

## Giovanni Orlandini – a Representative of European Anatomical Science and Culture

### Sandra Zecchi-Orlandini

Issue Editor

In my role as Issue Editor, it's my task to outline both the figure of Prof. Giovanni Orlandini and the event organized on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010, on the occasion of his appointment as Professor Emeritus.

Concerning the first argument, owing to the fact that I'm his wife, I actually feel neither appropriate nor politically correct to spend lofty words about his human and professional talents and merits, but will only summarize his curriculum, leaving any evaluation to the readers.

Giovanni Orlandini was born in Florence on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1934, studied Medicine at the University of Firenze and graduated in 1958 with honours. Since 1960 till 1969 he was Assistant in the Anatomical Institute of the Medical Faculty of Firenze and in 1969 he was appointed full Professor of Anatomy and Director of the Anatomical Institute at the University of Sassari, where he remained for 3 years. In 1972 he was asked to the chair of Histology and Embryology at the University of Parma. From 1974 till 2008 he was full Professor of Anatomy at the University of Firenze, where he became Dean of the Medical Faculty from 1986 to 2001, and then again from 2007 to 2008. In 2009 he was appointed Emeritus by the Italian Ministry of University and Research.

From 1990 to 1993 he was President (Vorstand) of the Anatomische Gesellschaft, and from 1997 to 2004 President of the Italian College of Anatomists. In 2005 he was elected President of the Italian Society of Anatomy and Histology, role which he still retains.

He is Author of more than 250 publications on several topics of gross and microscopical Anatomy, many of which as single author, and has promoted and coauthored a textbook of Anatomy with a wide national diffusion.

When he received the appointment as Emeritus, the colleagues of the Department decided that the best way to express their satisfaction and to tribute him a proper honour was to organize a scientific meeting involving the Italian morphological schools. We started proposing this idea to the closest friends of different Universities, either anatomists and histologists, but soon we realized that the adhesion would have been massive, so that only a portion of the scientific contribution proposed could be actually presented at the meeting and collected in this issue.

The meeting took place in a beautiful location, Villa la Quiete, formerly belonging to the University of Florence and now to Regione Toscana, close to Careggi hospital. The large lecture hall was completely full of colleagues of the Florentine Medical Faculty, gathered to congratulate their former long-course Dean and friend, and above all of so many anatomists and histologists coming from all-over Italy, from Turin to Catania, in spirit of friendship and collegiality.

The scientific session was preceded by Authorities' speeches, and indeed the academic Authorities were relevant. The Dean of the Medical Faculty, Prof Gian Franco Gensini, and four Rectors (Prof. Franco Scaramuzzi, Prof. Paolo Blasi, Prof. Augusto Marinelli and Prof. Alberto Tesi), who led the Florentine University in the course of Giovanni's career, took the word to express their affection, esteem and gratitude for his involvement and devotion towards the Academic institutions, and emphasizing his equilibrium and reliability. Moreover, the director of the department of Anatomy, Histology and Forensic Medicine, prof. Paolo Pacini, the delegate of the President of National University Council, Prof Fabio Naro, and Prof. Damiano Zaccheo, Emeritus Member of the Italian Society of Anatomy and Histology, brought their heartily contribution to congratulate him and to greet the colleagues. Eventually Giovanni, warmly thanking all the participants, underlined his satisfaction for having been a member of the academic world, to which he devoted much efforts and involvement, but from which he received so much in exchange (Fig 1, 2).

The following scientific session, with many presentations performed by young colleagues as a sign of continuity, was rich and representative of the modern trends in the morphological disciplines.

I'm grateful to the Director of Italian Journal of Anatomy and Embryology, Prof. Paolo Romagnoli, who wanted to gather the scientific contribution dedicated to Giovanni Orlandini in this issue of the Journal which represents the first one of the new editorial course.

To conclude, I can only agree with Giovanni when he said to be particularly happy that this occasion was designed to be in his honour and not in his memory.



**Fig. 1** – Images of the scientific meeting: A -Prof Gensini, Dean of the Medical School; B -Audience of the meeting; C - Prof. Augusto Marinelli, former Rector of the University of Florence; D - Prof Paolo Pacini, Director of the Department of Anatomy, Histology, Forensic Medicine



**Fig. 2** – Images of the scientific meeting: A -Prof. Orlandini thanks the colleagues; B -Prof. Franco Scaramuzzi, former Rector of the University of Florence; C - Audience of the meeting; D - Prof. Alberto Tesi, Rector of the University of Florence

### **Adolf-Friedrich Holstein**

Professor of Anatomy, former director of the Institute of Anatomy, University of Hamburg, Germany

In 1964 the International Congress of Anatomy took place in Wiesbaden, Germany. I presented a lecture on epithelia of the human epididymal duct. During the same session Dr. Giovanni Orlandini presented his lecture on the epithelia of the human ductus deferens. Already during the coffee break we discussed with emphasis our results about the structure and function of the epithelia of excurrent epididymal duct system. Even during a river boat trip on the Rhine with the participants of the congress we only discussed our scientific problems and decided to continue our stimulating exchange of experience in the future.

