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JĀNIS STRADIŅŠ and KĀRLIS ĒRIKS ARONS

SUCH WAS OUR TIME ...

A discussion between Professor Jānis Stradiņš, Vicepresident of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, and Associate Professor Kārlis Ēriks Arons, director of the Paul Stradins Museum of the History of Medicine. The discussion took place on January 26, 1993.

Comment by *Dr. med. Juris Salaks*.

J.Stradiņš (J.S.): This discussion is taking place in 1993 in the home where Wilhelm Ostwald¹ once lived. We shall discuss the history of medicine, but not only that. A few years ago words such as "perestroika" and "glasnost" were floating around in the air of the collapsing Soviet Union. Sensational facts were revealed about the past and the present. It was as though a veil had been removed from in front of our eyes, and we asked one another, "Where and how did we live all this time?". I suppose that the history of medicine and its telling have not been influenced too much by these critical currents. No matter what, the history of medicine seems to be a very conservative, retrograde and even slightly timid branch of science. At least I understood it to be such in the Soviet Union, and perhaps in Latvia, as well. But perhaps I am wrong?

K.Arons (K.A.): The history of medicine, at least in Latvia, has not been timid, but it has been maintained only as an oral history, it has never been written down. So now at last we shall be able to write down what we have been saying in our lectures, and I don't think that this history of medicine will look bad. Those who studied at the Riga Medical Institute in the early 1960s will remember that the history of medicine was quite an interesting subject.

J.S. I don't think that we'll be able to cover the entire territory of the ex-Soviet Union in our talk. Besides, Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union by force, though some people even assert that we were never part

¹ The apartment at Krišjāņa Barona iela 8 is currently occupied by K.Ē.Arons. From 1881 to 1887 it was occupied by the well-known chemist and philosopher Wilhelm Ostwald, who at that time was serving as a professor of chemistry at the Riga Polytechnicum.

of that empire. So let's limit ourselves to a narrower topic, and a smaller territory – just Latvia. Let's not talk about Brennsohn and Alksnis or other outstanding medical historians² who belong to another age. Let us limit our discussion to the last years of Pauls Stradiņš' life. I hope you'll forgive me for mentioning his name so frequently, though I do not intend to ignore such colorful personalities as Fjodor Grigoraš, Konstantin Vasiliev and others.

Medical historians elsewhere in the world might not be interested in our discussion, but our regional historians might benefit from learning some behind-the-scenes information about the development of the Museum of the History of Medicine, or about the publication of collection "Iz istorii mediciny", which you're editing, or how the first Baltic conferences on the history of medicine and natural science took place. We won't speak at any great length about the beginnings of the museum, we shall limit ourselves to the very start. You may remember I published an article on this question in volume 3 of "Iz istorii mediciny"³ based on reminiscences by my father. Today I can still agree with everything that was written there, although there were a couple of inaccuracies. At that time, for example, I had not yet studied the histories of the pharmaceutical collections of Maizite and Blümentāls⁴. I had to rely mostly on what assistant professor Vasermanis⁵ had told me.

K.A. There was a time when our colleagues, the pharmacists, seemed to be offended. But I think we've repaid any debt by creating a branch at the museum devoted to pharmacy⁶. Now they have a building of their own. The museum has never forgotten the contribution made by pharmacists. After all, the museum's most prominent pieces are the historical pharmacies on display.

² Isidor Brennsohn (1854—1928), physician, medical historian, researched the history of medicine in the Baltic Republics; his works include "Die Ärzte Kurlands von Beginn der herzoglichen Zeit bis zur Gegenwart" (Verlag von Ernst Plates A.G.: Riga, 1929); "Die Ärzte Livlands von den ältesten Zeiten zur Gegenwart: Ein biographisches Lexikon nebst einer historischen Einleitung ueber das Medizinalwesen Livlands" (Verlag von E. Bruhns: Riga, 1905); "Die Ärzte Estlands vom Beginn der historischen Zeit bis zur Gegenwart: Ein biographisches Lexikon nebst einer historischen Einleitung ueber das Medizinalwesen Estlands" (Riga, 1922).

Jekabs Alksnis (1870—1957), surgeon, medical historian, researched Latvian folk medicine.

³ Страдынь Я.П. Становление Музея истории медицины профессора П.И.Страдыня // Из истории медицины. – 1960. – Т. 3. – С. 139—153.

⁴ Dāvis Blümentāls (1871—1937), pharmaceutical historian, colonel

Jānis Maizīte (1883—1950), doctor of pharmacy, professor; both together they amassed a collection of historical documents on Baltic pharmacies.

⁵ Hazkel (Harry) Vasermanis (b. 1909), chemist, pharmacist; head of the Central Board of Pharmacies in Latvia; senior instructor at the Riga Medical Institute, currently lives in Israel.

⁶ The Pharmacy Museum was opened as a branch of the Paul Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine in 1987; it is located at Riharda Vāgnera iela 13/15 in Riga.

J.S. You are quite right. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, let me tell you that Pauls Stradiņš always held Jānis Maizite and his accomplishments in high esteem. I don't think that they ever had any misunderstandings between them. But let us turn to the way in which Latvian medical history was written in the post-war years. I'm not really certain of lectures delivered on the topic. Who read lectures on medical history when you were at the Riga Medical Institute? Was it Pauls Stradiņš or Doctor Grigoraš?⁷

K.A. I had a course on the history of medicine when I was in my fourth year. That was in the mid-1950s. The reforms on medical education which were implemented by Boris Petrovskij⁸ provided that the history of medicine be taught during the second year, and then his followers at the Latvian Academy of Medicine pushed that back to the very beginning of one's medical education. Unhappily I had no chance to attend Pauls Stradiņš' lectures. My lectures were delivered by Fjodor Grigoraš, who was a senior lecturer in the Department of Health Care which at that time was headed by Health Minister Ādolfs Krauss⁹.

