

Laudatio Prof. Dr. Johann Schaeffer

Piet Deprez

In the song “Tomorrow people” by Ziggy Marley there is a line that says: “If you don’t know your past, you don’t know your future”.

As veterinarians and scientists we try to keep up with the exponentially expanding scientific knowledge and every day we are busy looking for the latest publications. In doing so we tend to look somewhat down on the “old” literature.

And this is wrong. There are several examples of knowledge that has been lost or forgotten over the course of the years and suddenly reappears as a “new” discovery. Perhaps we forget to soon certain findings or thoughts from the past, or don’t learn enough from the discoveries and evolutions in the past.

Remember: If you don’t know your past, you don’t know your future

But there is hope. We have guardians, we have guardians of the past. And today we have such a guardian amongst us: prof. Johann Schaeffer.

Prof. Johann Schaeffer holds the chair for history of veterinary medicine and domestic animals, “Geschichte der Veterinärmedizin und der Haustiere”, at the University of veterinary medicine in Hannover.

We don’t have such a chair in our faculty. Many, if not most, veterinary faculties around the world do not have such a chair. Therefore, prof. Johann Schaeffer is a very important person, a VIP, for our profession.

And to thank and honour such persons, we have the George Sarton medals. In remembrance of the work of George Sarton, the University of Ghent

awards every year a medal to a select group of persons who have contributed, on an academic level, to the discipline of the history of science.

Today we are here to present this prestigious medal to prof. Johann Schaeffer, who has devoted his career to the history of veterinary medicine.

Prof. Schaeffer was born in 1952 in Munich and graduated as a veterinarian, "Tierarzt" in Germany, in 1979.

He was immediately fascinated by the past and started in 1980 as a researcher in the "Institut für Palaeoanatomie, Domestikationsforschung und Geschichte der Tiermedizin" in Munich, where he obtained his "promotion" (Ph.D.) in 1981 with a dissertation on the recipes in the *Corpus Hippiatricorum Graecorum*, an ancient collection of texts about equine medicine.

He continued his research in this field and obtained his "Habilitation" (D.Sc.) in 1990 with a thesis on "Animal birth and obstetrics in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. In German this sounds like: "Tiergeburt und Tiergeburtschilfe im Alten Mesopotamien und Ägypten".

In 1991 he became a professor in the history of veterinary medicine, and after a short stay in Munich, he moved to Hannover where he is still working at this moment.

Prof. Schaeffer is an academic, that means that he combines many activities.

First of all, he is a teacher, an enthusiastic teacher on the history of veterinary medicine and domestic animals, on medical terminology and also on professional administration and legislation.

Secondly, he is an organizer. He runs the department of history of veterinary medicine and he is also in charge of the archives of the university and especially of the Museum for the history of veterinary medicine. In times where money becomes increasingly difficult to find, he managed to expand this museum from the traditional small and dark room to an entire building. Next to these activities, he has organized numerous congresses and exhibitions to promote his favorite topic outside his faculty and outside his country.

But most of all, he is a researcher. His long list of publications, close to 200, can vouch for that. Additionally, he has supervised approximately 100

dissertations. He has published on all aspects of the history of veterinary medicine: for example the evolution of obstetrics in large animals is a topic that he has elaborated and nourished throughout the years and in which he has become a leading expert.

Currently he is devoting all his spare time to the redaction of his “magnum opus”, as he likes to call it, namely a complete inventory of the history of veterinary medicine, called: “Chronik des Tiermedizin: Ein Wegweiser durch fünf Jahrtausende”. A work we are of course all impatiently awaiting.

From early on in his professional career, prof. Schaeffer has also developed a keen interest in animal welfare, its evolution throughout time and the lessons we can learn from achievements and failures in the past.

Especially the troublesome relation we have had with our cattle, with our horses and especially with the man’s best friend, the dog, has retained his attention. He is not only interested in the academic aspect of this topic, but he combines it with an active involvement in, for example, training programs to teach children how to handle dogs. Thanks to his knowledge of the history of both dogs and man, he can explain the reason for the sometimes difficult relation we have with our pets, and more important, he can offer solutions for our future relations with these animals.

If you don’t know your past, you don’t know your future

Therefore, it is a great pleasure and honour for me to introduce Prof Schaeffer who will lead us to a better understanding of living together with dogs with his lecture on:

“The Ugly Frederick – Traumatic aspects in the history of the human-dog relationship”.