This was the start of a wonderful, fruitful friendship now existing for 46 years. In almost regular intervals we visited each other discussing always new scientific questions and then also published the results obtained in our cooperative work. We accompanied mutually our careers and participated in our fates and developments. Giovanni Orlandini invited me to visit the institute in Firenze and to give a lecture as he still was an assistant of the famous Prof. Fazzari. Then I visited him in Sassari as he was there the holder of the chair of anatomy. I invited him to visit Hamburg. In between I obtained the chair of Anatomy in Erlangen and in Hamburg. I decided to remain in Hamburg. Mutual invitations to take part in congresses in Germany

and Italy and to have a stay for research work in our cities Firenze and Hamburg followed. Beside the science we always found the time to eat and drink together well and to study the history and culture of our countries.

I was fascinated by the stimulating cooperation, which became base for further scientific work. From the Florentine institute further kind and creative colleagues added: Sandra Zecchi-Orlandini, Paolo Pacini, Massimo Gulisano. Altogether 18 publications came out from this fruitful cooperation.

We concerned ourselves with the structure of tunica dartos of the human scrotum, the myocytes contained and their adrenergic innervation. Expanded investigations were focused on malformed human spermatozoa and their development in human beings. Even on the differentiation of human spermatozoa in old age and predominating malformations new results were published. For the first time the distribution of lymph vessels in the human testis could be presented. It was elucidated that, contrary to experimental animals as rats and mice, in the human testis the lymphatics are restricted to the septula testis and not distributed in between the seminiferous tubules. In addition, the different cell systems of the testicular excurrent ducts were investigated and their surface structures in relation to function presented. The mesothelia of the human cavum serosum testis, i.e. epiorchium and periorchium, were investigated. An extensive work was directed toward the epithelia of the pars prostatica and the orificium externum of the human male urethra. For the first time we could demonstrate the glycogen-rich segment of the human male orificium urethrae, that means a physiological protection of the male urethra against ascending infections.

Not only I made me happy at productive cooperation with Giovanni Orlandini and his attractive personality, but also many colleagues of the Anatomische Gesellschaft estimated the results of his scientific work. He was not only involved with reproductive medicine but also with the blood circulation system and bone tissue. Giovanni Orlandini became member of the Anatomische Gesellschaft. Many helpful friendships developed.

The Anatomische Gesellschaft was founded in 1886 in Berlin and Leipzig and collected European Anatomists interested in German language and science. The Anatomische Gesellschaft is one of the oldest congregations of scientists in medicine. Giovanni Orlandini was well accepted since by his relation to German anatomy he presented an ideal member of the society. Round about 30 % of the Anatomische Gesellschaft are members of many European countries. Therefore, the congresses many times took place in different universities of Europe. Friendships of Italian and German anatomists have a long tradition.

In 1983 Giovanni Orlandini invited the 78. Versammlung der Anatomischen Gesellschaft to Firenze, his hometown. He asked me to create the poster of the congress. At first I did not know how to realize this function, in view of the oppressive fact that Firenze is a capital of arts. Than I decided to collect some motives of Florentine artists like a collage, adapted to anatomy. Only the inclusion of the portrait of my friend Giovanni Orlandini in a group of Florentine venerable citizens was my pleasure (Fig. 1).

Giovanni Orlandini was elected by the members of the Anatomische Gesellschaft to become member of the board of directors for the years 1990-1993. During this time in 1991 he was the president of the 86. Versammlung der Anatomischen Gesellschaft

in Szeged, Hungary. The Anatomische Gesellschaft estimated the friendship between us both, electing myself in the board of directors during the same time.

In 1995 Giovanni Orlandini invited the 10. European Congress of Anatomists to Firenze. The congress meetings organized by Giovanni Orlandini were not only characterized by a wealth of scientific topics and enriched by the participation of a lot of Italian anatomists, but offered in Firenze an outstanding social, culinary and cultural impression, the best of Tuscany. The great hospitality of Giovanni Orlandini and Sandra Zecchi-Orlandini in Firenze made each Congress a great personal experience.

