
History of Contemporary Medicine in Iran

Professor Werner Dutz (1928 – 1984)

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Figure 1. Professor Werner Dutz (1928 – 1984).

Professor Werner Felix Dutz (Figure 1), an Austrian pathologist, joined the faculty of the School of Medicine of Shiraz University in southern Iran in 1959. He and his wife, Dr. Elfriede Kohout, also a pathologist, had come to Iran for only a two-year appointment at an

academic institution in a Third World Country, to meet the existing requirements for eligibility of immigrant status in the U.S. They stayed for fifteen years until 1974, when they left for America and subsequently joined the University of Vienna, Professor Dutz's alma mater. Werner died unexpectedly of a heart attack in Vienna in 1984.

After World War II, many scientists, medical or nonmedical, from Europe or America, ventured across the globe to transfer their skill and knowledge abroad, in return for the satisfaction of having served where they were needed. Upon returning home, they would usually close that chapter of their life by publishing fascinating accounts of their sojourn overseas. Werner Dutz's undertaking was an altogether different proposition. He belonged to a very rare and special class of scientist – travelers.

In the early 1960s the city of Shiraz had a population of less than half a million. And the University of Shiraz happened to be in the grips of a tense local political turmoil. It was the ancient and universal confrontation between an established system run by the old guard not willing to abandon its privileges, and a younger generation intent on displacing them. It took almost a decade before the local administrative and political drama in Shiraz was played out by contending forces. Remarkably, in the end a vigorous and high-quality educational institution had evolved. There can be no question that Werner Dutz played a pivotal role in this often painful, but nevertheless successful transformation. His success rested in three special attributes of his:

a) He was a ranking medical scientist. Not only did he create single-handedly a superb department of pathology where none existed before, but by the time he left he had also performed over 4000 well-documented autopsies. This was a remarkable feat, considering that postmortem examinations were almost unthinkable in the socio-cultural settings of

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Shiraz of the 1960s. Werner performed his autopsies under stressful conditions in a small abandoned shed outside a collapsed building, never dissuaded by lack of facilities or assistance. He then held regular meetings for medical students and residents to discuss his findings, making his pathology sessions a favorite teaching exercise at the Medical School. He was a truly classic pathologist, strongly influenced by the world renowned Viennese School of Pathology of late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Not satisfied with following in the footsteps of Rudolf Virchow and Chiari, Jr. Werner Dutz ventured into such new fields as Mediterranean lymphoma, subsequently renamed as “immunoproliferative small intestinal disease” or IPSID by WHO. He became an internationally recognized investigator of *Pneumocystis carinii*,¹ a type of pneumonia that took its toll among newborns and children at the Shiraz Orphanage. This led to Werner’s postulating some novel views about the role of immunity in modulating thymolympathic factors operating in the clinico-pathologic picture he was observing. He was deeply interested in echinococcal disease. It was he who one day, in passing, suggested the application of silver nitrate solution as an effective scolicidal agent. No safer and more effective agent for this parasitic condition has yet been proposed.

Without a deep devotion to scientific progress and an equally intense fondness to impart his knowledge to younger generation, it would have been impossible for Werner Dutz to command the respect needed to carry on his self-appointed tasks. The large number of publications he turned out during his years in Shiraz, attest to his formidable scientific productivity. We have purposefully chosen three papers among the long list of his many scientific publications,¹⁻³ as those in which we had the honor of being Professor Dutz’s co-authors, allowing us to reminisce about a stalwart friend, and a dedicated scientist.

b) Visiting scientists usually do not involve themselves in the day to day administrative affairs carried out in local settings, and usually in traditional ways. Werner became wholeheartedly a part of the game and took an uncompromising stand when it came to defend academic standards. This attitude was of enormous help in guiding the medical school through its formative stages. It also explained the reason for him prolonging his stay year after year, as he would not abandon any experiment halfway. He felt, and was fully

accepted as part of the whole undertaking. He could have easily taken a back seat on the perfectly logical pretense that he was a foreigner, hence an outsider. He had a mission to accomplish, one that had to be taken to its end, simply because of his strong belief in basic principles and ethical guidelines underpinning any self-respecting and progressive educational institution.