Pauls Stradiņš did deliver an introduction to the history of surgery, perhaps two or three lectures. I remember being quite taken by these lectures, even though the topic was the history of surgery, not general medicine. We regarded Pauls Stradiņš as a medical historian in the broadest sense of the word, even though the museum at that time was not generally open to students. Grigoraš maintained a fairly ironic attitude toward his boss. Ādolfs Krauss was fond of history. He lectured in Latvian, which he spoke fluently, but he read long quotations in the original Russian from the 18th century authors Danila Samoilovič and Nestor Maksimovič-Ambodik. We, the Latvian students, read medical texts in Russian poorly. Krauss did the best he could with the knowledge and conclusions he had reached during his studies in the Soviet Union. Europe played no role in his lectures.

Stradiņš introduced us to Europe, but of course he didn't discard the Russian surgeons. He maintained a broader viewpoint.

J.S. It was during the so-called "German times" in 1942 or 1943 that Pauls Stradiņš got the idea of writing a systematic history of Latvian medicine. He was somewhat less occupied with various organizational tasks during those

⁷ Pauls Stradiņš lectured on the history of medicine at the School of Medicine at the University of Latvia until 1950. Fjodor Grigoraš delivered Russian-language lectures on the subject at the Riga Medical Institute from 1950 to 1961.

⁸ Boris Petrovskij (b. 1908), surgeon, Academician, Minister of Health for the USSR (1965—1980).

⁹ Ādolfs Krauss (1905—1958), Deputy Minister of Health for the Latvian SSR (1945—1946), Minister of Health (after 1946), senior instructor at the University of Latvia (1948—1950) and the Riga Medical Institute (after 1950), head of the Department of Health Care and History of Medicine.

years. The 25th anniversary of the School of Medicine at the university was approaching. He read a programmatic lecture to his colleagues and asked for their help and collaboration in collecting historical materials. When the Russians came in, the job became unrealistic. Very few physicians had remained in place, and the workload of those who had stayed was immense. And of course during Stalin's time you couldn't write the truth even on so harmless a topic as the history of medicine.

In the first post-war years Pauls Stradiņš kept reading lectures on the history of medicine. A few of his syllabi and abstracts have survived. After the fierce criticism which was waged against him in 1947 and 1949 he was removed from lecturing, and then he turned all his attention to his museum. Around 1951 or 1952, when Stalin's period reached its peak and then its decline, he prepared the first outline of a book on the history of medicine in Latvia, and he proposed the organization of a conference on the issue.

Pauls Stradiņš thought that potential authors might include his colleagues Dr. Griķe, who was an historian and an employee of the museum of history and who later wrote children's books under the pen name of Velta Zunde. Also Dr. Dalbiņš, Professor Rudzītis, Professor Bieziņš, Professor Liepukalns, also a few Jewish colleagues of his from the First Hospital, and also some professional historians. I can't remember all the names he proposed, but I do know that ever since 1953 my father had been urging me, a young chemistry student at that time, to collect material on the history of the natural and exact sciences in Latvia and the Baltics. By the way, perhaps I already told you that after I finished gymnasium I wanted to study history, but my father basically forbade it. He said that as a historian I would have to spend my life writing lies, and so I became a chemist. But anyway, in 1952 and 1953 Stradiņš had compiled a list of topics on the history of Latvian medicine, and he wanted to write the history in collaboration with Lithuania and Estonia. In connection with this plan he turned up Professor Girdzijskauskas and medical sciences candidate Biziuļevičius from Lithuania and Professor Eduard Martinson from Estonia

And of course the project needed a supervisor from Moscow. It turned out to be Boris Petrov¹⁰, who later became very well known.

K.A. I met Petrov when he arrived in Riga with the hope of getting the Stradiņš museum open as soon as possible. Of course he was greeted with all pomp and circumstance. I met him at the station and took him to the front steps of the Council of Ministers, where he showed off his easy ac-

¹⁰ Boris Petrov (1904—1991), corresponding member of the Medical Academy of Sciences of the USSR, employee of the Central Committee of the CPSU, historian of medicine.

cess to Vilis Lācis¹¹ and went up to discuss the museum with him. Petrov also rang up the central committee of the local communist party and so on. We considered Petrov a permanent guest at the Stradiņš museum, as well as a constant supervisor of Moscow's interests. He seemed to be quite favorably inclined toward the museum, and I tried to figure out why that was. I guess it was because he saw the museum as an object of pride not only for the republic Latvia but for the entire Soviet Union and the entire medical world.

J.S. Petrov first turned up in Riga in 1945. And he really did defend the Museum of the History of Medicine. I remember he went not only to Vilis Lācis, but also to Kalnbērziņš¹².

Petrov came from Malenkov's circle¹³. In the 1930s he wrote pamphlets such as "How to Fight Sabotage". There were brief instructions on how to unmask an enemy of the people. That was at the beginning of his career while he was a rising star in the party apparatus. I believe he was the director of the health care sector at the Moscow central committee. After Malenkov's fall he lost his administrative power and turned to the history of medicine. He was a very contradictory personality, but it is true that he really did facilitate the formation of the Museum of the History of Medicine in Riga. That was no easy task in those days.

During Stalin's time Pauls Stradiņš was regarded as a "bourgeois nationalist." Recently I read a chastizing speech by Arvids Peļše¹⁴ in which he compared Stradiņš' views with those of the notorious Jānis Dāvis¹⁵. That was absolute nonsense.