In 1999, during the *Versammlung der Anatomischen Gesellschaft* in Hamburg, Giovanni Orlandini became honorary member of the society. I was very much pleased by this honourship because of the acknowledgement of our Italian-German cooperative scientific work. With large gratitude also I was allowed to assume the honorary membership of the *Società Italiana di Anatomia e Istologia* from the hands of Prof. Dr. Pietro Motta, Roma. The congresses of my Italian friends have always fascinated me by the aliveness of knowledge transfer and the lively scientific discussions. Many further Italian colleagues became my dear friends, e.g. like Alessandro Riva, Cagliari, and the much too early deceased Pietro Motta, Roma.

Now I would like to congratulate my friend Prof. Dr. Giovanni Orlandini from hearts for the honour of „Professor emeritus“ of the *Università di Firenze* (Fig. 2).

Giovanni Orlandini has contributed to fulfil the European Anatomical Sciences with lives. Beyond the sciences he always has been a convincing ambassador of the country Italia and his hometown Firenze. Thank you, dear Giovanni, for the marvelous friendship for many decades.

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**Fig. 1a** – Poster of the 78<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Anatomische Gesellschaft held in Florence; **1b** – detail in the lower left corner



**Fig. 2** – Portrait of Dean Orlandini by A.F. Holstein

**Paolo Pacini**

Director of the Department of Anatomy, Histology, Forensic Medicine

I have known Giovanni Orlandini for many, many years, since he was a young student at the medical school. Our friendship was immediate and, after more than 50 years, it is still stronger; the link between us derived from the attitude and the behaviour that Giovanni immediately showed towards all the problems and the issues involving our generation.

When he graduated, among the first ones of his course, I was starting my path as internal student at the Anatomical Institute, directed by prof Ignazio Fazzari, where he soon became assistant; it appeared immediately clear that his didactic ability was exceptional, depending on his deep understanding of any topic, long before transmitting it to pupils. With such a teacher, it was easy for us to learn and keep in mind anatomy, since any concept was clearly, simply and consequentially exposed. In the meantime, we were also conscious that any problem we may meet in our career as students, Giovanni Orlandini was there for help, reference and advice.

In pursuing his career he devoted even more time and efforts to didactic activity and particularly to scientific research, trying always to apply, in a rigorous and correct manner, the most innovative and suitable techniques. I still remember the patience and accuracy he devoted to his wide-based study on the corrected circumference of coronary arteries, as well as his acumen and perseverance in the study of male genital tract, especially the vas deferens. In this latter field he constantly applied the most up-to-date techniques, such as transmission and then scanning electron microscopy. And indeed, to expand his knowledge on this topic, he established a strong and long lasting cooperation with the colleague Adolf Holstein at the Anatomical Institute of Hamburg. The results of his studies on the male genital tract, due to the experimental methods employed, as well as to their relevant functional implications, encountered high appreciation both at the national and international level, so that he was often invited to expose his data in workshops, seminars and congresses, always raising high levels of interest in the scientific community. This was also confirmed by his election as president (Vorstand) of the prestigious Anatomische Gesellschaft in the years 1990-1993. In spite of his didactic and scientific activity, he has also strongly felt the duty to offer his competence to the academic institutions, participating in several committees and organisms where his intelligent contribution and equilibrium were greatly appreciated by both colleagues and students. Those qualities represented the grounds on which, in 1986, he was elected as Dean of the medical Faculty of Florence and remained in that position for 16 years!! He has lived this task with a real sense of service and respect for institutions even in periods not easy for the University, and during this long period he has always followed the didactic and scientific activities of the department as well as the curricula of his coworkers. Among his pupils, I like to remember myself as well as Massimo Gulisano, both full professors; in particular, Gulisano has been one of the youngest full professors of Anatomy in Italy.

Thanks to his great experience, after having served his duty as Dean, he was elected in Senatus Academicus as member representing the biomedical area.

To testify his multifaceted personality, he decided to engage himself in politics, and indeed he presented as candidate for the City Hall administration and was



elected as a member of the City Council. Even in this role, his equilibrium, commonsense, as well as rigorous attention to the public interest and ability to mediate between different, sometimes opposite, political ideas have generated long-lasting and deep friendships, beyond any ideology.

Within his interests, a special place has to be left to the history of Anatomy: in particular his studies on the history, findings and preparations of Girolamo Segato have contributed to shed some light on this mysterious and fascinating figure.

To crown his career, at the end of his official tasks as professor, he has been appointed Professor Emeritus of the University of Florence. Anyhow, at the anatomical department, his "room" is still there for him. He utilizes that room as President of the Italian Society of Anatomy and Embryology, and to pursue his studies and prepare the lectures and seminars he is asked to give. But, above all, that room is the reference point for graduate and PhD students, for colleagues of the Department and of the Faculty, who visit him to get intelligent listening and proper advice.

In such manner I look at Giovanni Orlandini, a person who has run his path with coherence and honesty always trying to fulfil his task both in his work and in his family life. That's a man!!!