

One hundred years Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry—A treasure trove of German-speaking neurology

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Abstract

The Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry was founded in 1917 by Constantin von Monakow (1853–1930), the first professor of neurology at the University of Zurich and founder of the Swiss Neurological Society. The carefully bound booklets of these Archives are to be found completely in the scientific library of the Psychiatric University Hospital Burghölzli in Zürich. It is hoped that this treasure trove of knowledge will be preserved for all those interested in the history of neurology and psychiatry in its integrity. Today's work in and on this archives allows time and again to bring out older works and to present them in the light of more modern concepts. Of medical–historical interest is also the category of obituaries, occurring in almost all issues, virtually a “Who's Who” of neurologists and psychiatrists who have laid the foundations for our subjects.

Keywords

History of neurology, swiss archives of neurology and psychiatry, constantin von monakow

Working in our Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry is very fascinating: Constantin von Monakow (1853–1930)^{1,2} founded it in 1917 and published it at the renowned Orell-Füssli publishing house in Zurich in an outstanding quality of typography and printing. He was the first professor of neurology at the University of Zurich after having spent particularly fruitful years at the Psychiatric Clinic St Priminsberg in Pfäfers, Canton St Gallen.^{3–5} He also was a founder of the Swiss Neurological Society in 1907/8 and its first President.⁶ The carefully bound booklets of our Archives can be found completely in the scientific library of the Psychiatric University Hospital Burghölzli in Zürich, Switzerland (Psychiatric University Hospital Zurich, Scientific Library B Z 52; the signature may probably change as the library will be moved).

It is hoped that this treasure trove of knowledge will be preserved for all those interested in the history of neurology and psychiatry in its entirety. A detailed account of the history of contributions to these volumes is provided by Valko et al.⁷ This organ of publication was particularly important for the neurologists and psychiatrists from

Germany in the difficult times, when it was not possible for them to publish freely in their Reich.

The volumes of bound booklets of the Archives contain fundamental, detailed essays on topics that are as important and significant today as they were then: for example, “Bleuler Eugen: The Psychological Direction in Psychiatry 1918 II (2), 270–304”; “Von Monakow Constantin: Psychiatry and Biology 1920 IV (1) 13–44; IV (2): 235–276,” in which we can follow up on the developments of the thoughts of these two Zurich faculty colleagues. This holds true also in the critically stimulating review and discussion of a book of the one by the other: “Review C. von Monakow: Eugen Bleuler: The autistic – and undisciplined thinking in medicine and its overcoming, Critical

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discussion together with own psychological – biological considerations 1920; VII (1): 167–186.” Unfortunately, such “autistic-undisciplined thinking” is rampant still today or probably even more so, and therefore it is still worthwhile to study such works. Of course, there were also aberrations that one should not be afraid to thinking about, for example, “Rochus Thürlimann: On the Indication and Therapeutic Success of Castration in Sexual Perverts 1946; LVII: 153–206.” Today, one should certainly no longer call psychiatry colleagues “aliens,” as was then the official term: “Contribution à l’Histoire de la Société des Médecin Alienistes Suisses 1864–1919. Archives Suisse de neurologie et de Psychiatrie, vol. VII, 2, 1920, pp. 354–356.”

Today’s neurologists working in medico-legal expertises can also profitably refer to the statements made at the time of the assessment of complex neurological-psychiatric problems: “Von Monakow C: Glioma & craniocerebral trauma. Expert report 1924; XIV: 289–300”; or “On accident neurosis 1926; XVIII: 284–322.” After the convulsions of the First World War, it is possible to reconstruct something of the transformation of the classical neurologist von Monakow into a differentiated (even somewhat resigned) philosopher: “Syneidesis, the biological conscience of 1927; XX: 56–91.”

There are also texts in our Archives that deal with general culture-related topics such as: “Demole V: Analysis psychiatrique of the Confessions de Jean Jacques Rousseau 1918 II (2), 270–304.” Particularly detailed and profound: Ludwig Binswanger from Kreuzlingen: “The problem of language and thought 1926; XVIII: 247–283” or his analytic presentation of the legendary “Fall West” over hundreds of pages in various sections. Ludwig Binswanger (the Younger: 1881–1966) came from the widely ramified Swiss psychiatrist family Binswanger. He was one of the founders of the important “Daseins-Analysis,” a combination of psychoanalysis and existential philosophy, and was one of the leading intellectual personalities in our country from an early age. Personally, he was guided by the principle of his father, not to be constraint by any scientific “school” and by no dogma to remain open and free of ideological and scientific ties. The Binswangers also took liberal views when treating mentally ill persons, while on the other hand, they showed a high degree of respect and understanding for the individuality of their patients.

The Archives was a multilingual journal, for example: “Minganazzi G: Contributo clinico e anatomo-patologico allo studio delle afasie musicali e transcorticali 1919 III (2) 210–233,” as it was customary at that time that all participants to scientific meetings in Switzerland were allowed to speak and talk in their mother tongue and could expect to be understood by their colleagues from other parts of the country. For supporters of the International Committee of the Red Cross,⁸ who are nowadays active worldwide, a psychiatric analysis of prisoners of war in Switzerland during the First World War will be of interest: “Repond A:

L’hystérie chez les prisonniers de guerre en Suisse. 1919 III (1): 128–146.” Colleagues working nowadays in current situations with war traumatized persons are only too painfully aware of those challenges.

Renowned basic scientists also published in our Archives. Particularly noteworthy: Walter Rudolf Hess (1981–1973), the later Nobel laureate, who described his fundamental and far-sighted views on the functions of the vegetative nervous system for the first time here: “Hess WR: On the Physiology of the Vasomotors 1924; XIV: 20–29; On the interrelations between psychic and vegetative functions 1924; XV: 260–277; 1925: XVI: 36–55 and 285–306” and then summarized much later on: “The Vegetative Nervous System – Questions of Organization, Terms and Names” 1943; 50: 88–92. A later Editor of the Archives, which changed its name into Swiss Archives of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry, Professor Hugo Krayenbühl (1902–1985), had explained his groundbreaking habilitation thesis, published by Thieme-Verlag Stuttgart, in great detail here in the Archives “The cerebral aneurysm 1941; XLVII: 155–236” and his longtime colleague and deputy at the Neurosurgical Clinic in Zurich, the esteemed Gerhard Weber (1914–2009), had published his first work (still from the Pathology Institute of the University of Basel) on a very unusual case here: “On the simultaneous occurrence of symmetric brain tumor and syringomyelia in 1944; LIV: 240–248.”

Today’s work in and on this Archives also allows time and again to bring out older works and present them in the light of more modern concepts.^{9–11} Of medical–historical interest is also category of obituaries in almost all issues of the Swiss Archives, which is virtually a “Who’s Who” of neurologists and psychiatrists who have laid the foundations for our subjects.

When reading our Archives, one is always reminded of Plato: “Amazement is the attitude of a man who truly loves wisdom, indeed, there is no other beginning of philosophy than this.” (Plato: Theaetetos 155 d), and his student Aristotle also took it over: “the beginning of wisdom is wonder,” which places an emphasis on astonishment. And it is pleasing to note that as today’s neurologists and psychiatrists in Switzerland, we can stand on the shoulders of giants¹²—acknowledging, however, that this might be seen as a problematic metaphor when hagiography is not considered a valid approach to important sources in medical history. Respect to the work of colleagues means to trace their thoughts and decisions within their historical context and to analyze their work as it stands and compare it only in relation to the point of view of the achievements of their successors.


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