K.A. Petrov required diplomatic handling. Often he didn't know about the things we discussed and published in Latvian. But when we spoke Russian we always had to keep Petrov's political views in mind. He was a very good organizer, he tried to organize research on medical history. But

¹¹ Vilis Lācis (1904—1966), chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR (1940—1959).

¹² Jānis Kalnbērziņš (1893—1986), first secretary of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party (1940—1959).

¹³ Georgij Malenkov (1902—1988), member of the Politbureau of the CPSU; member of the CC Presidium (1946—1957); chairman of the Council of Ministers (1953—1955); expelled from the CC in 1957 and from the party in 1961 because of "anti-party activities".

¹⁴ Arvids Peļše (1899—1983), Corresponding member of the Academy of Science of the Latvian SSR (1946), first secretary of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party (1959—1966), party control chairman and member of the politbureau of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (after 1966).

¹⁵ Jānis Dāvis (1867—1959), pedagogue, journalist, active in the abstainers' movement, author of primary readers as well as anti-Semitic texts; died in emigration.

he always kept to the general theme of giving priority to the scientists of the "Fatherland". Once I tried to talk to him about the scientists of Dorpat, who were Baltic Germans, and he said to me, "Alright, Karl Janovič, you can go ahead and consider all the others to be Baltic Germans, but we absolutely will not give up credit for the Russian scientist Karl Maksimovič Baer!" Today we can smile about such statements, but he meant every word. He could be very sharp in rebuking such "sins."

J.S. That may be so, but he was always loyal toward my father. Help did come from Moscow.

If we think about how Pauls Stradiņš can be characterized politically ... I once asked him which party he had supported in the parliamentary elections when Latvia was an independent country, and he couldn't remember the name of the party. I suppose you could call Pauls Stradiņš a member of the democratic intelligentsia and a patriot of Latvia. He was never an extremist nationalist, nor an anti-communist, even though he had seen all the realities of communism in the Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1923. As far as I can remember from discussions we had, in 1917 my father leaned toward Maxim Gorky's "Novaja Žiznj" group in Petrograd. The aim of the group was to maintain and protect cultural values during those times of upheaval. The group was strongly opposed to Lenin. Recently a new edition of Gorky's "Untimely Thoughts"¹⁶ was published in Moscow. I had a chance to read it, and it revealed Gorky in a new light. And it gave new sense to the theory that Gorky and Pavlov (whose lectures, incidentally, were quite influential on Stradiņš in his youth – during those times Pavlov was very much comparable to Andrei Sakharov later), as well as Bekhterev, were secretly executed by Stalin, just like Kirov¹⁷. But we've gotten off the topic again.

Pauls Stradiņš had to walk a very fine line all throughout the post-war period. In autumn 1944 he refused to become a member of a special commission which was formed to investigate German fascist atrocities in the territory of the Latvian SSR even though a list of commission members, in-

¹⁶ Горький М. Несвоевременные мысли: Заметки о революции и культуре – М.: Сов. писатель, 1990. – 400 с.

¹⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s many outstanding Soviet physicians (L. Levin, J. Kazakov, D. Pletniev and others) were arrested and convicted of participation in the "anti-party Trotskyist bloc" and of murdering M. Gorky, V. Kuibizhev, V. Menžinski, S. Kirov and Gorky's son M. Peškov. See: Подлые шпионы и убийцы под маской профессоров врачей // Правда. – 1953. – 13 янв.; Политические процессы 30—50 годов. – М.: Политиздат, 1991. – С. 235—240; Этингер Я. Дело врачей и судьба одной семьи // Наука и жизнь. – 1990. – Т.1. – С. 126—129; Тополянский В.Д. Ночь перед рождеством // Огонек. – 1989. – № 14.

cluding his name, had already been published in the newspaper "Cīņa"¹⁸. I remember buying the newspaper at a kiosk and showing it to my father. He got very upset and immediately went to Arnolds Deglavs¹⁹ and refused to take part. Perhaps he was thinking of Burdenko²⁰ who in discussing the victims of Katyn and those responsible for the tragedy had, as we now know, lent his authority to a falsification.

Similarly, in 1945 my father refused to sign a "letter of protest from the Latvian intelligentsia" which was aimed at Latvian collaborationists, meaning followers of Hitler. The specific target was the rector of the university, Mārtiņš Primānis

Those kinds of things weren't really forgotten or forgiven in those days. Father was saved to some extent by his reputation as a doctor, his popularity among the people, his brief arrest during the German occupation and also perhaps his characteristic attempts not to make enemies. He was also helped by the support of his colleagues in Moscow and Leningrad. He was tied to Russia both by family connections and through friendships.

K.A. In his notes Pauls Stradiņš wrote about his conception of the museum. When I first saw the museum, the professor had laid it out floor by floor, and there was no planned space for the so-called Soviet section which later came into being under the direction of Vladimirs Šmits and Herta Hanzena²¹. It was reorganized several times, but what was unique about it was that in his conception Pauls Stradiņš had planned space both for European and Russian scientists corresponding to their proportional accomplishments but not denying one side or the other. Now, perhaps

¹⁸ Cīņa . – 1944. – 5. nov.

¹⁹ Arnolds Deglavs (1904—1969) – chairman of the Riga City Executive Committee (1944—1951).

