

– OBITUARY –

In Memoriam Herman Musaph

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On the 18th of November 1992 Herman Musaph, psychiatrist and sexologist, died in his home town Amsterdam, The Netherlands. A prominent colleague and a beloved man passed away.

Herman Musaph was born in 1915 as the eldest son of orthodox Jewish parents. He studied medicine at the University of Amsterdam, and in 1940 he started practice as a general practitioner. In the same year The Netherlands were brutally invaded by the Germans. A long period of suppression and terror started, in particular for the Jewish community. His father, his mother, his younger brother and his sister were murdered by the German Nazis. Musaph survived as the only member of his family.

After the war he specialized in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. He became a versatile doctor and an outstanding lecturer, and he distinguished himself in the fields of sexology, psychotraumatology, and psychodermatology. Predominant in all his work is his passionate appeal for the development and the protection of a harmonious emotional life.

By organizing yearly conferences on sexology he strongly contributed to the further education of hundreds of physicians. He published on childhood and adolescent sexology, on touching and intimacy, and on sexual dysfunctions such



*Professor Herman Musaph*

as male impotence, vaginism, and dyspareunia. A year of great significance was 1977. Musaph was appointed Professor in Medical Sexology at the State University of Utrecht, and in the same year his “Handbook of Sexology” came out. This extensive handbook, edited together with the American sexologist John Money, became well known among clinical professionals and has been translated in many languages.

In the field of psychotraumatology – through psychotherapeutic, publicistic and executive work – he greatly enlarged the understanding of long-term psychosocial implications of World War II, for instance in his publications on the “Second and Third Generation” and on “Anniversary Disease”. In a prominent way he was able to elucidate how this tragedy of repression and terror affects daily life in contemporary society.

From 1951 onwards Herman Musaph was consulting psychiatrist at the Department of Dermatology of the University of Amsterdam, where – later on – he became Head of the Department of Psychodermatology. Here, for many years, he worked with enthusiasm, creativity and an enormous productivity. He started at a time when psychosomatic medicine was in the focus of the interest. The knowledge and understanding of emotional factors in skin diseases was limited, the results of psychosomatic research in general were promising, and the expectations about the results of psychosomatic research in dermatology were high.

Musaph’s psychoanalytic background enabled him to develop a thorough understanding of emotional factors in skin diseases. He published on the role of aggression in self-induced conditions, such as dermatitis artefacta and trichotillomania, on emotional conflicts in psychogenic pruritis, and on defense mechanisms in psoriasis. He was particularly interested in itching states and scratching behaviour. In 1974 an important and comprehensive study on “Itching and Scratching, Psychodynamics in Dermatology” was published.

Whereas others used the name “psychosomatic dermatology” or “psychocutaneous medicine”, Musaph used the word “psychodermatology”. In a brilliant study on its history (1974) he described psychodermatology as the study of psychological variables related to the onset, cause and treatment of a dermatosis. In teaching psychodermatology Musaph made use of beautiful anecdotes, metaphores and lots of humor to illustrate complicated psychological mechanisms. Although he primarily studied psychopathological aspects of skin diseases, he always emphasized the psychological meaning of the skin in normal personal development, especially the meaning of skin contact, touching, and intimate behaviour. In many ways he pointed out that skin contact between mother and child is essential for a healthy emotional life.

Herman Musaph, Nestor of Psychodermatology, enjoyed the renewed interest in psychodermatology in the late eighties and nineties. In 1987, the first International Conference on Dermatology and Psychiatry was held in Vienna, to be followed by Conferences in Leeds, Florence and Philadelphia. In many countries, The Netherlands included, societies were founded. Initiatives were taken to raise a European Society for Dermatology and Psychiatry, as well as an Association for Psychocutaneous Medicine of North America. He enjoyed very much the contacts with his colleagues and friends. Until the very last moment he was ac-

tively involved in psychodermatology: he died shortly after an ESDAP-meeting in Paris, and a few days before a symposium on psychodermatology in Amsterdam. His life-work is handed over to a new generation of psychodermatologists.

John de Korte, psychologist

Dept. of Psychodermatology, Academic Medical Centre, Amsterdam

**Herman Musaph, January 7, 1915 – November 18, 1992**

“That Which Hath Been Is Now,  
And That Which Is To Be Hath Already Been,  
And God Requireth That Which Is Past”

Koheleth (Ecclesiastes) 3, 15

Herman was a good and faithful friend to many of us and a great supporter of the International Society of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (ISPPM) and the International Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (former International Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Studies).

I was privileged to enjoy Herman’s confidence and my personal meetings and long and deep talks with him have been a very important source of inspiration and insight. He advised me as a dear and loyal friend and elderly colleague in many important matters concerning the Society and the Journal. He faithfully stood by me in sunny days and cloudy days.

His contribution to understanding the significance of the prenatal and perinatal processes as the indivisible continuity of human life essentially influenced the developing of the new scientific theory of prenatal and perinatal psychology and medicine.

Professor Musaph was the first who proved the essential importance of the early mother-child skin contact for the child’s healthy psychological and sexual development. He also stressed the mother-father-infant triad in a broader social and cultural context. In this Journal (*Int. J. Prenatal Perinatal Studies* (1989) **1**, 181–185) he described the early interaction in the human bonding process and the secret language between mothers and their unborn babies.

In all his writings and his lectures Herman showed his everlasting deep and true humanity and loving sympathy to the creatures of God. Herman will always be with us and his legacy will continuously influence our thoughts, our feelings and our work.

We thank Herman for everything he gave us and we always will treasure the light he created.

Peter G. Fedor-Freybergh