecology, respectively, were lecturers in anatomy.^{3,4}

Six years after the foundation of Shiraz Medical School, in 1958, Professor Joseph Tomasch joined Shiraz Medical School.

Professor Joseph Tomasch was born in Vienna, Austria in 1920. After completing high school in 1939, he enrolled at the Vienna Medical School and received his MD degree in 1946. Then, he studied anatomy and graduated in 1952. Since 1946, he worked initially at Vienna Medical School for five years, then as a professor of anatomy in Basel, Switzerland for one year and subsequently he worked for seven years in Ottawa, Canada and finally for one year in Seattle in the USA. Thereafter, in 1958, he was employed as the

Authors' affiliations: *ENT Private Clinic, Tehran, Iran, **Department of Internal Medicine, Nemazee Hospital, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, ***ENT Clinic, Milad Hospital, Tehran, Iran.

Corresponding author and reprints: Mohammad-Hossein Azizi MD, Second Floor, No. 6, Amir Ebrahimi St., Boostane 2, Pasdaran Ave., Tehran, Iran.

Telefax: +98-212-253-4338, E-mail: f_azizi2000@yahoo.com.

Accepted for publication: 15 November 2006

professor of anatomy of Shiraz Medical School.

The late Dr. Zabihollah Ghorban (1903 – 2006), the founder and the first Dean of Shiraz School of Medicine, has written in his memories about the employment of Professor Tomasch. He has written that: “Dr. J. Tomasch, while in Seattle in the USA, saw our advertisement in the *British Medical Journal* for a position in our anatomy department. He wrote to me of his interest and I agreed to engage him. So, he and his wife came to Shiraz and our long, happy, and fruitful association continued until 1979.”⁴ According to Dr. Ghorban: “Dr. Tomasch, together with Dr. A. Mehrabian as instructor, built up the department of anatomy and histology, where he then became the chairman”. Dr. Ghorban added: “I bought an electron microscope in Germany and he set it up and put it to work, much enhancing the course of study”.⁵ Figure 1 shows that electron microscope.

In the academic year of 1960 – 1961, the academic staff of the department of anatomy and histology of Shiraz School of Medicine were: Dr. Tomasch, Chairman, -Dr. Etemadi (Figure 2), Dr. Sadeghi, Dr. Fatehi, Dr. Ebnesajjad, Dr. Radmanesh (Figure 2).⁵

In the curriculum of Shiraz Medical School in the same academic year, the topics of anatomy including histology, embryology and neuroanatomy were offered the first year medical students as a 32-week course, totalling 768 hours of their teaching.⁵

Dr. Tomasch spent more than two decades in Shiraz and according to Dr. Ghorban “Dr. Tomasch and his wife found life agreeable in



Figure 1. The first electron microscope at the Department of Anatomy in Shiraz Medical School. Professor Tomasch set it up for performing his original research.



Figure 2. From right to left Dr. A. A. Etemadi, Professor J. Tomasch and his wife, and Dr. Radmanedh. Date unknown.

Shiraz.”⁵ Professor Tomasch’s wife was highly interested in painting. She painted some interesting views of Shiraz and donated them to the Vienna museum.

The main area of Professor Tomasch’s studies was the nervous system including the cranial nerves. He attended several international scientific meetings in Mexico (1980), South Africa (1973), Russia (1970), Canada (1954, 1958), England (1950, 1968), France (1954), and the USA (1954, 1958, 1960). He published about 40 original papers in English or German in reputable international journals especially on neuroanatomy. In the *Gray's Textbook of Anatomy*, the name of Professor Tomasch is mentioned as one of its coauthors.⁶ He knew English and Latin very well in addition to German.

Added to anatomy, Professor Tomasch was highly interested in electronics especially its application in audiovisual teaching and research. He wrote a book entitled “*Role of Electronics in Modern Teaching and Research*”.

Ultimately, Professor Tomasch left Iran and returned home in 1981. In summary, he was an efficient and experienced educator who loved his career and students. Therefore, his memory is always alive for the graduates of Shiraz Medical School.

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank Dr. Sarkarzadeh for providing the photography of Professor Tomasch as well as Dr. Reza Varasteh-Kia (surgeon), Dr. Masoud Soutodeh (pathologist), and Dr. Saleh Ras-Ras (neurosurgeon) for their invaluable comments.

References

- 1 Azizi MH. Dr. Jacob Eduard Polak (1818 – 1891): the Pioneer of Modern Medicine in Iran. *Arch Iranian Med.* 2005; **8**: 151 – 152.
- 2 Hedayaty J. *The History of Contemporary Medicine in Iran*. Tehran: Iran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services, 1st ed. 2002: 35, 58, 203.
- 3 Azizi MH. A brief history of the establishment of Shiraz Medical Auxiliary Training School: the forerunner of Faculty of Medicine at Shiraz University. *Arch Iranian Med.* 2006; **9**: 295 – 298.
- 4 Hafizi MA. *A Guide to the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Hospitals, and Affiliated Schools of University of Tehran*. Tehran: Tehran University Press; 1951.
- 5 Ghorban Z. *Medical Education in Shiraz: a Personal Memoir*. Unknown Publisher; 31, 77, 81.
- 6 Gray H, Mayo-Goss C. *Gray's Textbook of Anatomy*. 29th American ed, Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger; 1976: 901.