²⁰ On January 16—23, 1944, a special commission headed by Nikolai Burdenko (1876—1946; surgeon who served as the chief surgeon of the Soviet army (after 1937) and a lt. general in the medical corps (1944); first president of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences after 1944) exhumed a number of bodies in Katyn and concluded that the Polish officers had been killed by German fascists after the fall of Smolensk in the autumn of 1941. The international war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg refused to accept this Soviet document as evidence and, interestingly, the Soviet Union did not protest this refusal. On April 13, 1990, the Soviet news agency reported that Mikhail Gorbachev had turned over to Polish leader W. Jaruzelski secret Soviet documents concerning the execution of more than 15,000 Polish officers at Katyn, thus revealing one of the greatest atrocities of Stalin's regime.

²¹ Vladimirs Šmits (b. 1925), expert on forensic medicine, director of the Pauls Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine from 15 December 1960 to 9 February 1961.

Herta Hanzena (1909—1972), nomenclature worker; graduated from the Kharkov Institute of Sanitation and Hygiene; arrived in Riga in 1940 as head of the personnel department at the Ministry of Health; worked as an advisor to the Council of Ministers; director of the museum from 9 February 1961 until 1972.

this was not noticed while the museum was located at the hospital, but once the collection was moved to the state museum, it became readily visible that it was lacking in the priorities of the "Fatherland". Pauls Stradiņš' conception of the museum is finally being implemented now that Latvia is an independent country. He would have had a hard time watching the museum's development in the years prior to this.

J.S. Of course not everything could be done openly, one had to pay extensive homage. Perhaps that is why he was sometimes accused of conjuncturism. "Render unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's" – that principle.

Recently I was told by Vilis Krūmiņš, who is now director of the Museum of Nature but who at that time was second secretary of the Latvian Communist Party, that the notorious "Moscow doctors" affair in 1953 might have continued in Latvia, too²². It turns out that denunciations were implemented not only against Jewish physicians but against some Latvians, as well – Pauls Stradiņš, The Soviet Supreme Council deputy Dr. Jēgermanis, Aleksandrs Bieziņš. There was a plan to "collect local documentation" to develop this matter. But in the spring of 1953 who should turn up in Riga but Yuri Andropov himself. He was at the very beginning of his career at that time. He'd just been transferred from Karelia to Moscow as an instructor at the CPSU Central Committee and as a supervisor of Baltic affairs. Krūmiņš characterized the situation so as to favor the Latvian doctors, so instructions came down that they be left to work in peace but that an eye should nevertheless be kept on them. That was the beginning of the Khrushchev "thaw", and it was felt in Latvia, too. The regime was liberalized a little bit and Latvia's national interests were observed at least to a minor extent. In 1955 my father was nominated (and, naturally, unanimously elected) to be a deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR. By the way, that specific fact played a considerable role in the official founding of the Museum of the History of Medicine and the assignation of a building for its use.

Vilis Krūmiņš played a great role in getting the building for the museum. He managed to move the Latvian Komsomol to the Communist Party building which was possible in 1957 but would have been unthinkable three years later. It's clear that if the building hadn't been given to us at that time, then the museum would never have existed. It could not have sur-

²² On 13 January 1953 a group of doctors-"saboteurs" was arrested in Moscow on charges of working to shorten the lives of active Soviet government employees. The doctors were accused of involvement with the Jewish and British intelligence services. On 4 April 1953 the Ministry of Internal Affairs deemed the accusations false and ordered the doctors released.

vived in the attics, basements and dormitories of the Clinical Hospital even if it had been named after Pauls Stradiņš, which later it was.

But back to the writing of the history of Latvian medicine. In 1953 there were, of course, no books or conferences on Latvian medical history. The years of upheaval, of the first, failed attempt at "perestroika", were upon us. Still, the first of materials on the history of medicine for an irregular periodical was begun at that time. The last materials for the irregular periodical "Iz istorii mediciny" were assembled in 1956. Father himself assembled the collection, I helped out with some technical details. Another person who offered to help came from the ranks of military medics. He was Major or Lt. Col. Konstantin Georgijevič Vasil'iev. I can't remember just now when he turned up in Riga. I think at that time he was not yet working at the Kirhenšteins Institute of Microbiology. Have you heard anything of him?

K.A. One should speak of Konstantin Georgijevič *aut bene, aut nihil*²³, in order to avoid coming into contact with his virulent nature. He started to work on the Latvian history of medicine together with Grigoraš. Ādolfs Krauss was brought in, too, but from later conversations with the other authors I came to understand that he contributed little. Vasilijev's wife spoke German, and I think that the basis for research on Latvian medical history was a piece of older history text book translated from the German. Vasil'iev wrote that section, and Grigoraš added the Soviet period. Using the system of lies which had been perfected over the years by Soviet statisticians, he "discovered", for example, that before the "renewal of Soviet power" in 1940 there had been not one single rural hospital in Latvia, but after 1940 all of a sudden there was a wealth of such facilities.

J.S. We'll come back to this book later, but tell me – how did the first volume of "Iz istorii mediciny" appear? I think the editor of "Zinātne," Solomon Levi, can be thanked for his competent editing and even censure of the material, may he rest in peace. That was the beginning of a 35-year tradition for this irregular periodical. Father lived to see the first volume himself, even though he had already suffered the stroke which after December 1956 sharply limited his ability to work. The volume was positively accepted by historians of medicine outside Latvia. Boris Grigorjevič roused himself just at this time. He had played no role in assembling the collection, but once it was ready he wanted to present it as an accomplishment of the history of medicine for the entire Soviet Union. He requested several dozen copies and distributed them throughout the "people's democra-

²³ Latin: Either good or nothing at all.

cies" of the world, as well as international organizations of medical history. That, of course, was not a bad thing.

