

## EDITORIAL

# Reflections on the First Centenary of *Actas*

I am sincerely grateful for the telephone call from Esteban Daudén, current editor of *Actas Dermosifiliográficas*, telling me that on the occasion of the first 100 years of the publication they wanted to publish some notes on the past and present of this venerable and beloved Journal, also asking me to contribute some comments arising from my many years participating in its publication. My friendship with and fondness for Esteban Daudén—a most worthy third-generation representative of a line of brilliant dermatologists—obliges me to respond favorably to his request.

I think I can divide this humble contribution into 2 parts: the first on the journal itself; and the second—undoubtedly the more original—on the personalities of the magnates of Spanish Dermatology in the late 50s and 60s of last century. Their clinical work and research was published almost exclusively in *Actas*, maintaining both the scientific interest and continuity of the readership.

On the subject of the journal itself, I can only provide a testament of my admiration. Those of us aware of the serious problems of all kinds that have faced the journal over these 100 years, and lucky enough to be able to hold the first issue of 1909 one hand and Volume 100 of 2009 in the other, feel we are witness to a genuine miracle of survival.

*Actas* was born from the need to disseminate the teachings of the recently founded Spanish Academy of Dermatology, where a group of enthusiastic dermatologists met monthly to discuss problems arising from the diagnosis and treatment of patients, generally from the Hospital San Juan de Dios, in the past month. It soon became clear that these teachings should be extended to other specialists unable to attend the meeting personally. Several academics were appointed to take written notes on everything that was discussed at the meetings—the Records Clerks—producing the raw material for the journal.

These first issues undoubtedly required the investment of a great deal of effort by the enthusiastic group of academics working on the journal, even if today they look almost like a poorly distributed parish magazine shared by a select group of friends. I will not go into the historical details, for they have already been fully described by Dr del Río in Issue 1 of Volume 100 with his characteristic clarity and attention to detail.

Similarly, it is the work of Conejo-Mir, Daudén and other contributors that make up the journal of today and guide future plans for *Actas*.

While the inception was difficult enough 100 years ago, the present-day situation is just as complicated, if not

more so, for the current team of Daudén, Isabel Longo, Diego de Argila, and José Manuel Carrascosa; for they are responsible for maintaining and improving a journal that has already achieved high quality presentation, extremely broad international dissemination and strict selection criteria for articles. It is precisely these elements that encourage many prestigious Spanish and international specialists to choose this publication in which to present their work, gaining the same guarantees offered by the leading European or American journals.

In the second part of my reflections, I thought it would be more original to make some observations on the personalities of the 3 leading lights of Spanish Dermatology between 1950 and 1975. It was they, and their schools, that provided the scientific works published in *Actas* and we must thank them, retrospectively, for their valuable contributions.

The 3 lead players were Professors José Gay Prieto, José Gómez Orbaneja, and Xavier Vilanova. Perhaps the following anecdotes will provide some insight to the particular nature of each of them.

Professor Gay emanated distant power with a personal presence that could fill any arena. He was of medium height and always elegantly turned out in a silk shirt and crocodile shoes, but all of his communications with the Academy were received in silence as no one would dare contradict him, except for some member of the Orbaneja school. The brilliance of his interventions was comparable to his impressive imaginative mind.

This is clearly demonstrated in the following anecdote. In the International Congress in Munich in 1967, Gay gave a presentation on vasculitis—a key issue of the time. Some moments before making his presentation, over coffee, he asked Dr Jaqueti, his assistant at the time: “Well Gerardo; what do you think about this vasculitis business?” Dr Jaqueti grabbed a pen and paper and sketched out a brilliant diagram that Dr Gay glanced at for some seconds and then placed in his pocket. As the presentation opened, Gay let the other 3 delegates speak first. He listened attentively without taking notes and when his turn came, he gave the best lesson ever on this complicated issue without so much as a prompt card. Both Jaqueti and I, who were with him at the conference, were warmly congratulated for being under the tutelage of such an illustrious teacher. At the same meeting José Gay was appointed president of the International Committee of Dermatology—the most important role in international dermatology. He either did not know how to, or did not want to, create a large school and Professor Jaqueti was practically his sole heir.

I had no dealings with professor Orbaneja, but although clearly less brilliant, he was better able to pass all his knowledge on to his many protégés, showing great interest in helping them on to university posts and greater prestige. Examples of these include Professors Quiñones and García Pérez, Antonio Ledo, Luis Iglesias, Amaro García, and the many others who maintained and increased the prestige of his school.

It was Professor Xavier Vilanova who I knew best, as I was Secretary of *Actas* when he was president of the Spanish Academy. Throughout the years of his presidency he arrived punctually once a month in Madrid to preside over the monthly session of the Academy. He stayed at the Hotel Palace and, as editor in chief; I picked him up from the hotel in my modest Renault to take him to the Academy headquarters in Sandoval street.

During the trip he often took me into his confidence and was always especially affable. I have a few anecdotes from these trips, but the one that best portrays his sense of humor took place as he ran into a Catalan friend also staying at the hotel one afternoon. As is usual in our specialty, the Catalan cornered him to ask a question: "Xavier, please take a look at this wart and tell me what you think." Xavier donned his glasses and said: "I can't see it too well, but I don't like it at all. When you get to Barcelona come and see me." As soon as we were alone, Xavier turned to me and said: "He'll never pay me for that consultation, but he won't sleep tonight either."

Xavier Vilanova maintained the great prestige of Spanish Dermatology, spreading its reputation across France and the rest of Europe. This prestige has been maintained and undoubtedly increased by his many protégés including Joaquín Piñol and José Cabré, who both passed away prematurely, and José María Mascaró, a youngster still standing his ground.

But aside from these glimpses into the personalities of the 3 masters—the influence of whose labors have been clearly seen in this journal—we would like to stress how the history of dermatology is also reflected in *Actas*. The first issues simply covered cases of clinical diagnosis and the rudiments of local treatment. These were followed, in the late 40s by the first publications of the systemic treatments that were to change the specialty. Penicillin was used for syphilis, antibiotic treatments for gonococcal and nongonococcal urethritis, and griseofulvin against dermatophytes, while corticosteroids were to change the prognoses of diseases such as bullous dermatoses and collagenopathies. The transforming influence of these treatments can be reviewed historically by leafing through our Journal.

The success of these treatments led to the almost total eradication of the infectious contagious diseases that had provided doctors with most of their dermatological cases. This reduction of the range of illnesses was compounded by dermatologists defending themselves poorly against the inroads of other specialties like rheumatology, clinical microbiology, and oncology. This pressure further reduced the traditional range of illnesses, leaving a large gap for new techniques such as dermatological surgery—an area initiated by Dr Dulanto and his protégés Armijo and Camacho whose work is very well reflected in the pages of *Actas*.

More recently, *Actas* has also borne witness to the arrival of dermocosmetics, with a range of infiltrations and laser treatments that have made dermatological practice more profitable. But this is another form of dermatology. Dermatology is dead, long live dermatology.

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