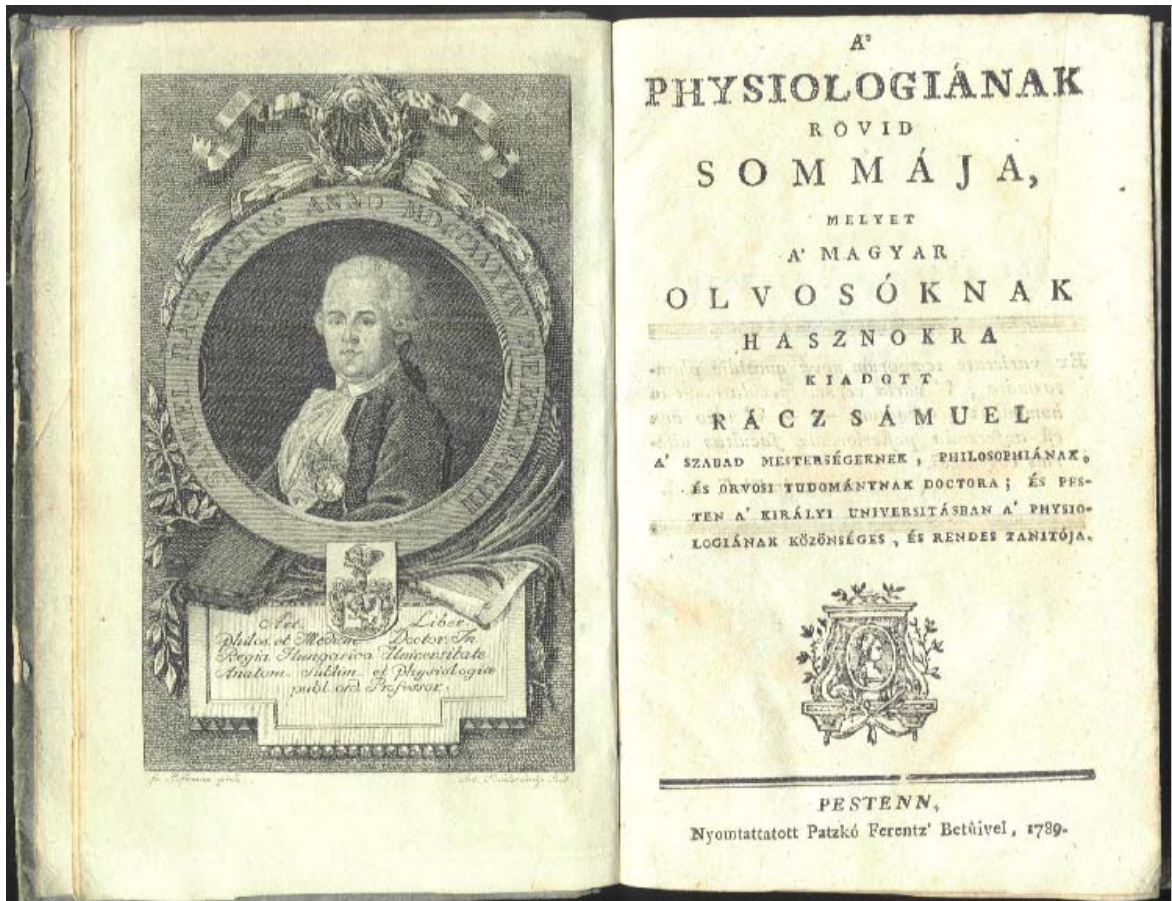


In memory of professor Sámuel Rác - who wrote the first Hungarian textbook in physiology – on the 200th anniversary of his death

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Sámuel Rác was born on 30th March 1744 in Gyulafehérvár from Calvinist Szekler (eastern Transylvanian) parents János Rác and Annamária Nemes. He converted to the Catholic faith in his younger years as a result of a Jesuit influence. He went to secondary school in Kolozsvár, and then studied arts in Nagyszombat, which was then the first step to higher education. At the University of Vienna he studied theology and law as a Jesuit novice, but finally he chose medicine as the object of his life. He left the order and obtained his medical doctor's degree in 1773 with his essay 'De sanitate conservanda'. The young Sámuel Rác attracted attention with outstanding exam-results.

He returned to Hungary in the year of his graduation and became a royal and municipal chief health officer in Nagybánya. A year later he was also entrusted with the medical post of the treasury. In the same year he married Borbála Rumbach, the daughter of the chief medical officer of Pest, Sebestyén Rumbach, who came from Nagybánya.

From 1st November 1777 as an extraordinary lecturer he gave lectures on pathology to medical students specializing in surgery at the Faculty of Medicine in Buda. In 1783 he was appointed as a university professor of physiology and 'higher anatomy' (histology). At the Department of Physiology he gave lectures till his death. His well-known physiology book was published in 1789. A famous Hungarian poet, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, greeted him in 1793 with a poem titled: 'To the Famous Mr. Sámuel Rác':

“Sir, the Hungarian nation
Rejoices, as it can hear the
Present-day sons of Asclepius
Speak Hungarian;
And as Hippocrates took off his
Greek-style clothes and changed them
To a Hungarian gown
And even took a liking to it
... ..”

(Translated by Mrs Szabóné Zs Rudnai)

(In Hungarian:

„Uram örvendez a magyar
Haza, hogy a mostani
Eskuláp fiait hallja
Magyar hangon szólani;
Hogy görög-módi ruháit
Hippokrates letette
S magyar köntösre váltotta
S már azt is megszerette
.....”)

As a pioneer in experimental physiology, he carried out remarkable studies in the field of lymph flow: 'Even though, I sometimes pushed the mercury from the lactiferous vessels to the fimbria (villi) and never saw it pour to any other cells, which means the lactiferous vessels take their source in the fimbria.'

At the university he also taught internal medicine (1785/86), theoretical medicine and state medicine (1802/03), as well as anatomy (1805/07). As an enlightened intellectual he considered developing the Hungarian medical professional terminology as a very important aim in his life. He published textbooks in Hungarian, which were partly written by him, partly translated in nearly every branch of medical training of that time.

Sámuel Rác wrote 25 scientific works, from which 12 were written in Hungarian and the others in Latin, German and Greek. He could also speak and write in French. His main works:

- “A textbook on the general knowledge of human life”. (In Hungarian: Az emberi élet általános ismeretét tanító könyv, Buda, 1772);
- “Medical teaching, in which the symptoms and the cure of the most frequent and most common internal diseases are described”. (In Hungarian: Orvosi oktatás, melyben a leggyakrabban és legközönségesebb belső nyavalyáknak jelei és orvosságai röviden leíratnak, Buda, 1776);
- “A short summation of physiology”. (In Hungarian: A physiologiának rövid sommája, Pest, 1789);
- “Medical practice, that is: The description of diseases and their cure”. (In Hungarian: Orvosi praxis, vagyis: A betegségeknek leírása és orvoslása, Buda, 1801).

He was Dean of Faculty for four academic years and the Rector of the University for one year (1793/94) and was given the title of ‘Royal Councilor’. Several foreign scientific societies elected him to be a member. He died 200 years ago in Pest on 24th February 1807 at the age of 63. The Hungarian Society of Physiology founded the Sámuel Rác Commemorative Medal in 1985 in honor of his pioneer work in writing the first university textbook in Hungarian.

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