Latvia's professional historians were skeptical about the volume. Mārgers Štepermanis, for example, declined to write a review, saying that medical historians were not using archival materials. The most unpleasant reaction came from the party organization of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR. Two future Academicians participated in the campaign against Pauls Stradiņš, who at that time was already very ill. I have not forgotten that. The accusation was "bourgeois objectivity", and there was condemnation for the inclusion of obituaries for the former civil defense officer Dalbiņš and the "reactionary" professor Jēkabs Alksnis, who had died in exile²⁴, while there was no mention of the 85th anniversary of Professor Augusts Kirhenšteins²⁵. The situation was eased somewhat when the President of the academy, Jānis Peive, and the party secretary of that time, Lina Zaļkalne, intervened²⁶.

At the last moment, at Levi's request, I wrote an editorial for the collection with a couple of politically correct phrases. Levi sensed that this would be no joking matter. The editorial was printed over the signature of Pauls Stradiņš, who was already ill, but I want to take the sin of this conjecture upon myself. I don't think Pauls Stradiņš would have accepted such words, but the editors said they were needed if the collection was to see the light of day. The second volume was accused of attempts at bringing in "nationalist contraband". That's how one prominent historian of sciences in Moscow put it.

But let us continue speaking of the year when the second volume of "Iz istorii medicini" appeared. In 1959 Vasil'iev, Grigoraš and Krauss published a book called "Материалы по истории медицины и здравоохранения Латвии". Academicians Pēteris Gērke, Pauls Stradiņš (deceased) and Aleksandrs Šmidts were appointed scientific editors. I objected against my father's being appointed an editor, because the content and level of the book would hardly have been acceptable to him. If there was anything of him in the project, it was only the idea of publishing it in the first place. There was discussion of that in 1956, or even in 1953, but with a completely different idea and group of authors. The only thing to

²⁴ Из истории медицины. – Рига, 1957. – Т. 1. – С. 275—277.

²⁵ Augusts Kirhenšteins (1872—1963), scientist and state employee, founder and director of the Microbiological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR (1946—1962), presidium chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR (1940—1952).

²⁶ Lina Zaļkalne (b.1899), secretary of the party committee of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR; deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR (1947—1959).

do was to ask the historian Heinrihs Strods to write a review so that no one would believe that Latvian historians accepted all that nonsense. The review did, indeed, appear in the newsletter of the Academy of Sciences, probably in 1960, and sharply criticized the serious omission of information about the feudal period.²⁷ Of course tendentious selection of facts and generalized phraseology were common at that time.

K.A. That book was my first work as a reviewer²⁸. I wrote, with purposeful naivete, that this was a book about Latvian medical history without Latvians. Grigoraš did not easily forgive me for that, even though he realized that there were indeed no Latvians – doctors or scientists – mentioned in the book. That was mainly because any discussion of them would have forced a mention of Latvia as an independent nation.

J.S. There was no discussion of that in the book at all.

K.A. As far as the Soviet era was concerned, the book was all hyperbole and falsification of facts, outright lies. Professor Grigoraš always tried to justify himself by saying, "Had I not written this book, however bad, there would be no history of medicine at all." I am not sure how to evaluate that idea – to write something bad just so that there might be something. I don't know.

J.S. Khrushchev's thaw, which began in Latvia in 1955 and 1956, ended earlier in Latvia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union, starting with the notorious "unmasking and destruction of the group of bourgeois nationalists" at the July 1959 plenary session of the Latvian Communist Party. I think that the relaxed era gave positive impulses to Latvian life at that time. Objective future historians will be unable to pass this era by. The historical Riga Polytechnical Institute was renewed, the Institute of Organic Synthesis was founded. So was the Museum of the History of Medicine.

It was also at that time that the Association of Latvian Historians of science was established. In 1958 the first conference on the history of Baltic science took place in Riga. This was a tradition that started in Latvia because Latvia was the most progressive of the Baltic Republics at that time. So we tried to establish something of a Baltic intellectual entente, and later that had its importance in the national renaissance of the three Baltic nationalities. Unfortunately now that we are independent we're starting to split up.

To some extent I can also consider myself a child of that period of thaw. The time was very brief and of course quite contradictory. There was only

²⁷ Strods H. Serious drawbacks in the description of Latvian medicine during feudal times // *Latvijas PSR ZA Vēstis*. – 1962. – Nr. 3. – 143.–148. lpp.

²⁸ Arons K. Solis uz priekšu Latvijas medicīnas vēstures jautājumos [A step forward in the research of Latvian history of medicine] // *Čiņa*. – 1960. – 3. marts.

a slight attempt at liberalizing the totalitarian system. There could be no thought of independence for Latvia. But it is important that the influence of the period reached into the area of medical history, as well – into our collected works and the official beginnings of the Museum of the History of Medicine.

Pauls Stradiņš died on 14 August 1958, and as I said, the government of the Latvian SSR honored his memory. The government kept alive the idea of a museum. The years from 1958 to 1961 were critical to the survival of the museum. There were the years of "to be or not to be," when if nothing else, then the collection assembled by the deceased founder had to be kept together and moved from the hospital to its new five-story building. The structure at the time was occupied by some agricultural machinery office with which my father had despairingly battled for the last years of his life. I would like to emphasize that among government officials, special care for the museum was offered by Ella Ankupe, the Supreme Soviet deputy and chairwoman of its commission on health care and social security²⁹. In 1959, after the notorious plenary session of the Latvian Communist Party, she came to our summer house in Lielupe and despairingly told us all the details of the session, almost as if she were reciting a transcript of the meeting. That's why transcripts I saw later were no surprise to me³⁰. She kept repeating, "What is going to happen now?" Later I had the satisfaction of learning that Ella Ankupe was among the 17 long-standing Latvian communists who signed the famous 1972 letter about the dangers being posed to the Latvian national identity and its future, the letter which, thanks to Uldis Čermanis in Sweden, reverberated throughout the world³¹. Her name can also be favorably mentioned in connection with her involvement in the fate of the Museum of the Medicine of History.