c) A measure of a true intellectual is the depth and breadth of the person’s curiosity about his or her surroundings. Visiting scientists coming to Shiraz are invariably fascinated by the ruins of nearby Persepolis. Werner Dutz went beyond such first impressions, and developed a deep interest in Iran’s ancient history and the wealth of archaeological remains around Shiraz. His attraction to Iran’s ancient grandeur was genuine, culminating in a beautifully illustrated atlas-type of guidebook to Persepolis (Figure 2).

On many weekends Werner would, at personal expense, take a dozen or so of his technicians on a bus tour to the ancient Sasanian site called Bishapur. There he would climb to the top of a small hill overlooking the whole landscape. He would then summon in turn each of the young people to stand next to him on the small flat space

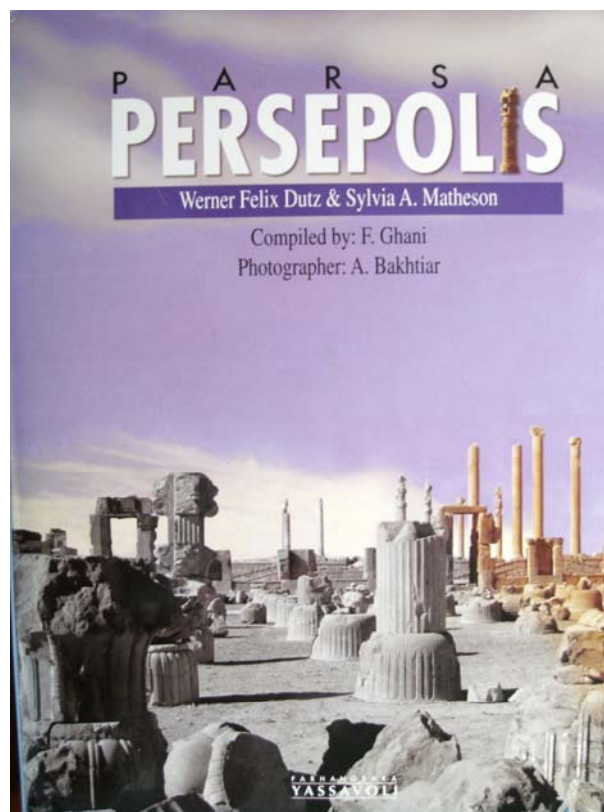


Figure 2. The front cover of Guidebook to Persepolis written by Dr. Dutz.

available, pointing out to each the important archaeological features of the site. He would punctuate his description with the encouraging phrase: “Now that you have seen what your ancestors did, you better go and see what *you* can do for your country.... who is next...?”

He understood Iranians, and felt no contradiction between their culture and their scientific endeavor.

It is almost quarter of a century since Werner Dutz passed away in his home town in Vienna. Things in Shiraz have moved forward at great speed and the population has risen to nearly three million. There are still many people who fondly remember the Dutz family. And Werner's indispensable contributions to Shiraz University will not be forgotten by generation of students he taught and residents he trained. What definitely set him apart from all other foreign medical scientists who came to Shiraz to help the University in its formative years, was Werner's insistence on doing

everything in a thorough way and regardless of circumstances. He showed that he could meet local adversities and frustrations-reserved usually for returning native sons and daughters-with grace and magnanimity.

This is an inadequate expression of admiration and gratitude for a true scientist and a righteous man who followed his high moral principles, and was guided by a genuine and selfless desire to be part of valuable educational project in a distant land.

References

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Khaju Bridge over Zayendeh Rood River, Isfahan, Iran. This bridge which is 110 meters long and 20 meters wide was built in the reign of Shah Abbas II between 1642 and 1667 A.D. (photo by M.H. Azizi MD)