



In Memoriam

Robert de Marneffe (1919-2007)



Robert de Marneffe passed away on 28 August 2007. Many of us have met him through his various activities, but few of us know the multiple facets of his commitment to Orthopaedics and Traumatology.

His antecedents are not foreign to his vocation. In 1916, his father, a regimental doctor, inaugurated the Anglo-Belgian Hospital which was the Belgian Army's centre of orthopaedics and physiotherapy in the South East of Rouen during the first World War. He was the Hospital Director and managed it with

the assistance of Ms Loveday for medical gymnastics and pedagogical gymnastics. She became his wife and Robert de Marneffe was born on 1 September 1919.

Robert de Marneffe graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of Brussels University in 1945. He began his training in surgery at the Saint Pierre University Hospital, which was attended by Robert Danis at that time. He had a special interest in orthopaedics and worked on a thesis entitled "Morphologic and experimental study on bone vascularisation". He gained his PhD in 1951 and, in the same year, he was appointed Assistant in the Surgery Department of Saint Pierre Hospital and later Associate from 1956 to 1962 and Senior Associate from 1962 to 1964. At the request of Jean van Geertruyden, Head of the Surgery Department at Brugmann Hospital, he left Saint Pierre Hospital for Brugmann Hospital serving as the acting Senior Associate from 1965 to 1967 and as Head of the Bone Surgery Department from 1967 to 1984 when he retired.

He organised his Department surrounded by assistants who went on to become successful surgeons: Franz Burny later took charge of the Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology of the Brussels University (ULB) Clinics at Erasmus Hospital; Jacques Wagner succeeded Robert when he took charge of the Orthopaedic Clinic at Brugmann Hospital; and Pierre Opdecam headed the Orthopaedic Department at the Academic Hospital of Brussels University (V.U.B.). Over the course of his career, Robert de Marneffe modernised several tools/equipment and techniques. He became one of the first in Belgium to routinely perform total hip arthroplasty, an operation which was considered daring at the time. Those who had the opportunity

to be part of his team will remember his technical inventions such as the Bosworth technique adjusted by de Marneffe or the Bankart repair procedure done through the armpit ! By adopting unambiguous positions such as “Jean (van Geertruyden), you have your style, I have mine !”, he contributed to making orthopaedics more and more independent within the General Surgery Department.

As regards teaching, Robert de Marneffe was appointed lecturer in 1962. He contributed to the academic recognition of the Orthopaedics and Traumatology course, and a specialty degree was introduced for the first time at Brussels University in 1962-1963. He presided over it first as part of a triumvirate which also included André Danis and Marcel van der Ghinst and then alone from 1980 onwards.

He recommended a collegial management structure of the degree programme, to which he associated all the trainee supervisors of the Hospitals network of ULB in order to ensure plural and diversified training. To achieve these objectives, the “College of Orthopaedic Surgery” (CELO) was created. In 1985, he proposed establishing the teaching program which would limit training in general surgery to two years followed by purely orthopaedic training for four years. In 1986, he was succeeded by F. Burny as President of the Graduate Programme. When the Higher Institute of Physical Education and Kinesitherapy of Brussels University was founded, he was also active as a lecturer in orthopaedic pathology.

R. de Marneffe’s written works deal with various subjects in particular fields, such as hip surgery, bone vascularisation, injury and invalidity assessments and, more recently, a collection of portrayals of great figures in the history of bone surgery and Belgian medicine, such as Albin Lambotte, Robert Danis, Albert Hustin, Antoine Depage and Louis Seutin. He published a “History of the Belgian Society of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology” in *Acta Orthopaedica Belgica* in 1998.

After his retirement, he remained active in the field of bodily injury assessment and appraisal. Always ensuring that everyone assumed his respon-

sibility, he went so far as to impute 7% liability to a patient who had chosen an incompetent surgeon !

He was a particularly active member of the Belgian Society of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology. He was its Treasurer from 1959 to 1975, Second Vice-President in 1976, First Vice-President in 1977 and President in 1978 (one of the longest terms in office, 19 years). In 1964, the Society entrusted him with writing its annual report : “Surgical treatment of coxarthrosis”, a large part of which emphasized the work of Pauwels and which also highlighted his interest in prosthetic replacement.

In 1978, he was the President of the Society’s Congress which was mainly dedicated to the new acquisitions within orthopaedic diagnostic techniques. He held at that time an informal congress of the European Society for Biomaterials, the first Congress of the European Society of Biomaterials held jointly with the Vth Symposium of the Interdisciplinary Centre of Bone Biomechanics (CIBO).

He became a member of SICOT in 1957 and Secretary General after the Paris Congress in 1966, succeeding Bailleux. He remained in this role until 1984, when he was elected President at the London Congress. He made his mark on the Society at an important turning point in its evolution. He contributed to updating the Statutes, facilitating access to SICOT for orthopaedists from all over the world. In 1989, on the 60th anniversary of SICOT, he published a collection of founding texts.

Robert de Marneffe was also a titular member of the Belgian Royal Academy of Medicine from 1988 onwards.

With the death of Robert de Marneffe, we have lost a great figure of Belgian and International Orthopaedics, who has left his mark in widely varied domains during a period when our specialty has experienced an extremely rapid and productive growth.

Franz Burny

Maurice Hinsenkamp