K.A. I entered the field of medical history somewhat later. I remember Ankupe, we often went to her for assistance. The scientific council was headed by the academician Ģerke, along with Aleksandrs Bieziņš and Fjodor Grigoraš. Ģerke was irritated by what he considered to be foot-dragging on the part of the museum organizers in assembling expositions,

²⁹ Ella Ankupe (1908—1986), department head of the Central Committee of the LCP (1949—1956), candidate member of the Central Committee of the LCP (1949—1959), deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR (1951—1963).

³⁰ LKP CK VII slēgtā plēnuma stenogramma 1959. gada 7., 8. jūlijā // Padomju Latvijas Komunisti. – 1989. – Nr. 2. – 78. — 94. lpp.; Nr. 3. – 80. — 95. lpp.; Nr. 4. – 67. — 95. lpp.; Nr. 5. – 79. — 95. lpp.; Nr. 6. – 63. — 95. lpp.

³¹ Krogzeme I. Seventeen Moments in the Fall: The 20th Anniversary of the 17 Communists Letter // *Nacionālā Neatkarība*. – 1992. – Nr. 5—6.; For commentary by J. Anoliņš see also // *Brīvība*. – Stockholm, 1991. – Nr. 2.

their spiteful adherence to "old ideas" and their quarrelsome attitude toward his suggestions.

For their part, the museum workers made fun of Grigoraš's ideas and the way in which they were presented. He spoke Latvian poorly. But Pauls Stradiņš and his followers had managed to assemble a group of historians of medicine who established traditions in the research of the field. There were young biologists, historians, who had all grown up in the period of the thaw. It was understandable that we had to work long and hard to get one employee to go repeat an examination in marxist philosophy. That was the reason she, the chief curator of the museum, was without a university diploma. To this very day Aija Dirbe, who began her career with Professor Stradiņš, is still working at the museum.

The curator of the museum's basic collections was Edgars Liepiņš, son-in-law to Professor Jēkabs Alksnis. He lacked experience in museum work and perhaps didn't manage to do everything he should have, but he approached his work with a great sense of responsibility. Not everyone believed that the collection should be kept intact, there were many squanderers.

I would particularly like to mention Ādolfs Karnups, who was an experienced museum worker. He had an unusual talent and piety toward the education of young people. *Nulla dies sine linea*³², that was him – not a day without work. He even knew how to instruct old men. In this respect I would like to mention the outstanding Latvian scientist Vilis Derums, the Pauls Stradiņš prize winner who upon returning from the Soviet deportation earned a doctorate in paleopathology. He was helped very much by Karnups' outstanding knowledge of archaeology.

J.S. I would like to add something here. Once, during a meeting of the scientific council, I tried to explain to Ādolfs Karnups how the notion of a primitive community should be viewed from the perspective of Marx and Engels. Today I am ashamed of it, and I would like to retrospectively apologize to him for it. Ādolfs Karnups was an outstanding Latvian archaeologist who had conducted excavations at Talsi in 1938, who had been editor in chief of the magazine "Sējējs" in 1939 and 1940 – a magazine which was close to the heart of Kārlis Ulmanis. Ādolfs Karnups, who worked in the Latvian Museum of History as deputy director and was sentenced to death for trying to save Ulmanis' personal belongings, some of the state symbols of Latvia. Later the death sentence was reduced to 25 years in exile, because the Soviet Union for a while abolished capital punishment. Karnups' letters from exile to Pauls Stradiņš survive intact. When

³² Latin: Not a day without work.

he returned from exile, Karnups was not allowed to live in Riga, so he settled in Ogre³³. Professor Stradiņš found him there and brought into the work of the museum. I think Ādolfs Karnups not only stimulated Derums, but many others, as well. Wasn't your dissertation on Latvian folk medicine influenced by his work, as well?

K.A. It was, indeed. He taught me how to make use of archaeological discoveries as resources for my research, he encouraged me to go on expeditions, to collect material and analyze it, to form my own concepts.

J.S. You came to work at the museum at the same time as Herta Hanzena, or a little bit earlier. Frankly I, along with my mother Nina Fedorovna, who actively followed the fortunes of the museum, was quite concerned about Hanzena's coming to the museum, because at her former place of employment, the Council of Ministers, she had not been kindly disposed toward Professor Stradiņš and his museum. I remember going out to Mežaparks to see Professor Kirhenšteins and ask his opinion. He told us that he had come to know Herta Augustovna while she was still in Moscow. She was working as a guide at Intourist (this was before the Soviet occupation of Latvia). She was appointed to the delegation from Latvia. She pretended not to be able to speak Latvian at all. To his surprise, when Kirhenšteins later met her as a state adviser in Latvia, she had an outstanding command of Latvian. But the appointment of Herta Hanzena as director of the museum was a done deal. The Central Committee had decided that it should be so.

K.A. Herta Hanzena was a typical voluntary leader of a Soviet institution. She wanted the post. The curator of the Pauls Stradiņš museum at that time was Viktor Michailovič Krūmiņš, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers. Apparently he wanted to get rid of Hanzena, who was of rather an unpleasant nature. Hanzena did not appear to be nonplussed at her lack of knowledge in the history of medicine. She was a typical nomenclature worker able to manage any Soviet institution. Management was a profession in itself.

J.S. Pauls Stradiņš once said, "Look out for this lady with the green eyes!"

K.A. It was hard. There's a lot one could say about the battles between the museum workers and the boss. Both the party organization and a general meeting of the museum staff expressed a lack of confidence in Hanzena. Neither Kaņeps nor Girgensone did anything until Hanzena died.

