

Preface

The five hundredth birthday of Vesalius in 2014 may not pass by without paying him adequate homage.

Indeed, such event precedes the start of World War I by four hundred years.

Of course both these commemorations cannot be compared: the cruelty of an all-destroying war has nothing to do with a person, who is largely responsible for the development of present-day medical thinking.

Yet the year 1514 remains exceptional. On the last day of that year someone was born who, thanks to his intelligence, courage, indefatigable diligence and perseverance, was heralding a re-ovation, a 'rebirth' of the basic principle of our health care, namely the knowledge of our own human body.

Such knowledge is now taken for granted: from primary school onwards our youth gets informed about their organs and tissues, their physical and psychic capacities, their muscle activities during sporting exercise, the advantages and drawbacks of various foods for their general health and performances, etc.

When Andreas Vesalius was born, December 31st, 1514, European citizens at that time had other problems to think about.

In the forefront stood the political struggles between the rulers of that time: Charles V, François I, Henry VIII, and Süleyman I, who

brought death and destruction on the European battle fields.

Secondly, economical disaster years with bad harvests and floods afflicted the precarious balance of the mainly rural populations.

Next, the rise of alternative religious movements induced continuous religion wars and persecutions, which led to peoples' migration, inquisition and terror, that would for ages disrupt intercultural relations and tolerance between nations and individuals.

On top of that, diseases and epidemics ravaged the population. The plague repeatedly continued to cause razzias amidst urban populations. New diseases such as the English sweating sickness or syphilis created great distress in different countries through their acute, respectively chronic fatal disease evolution.

In such a mind of era that is scarcely understandable for us, Andries van Wesel would change one's tack and announce a renewal, that up till now throws off his fruits.

Vesalius's main work, his 'Opus Magnum', the *Fabrica*, continues to influence our health care as the basis of anatomy, the foundation of medicine, without which no new vision on actual health care would be possible.

In this book different authors discuss the personality of Vesalius, as well as his 'arts' and achievements, which contributed to this medical evolution.

In particular the intimate relationship is stressed between science and art, which since antiquity represented the integration of medical art and medical science, the so-called *Ars Medica*.

By attracting the very gifted draughtsman Jan van Calcar to help him realize the *Fabrica*, Vesalius produced a universal Canon for physicians and artists.

The Renaissance provided the ideal medium: in art as well as in science new ideas evolved, new ways of expression were found, a new freedom of thinking became apparent, a renewed look on the basis of our human existence was searched for, in particular our own human body.

That the artistic angle to evaluate Vesalius' anatomy is not really new, is proven by the various publications issued in relation to Vesalius' 450th birthday in 1964. Renowned scholars as O'Malley, Cushing, Lindeboom, and later also Huard & Imbault-Huart already stressed the extraordinary qualities of the prints of Vesalius' *Fabrica*.

This book continues this path, but tries to reveal and establish new connections and ideas concerning the art of Vesalius, as a result of the renewed interest, shown by artists and scientists in the figure of Vesalius in our twenty-first century.

The recent translations of the *Fabrica* into English, and of the *Epitome* into French, have no doubt contributed to this revival. As never before, scholars and artists reading Vesalius' texts in modern vernacular languages and looking at the images, now can comprehend, evaluate and ... praise the outstanding qualities, of the text as well as of the illustrations of Vesalius' works.

When in 1914 the first World War eclipsed the upcoming commemoration of the 400th birthday of Vesalius and transformed it into roaring canons and flooded trenches, when in 1943 the same happened during World War II for the commemoration of the 400 year old edition of the *Fabrica*, everybody hoped to once see the day of commemoration of Vesalius' 500th birthday.

This book wants to provide a contribution to this event. Internationally known scholars with a particular expertise in Vesalius all collaborated and succeeded in this enterprise. I am deeply indebted to them.

May this book not only glorify the fame of a Brabanter, a Brussels citizen, Andries van Wesel, and thereby mirror his 2004 election as one of the most famous Belgians, but also contribute to his worldwide recognition as a founding father of our present-day health care.

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