OBITUARY

A tribute to Henry Haimovici

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On July 10, 2001, vascular surgery lost one of its founding fathers. Henry Haimovici, whose interesting life was dramatically altered by the upheavals associated with World War II, brought scholarly excellence to our specialty.

Henry Haimovici was born on the banks of the Danube in Romania on September 7, 1907. After early schooling in Tulcea, Romania, not far from the Black Sea, young Henry, at the age of 20, went to Marseille, France, for his medical education and residency training—first in all specialties and then in general surgery. Dr Haimovici was a distinguished student and scholar from the beginning. He developed an early interest in vascular surgery, and the title for his thesis for his medical degree, only awarded upon completion of his training, was “Arterial Emboli to the Limbs.” This thesis was of such high quality that Henry’s chief at the time, Professor Jean Fiolle, suggested that it be published as a monograph. It was, and its preface was written by another pioneer in vascular surgery, Rene Leriche, who had become one of Henry’s earliest admirers and supporters. This book was of sufficient quality that it attracted the attention of another vascular surgery pioneer, Geza de Takats, who recommended that it be translated into English so that “this splendid piece of work be available to everyone.”

While still in training, Dr Haimovici also developed an interest in venous gangrene. He published one of the first case reports on this condition and subsequently a classic monograph on what he termed “ischemic venous thrombosis,” which was also known under the more popular name, phlegmasia cerulea dolens.

Immediately after his residency training, Dr Haimovici was selected by the dean of his medical school to direct a new institute of neurology and neurosurgery which was planned as a joint project by the Rockefeller Foundation. To qualify for this new chief’s position, Dr Haimovici was sent to the United States to study neurophysiology under Dr Walter B. Cannon of Harvard University, regarded as the most prestigious physiologist in America. During his year’s fellowship with Dr Cannon, Henry published key papers on the effects of motor and sympathetic denervation and regeneration. Dr Haimovici always considered Dr Cannon to be his most exceptional mentor and his time with him to be his most productive. While in the US, Dr Haimovici also met with all the neurosurgical leaders in North America and had planned further training in neurosurgery before returning to his prestigious appointment in Marseille.

However, the second World War had erupted, and all of Dr Haimovici’s plans exploded with it. He was drafted into the French army, but after France surrendered he decided to accept Dr Cannon’s invitation and return to the US. However, to escape from occupied France took many adventures and occupied 2 years, and by that time Dr Cannon had retired. So Dr Haimovici returned in 1942 to Boston and the Beth Israel Hospital, where he worked with outstanding scientific leaders like Rene Dubos and Jacob Fine on infections, toxic shock, and the effect of gelatin in preventing thrombosis of injured veins.

After 2 highly productive years in Boston, Dr Haimovici moved to New York, where he married a young PhD biochemist, Nelicia Maier. He and his new wife joined their interests in studying the metabolism of atherosclerotic...
arteries, a field to which he would continue to contribute for the rest of his career.

In New York City, Dr Haimovici held an appointment in vascular surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital before being appointed Chief of Vascular Surgery at Montefiore Medical Center in 1945. While at these two institutions, he continued to produce important articles relating the physiology of the autonomic nervous system—its mediators and its blocking agents—to vascular disease such as Buerger’s and atherosclerosis. His work was published in the leading medical and physiology journals of the era.

Dr Haimovici’s scholarly activity extended well beyond his high-quality original investigations. In addition to his over 200 journal articles and book chapters, Dr Haimovici wrote or edited more than 10 books. His monograph on Metabolic Complications of Acute Arterial Occlusion and Related Conditions published in 1988 is considered a classic. In addition, Haimovici’s Vascular Surgery: Principles and Techniques, first published in 1976, is regarded as one of the finest texts in the vascular surgery field and was also published in a Spanish edition. The first four editions of this important text were edited by Dr Haimovici himself, while Enrico Ascher, now in the role of Chief Editor, is in the process of preparing a fifth edition with most leaders in vascular surgery serving as contributors.

Despite all these accomplishments, Henry Haimovici’s crowning achievement will always be his role in founding the International Society of Cardiovascular Surgery (ISCVS). In March 1950, Dr Haimovici, who was the editor of the journal, Angiology, took the initiative of organizing the International Society of Angiology. He discussed his plans with Rene Leriche, who became the organization’s first president. A number of the most prominent vascular surgeons from around the world signed on as charter members. Dr Haimovici became the organization’s first Secretary-General and wrote its original bylaws, which created regional chapters for this worldwide vascular society. In 1952, the first meeting of the North American Chapter of the ISCVS (now the American Association for Vascular Surgery) was held in Chicago. Emile Holman was elected the first President and Henry Haimovici the first Secretary-Treasurer of the Chapter. Meanwhile he held the post of Secretary-General in the international organization from 1950 until 1963.

In this position, Dr Haimovici was a major force in organizing the Society’s first four biannual International Congresses, in changing the name of the Society in 1957 to The International Society of Cardiovascular Surgery, and in establishing its journal, The Journal of Cardiovascular Surgery. He served as the Founding Co-editor of this publication from 1960 to 1973 and was a consulting editor until his death.

Henry Haimovici was honored with the Presidency of the North American Chapter of the ISCVS in 1959 and 1960. He served as a Visiting Professor around the world and was awarded nine honorary degrees. In 1986 he was elected a Corresponding Member of the French National Academy of Medicine, a truly unique honor for an American surgeon.

In his 93 years, Henry Haimovici made his scholarly mark on surgery throughout the globe. He helped to establish vascular surgery as a true specialty, and he contributed greatly to its scientific underpinnings. He was a leading vascular surgeon in at least two countries and was widely known and well respected everywhere. He was a true surgeon-scholar with an encyclopedic knowledge of the vascular literature. He was a talented editor and writer, and he had organizational skills possessed by few vascular surgeons. Henry Haimovici was a colleague and a friend who will be sorely missed, even though his mark will long remain on vascular surgery.

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