³³ Ādolfs Karnups (1904—1973), archaeologist, ethnographer, historian of medicine; worked at the State Museum of History (1926—1946); exiled until 1955; worked at the Museum of the History of Medicine beginning 2 August 1956.

She began her work at the museum by implementing a routine reorganization of the Soviet department. Nearly every Soviet professor in existence had to be displayed. We cut photographs from obituaries and anniversary celebrations printed in Soviet magazines, pasted them together, invited consultants to come and assist.

J.S. Now we arrive at the years of stagnation, Brezhnev's time. Even then the museum's affairs did not go too badly. A systematic history of medicine, however, was never compiled. On the other hand, the museum assembled an extensive staff, perhaps too extensive and with fairly little in the way of scientific productivity.

The museum continued to flourish with one new department after another. There was a department on space medicine, including exhibits from the first trip into space. I remember that in 1974, Riga was visited by a well-known biochemist, Academician Severin, senior. He was an official representative of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union at the 250th anniversary of the Academy. Celebrations were organized by the academies in each of the Soviet republics. In his speech, much to the displeasure of our president, Mälmeisters, Severin mentioned two things which were of global interest in Latvia: The Institute of Organic Synthesis with its newly developed medicines, and the Museum of the History of Medicine with its extraordinary conception and exhibits. I myself had the honor to show the museum to Academician Aleksandrov, the atomic power station designer who later became president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. He designed powerful nuclear reactors, including the one at Chernobyl. He came in 1962. His flight from Riga back to Moscow was a regular commercial flight, but it was kept waiting at the airport until he finished his inspection of the museum.

K.A. We were energetic in collecting materials in St. Petersburg and Moscow. We made many friends, and Professor Stradiņš' name opened many doors. We did not avoid the relatives of scientists who had fallen in disgrace. The old intelligentsia, who had watched nothing but destruction and demolition, believed that their things would be kept intact at the Riga museum. Many prominent persons visited the museum. We were included in the Central Committee list of the most important objects to be viewed in Riga. I myself guided Brezhnev's grandson, an inquisitive 12-year-old, through the museum (a lower-standing guide would not do for Central Committee employees).

The medical museum of Kiev was formed after our example; they even copied some aspects of our medieval town. We became a methodical center for medical museums throughout the Soviet Union. We formed

ever more active contacts with medical historians in West Berlin. We signed a cooperation agreement with them back in the time when those who fenced the city in believed their system would last as long as Great Wall of China. We were accepted into the European Association of Museums of the History of Medical Sciences. Our colleague Juris Salaks defended his dissertation at the Free University of West Berlin.

J.S. What can we say about the minister of health of that time, Vilhelms Kaņeps? He was, of course, a minister, but first and foremost he was the son-in-law of the all-powerful Soviet Communist Party politburo member Arvids Peļše.

Kaņeps had a controversial personality, though he had a favorable attitude toward Pauls Stradiņš and the museum. He didn't know Pauls Stradiņš very well personally, but he used to be the Comsomol organizer at the time when Professor Stradiņš was dean of the medical faculty. He remembered this fact with a certain sincerity. In any event he was especially sympathetic toward the museum. Why do you think that was true?

K.A. Kaņeps knew how to evaluate what was good and worthwhile. He often took ministers from other republics to the museum to show it off. The Soviet Health Minister Petrovskij signed the guest book and added a note that every Soviet doctor should see the museum. He wrote that from the heart, not just to write something pretty. I can imagine that when Kaņeps met up with the Soviet Union's outstanding scientists at the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences, they often began their conversation by asking how things were going with the museum. After all, they themselves were on display there!

J.S. He was head of one of the academy departments located at the museum?

K.A. He headed the department of social hygiene and read lectures from a sheet of paper despite the fact that he was a good public speaker, witty and very conversant with the topic at hand. I suppose he was short of time, or perhaps fear of the fact that a person of his standing had to answer for every word he said.

It was not easy to work with him. He was insolent and rude with his closest colleagues. Now I realize that that was the standard style of a Soviet leader. Most recently we learned that Gorbachev addressed his colleagues that way, too. At the same time, though, Kaņeps was also helpful and sensitive toward the cares of the "little people," and he was unquestionably a good organizer.

J.S. Now another question, less pleasant. Is it true that the Pauls Stradiņš prize was established in 1983 in connection with Vilhelms Kaņeps' 60th

birthday? That was the time that the ascetic Yuri Andropov came to power in Moscow³⁴. Prizes and medals were not distributed as generously as they were in Brezhnev's time, the thought of receiving the title of Socialist Hero of Labor was long gone. It was said that the Stradiņš prize was founded as a consolation prize to Vilhelms Kaņeps, who was the first to receive it. Is that true?

K.A. No. The International Association of Medical Historians awards the Golden Aesclepius. The Germans award the Pagel medal. Why couldn't there be a Pauls Stradiņš prize for the best work in the history of medicine in the world? That was our hope. We wanted to raise the prestige of medical history as a field. We wanted to make the Pauls Stradiņš name better known.

J.S. I was happy to receive it, because of its connection with my father. To me it seems the most valuable of the relatively many awards I have received. I might perhaps regard it as acknowledgement of the work I did in preparing the three-volume collection of Pauls Stradiņš' writings³⁵ and another book commemorating his life. I devoted about seven years to this work, from 1959 to 1966, and I did it at the same time as my regular work at the Institute of Organic Synthesis.

K.A. "Pauls Stradiņš: His life and Work" has become a bibliographical rarity. You deserve praise for that – for creating the first example of memorial literature in those times. After that book was translated into Russian, though unfortunately omitting Stradiņš' letters and diary. Stradiņš' name was included in the curriculum of every medical history course in every medical academy in the USSR.

J.S. He tackled things *"im Grossen und Ganzen"*³⁶, and it seems to me that the main thing for which we owe him a debt is that in Latvia we do not view the history of medicine locally, but on a European, Eurasian or even a global scale. Pauls Stradiņš was the first person to speak of the Baltics as a region joining the East and the West, even back in Stalin's time, the first person to speak of the five major routes of influence. It is, after all, a miracle that Riga, a city in which nothing of worldwide note has ever happened in the area of medical history, has become home to a world-class museum of medical history, a museum which charts the entire course of the development of medicine!

³⁴ Andropov was elected general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in November, 1982.

³⁵ Страдинь П.И. Избранные труды: Т. 1–3. – Рига, 1963 — 1965. – 369 с.; 456 с.; 689 с.; Professors Pauls Stradiņš dzīvē un darbā. – Rīga, 1961. – 362. lpp.

³⁶ German: In general.

Perhaps the museum displays these things in a popular way, perhaps without many valuable original items, but still *"im Grossen und Ganzen"*. I suppose the museum has also left a favorable influence on the local medical culture, on the development of a generation of cultural Latvian doctors. We may be poor in medical instrumentation, but the education of our doctors is not so bad. That is demonstrated by the work our doctors do abroad.

But back to the writing of a history of medicine – a project suggested by Pauls Stradiņš 40 years ago. Are we not at the same point today as we were back then? Aren't we even worse off in terms of authors? Do we have a new generation of medical historians? Even Dr. A. Viksna, the most notable historian of the next generation, after the ours, is over fifty. Why hasn't a school of the history of medicine developed here? We have all the necessary requirements: plenty of literature in our libraries, a wealth of archival material. It seems that we have everything. Is it our modesty, our fear to tackle a major project? Perhaps it's a lack of ability, or laziness? The totalitarian era is over. We can write the truth now. Will this generation of medical historians provide something fundamental, or will we have to wait for the next one to grow up?

And the last question: Are the conditions in place today for the writing of a systematic history of medicine? Do we have to wait, not only because of a lack of authors, but also because times are unsettled? Pauls Stradiņš started thinking about this in the 1950s, even before "the thaw". He considered it, but perhaps they couldn't have written anything lasting back then. The very idea of Latvia seemed suspicious and to be opposed. Now we have freedom. Latvia's name is supposedly highly honored, there is no censorship. But society has no active interest in the history of medicine, and the economic conditions for large scale research are not there. But the main problem is this sort of resignation: is this work really necessary?

I guess we should first tackle the problems of modern medicine, the health care of the people. The old socialist guarantees are disappearing, there are no new ones in their place. We must reverse our backwardness in treatment, medicines, technology. Then we could turn to the history of medicine. Will the museum survive in these difficult times? Does so international an institution have a place in a small country which ranks 77th in the world on the economic index?

We have paid a high price for our freedom, and in some respects we're right at the starting block, just as in the 1920s. Everything must be started from the beginning. I believe that this crisis will be overcome, even though the idea of writing a history of medicine right now is the same as the idea of reciting poetry during heart surgery or something like that. Per-

haps I'm wrong – I'm not a doctor – or maybe the past will act as a pleasant narcotic that puts us to sleep; new myths will be created, new heroic deeds, new legends.

We are forever prattling about returning to Europe. Where have we been all this time? What have we been doing during these years? It is no longer considered modern to speak of Latvia as a bridge, but if we cannot live on a bridge, we may soon come to live under it. I don't know which of these options would be the more pleasant. Aren't we sinking into a new provincialism hidden behind patriotic phrases? Aren't we threatened with the prospect of living in a very, very narrowly defined world? I love Latvia, but I don't want to see it narrow-minded and withdrawn into itself. But should we conclude this conversation so pessimistically?

K.A. The history of medicine is not just a branch of science, it is also a branch of education. Its place in medical education is long since undebatable. If our medical academy wishes to become part of Europe, we must see to it that the system of medical education corresponds to that in Europe. One should, in fact, assign the history of medicine a place in the curriculum which corresponds to the place it would have in a European medical institution, and not leave it at the place it had in the Soviet Union. The history of medicine lays the groundwork for medical deontology without which no technical equipment, no abundance of medicine will be of any value.

We have a tendency to simplify everything and make it utilitarian. We argue over such things as whether prescriptions for drugs should be written in the state language – Latvian. Some laugh, others are horrified, others seriously argue that it should be done that way. I wish things were the way they used to be: applicants to the Academy of Medicine had to pass an entrance examination in Latin after having studied it for four years in secondary school. Then Latin would not be included in the medical school curriculum, and the time could be given to other subjects, such as medical terminology.

Medical historians must write a general history of medicine in Latvian. And when we become the first to write a decent medical history in the entire ex-Soviet Union, I hope that it will be translated into Russian.

J.S. Perhaps it will be translated into the other major European languages?

K.A. I don't think it would tell them anything new, only that which they themselves have not considered: the place of medicine in Russia and the countries it occupied in the general context. That's the place for Latvian medical history and the history of Latvian medical sciences. We have to

remember that we cannot throw out the grain with the chaff which was the Soviet chaff. We ourselves have carefully nurtured grain in that system.

J.S. But will it be our generation to do this? Perhaps a history of medicine will be written by Dr. Viksna or Dr. Salaks. But how to conclude our conversation? We could get drunk tonight, complain of what hasn't been done. Or we might say that history is a grand stage. There will be new plays, new actors, new audiences. There will be a new age, and someone will do what we did not manage.

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