

The work of French surgeons in disseminating obstetrics in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century

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In the second half of the 18th century giving birth was a perilous process in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, partly since obstetrics was not yet a recognised subject. The abolition of the Jesuit Order, which was quite influential in the field of education, provided a good opportunity to reassess the Commonwealth's educational system. As a result, the Commission of National Education was created, leading to major reforms, especially in the field of medicine. However, because of the lack of specialists in the Commonwealth, it was necessary to search for teachers abroad.

Obstetrics was already well developed at that time in France, and the French physicians Pierre Maignan and Nicolas Regnier distinguished themselves by disseminating this science in the Commonwealth. Pierre Maignan was the first person to teach obstetrics at the School of Surgery in Warsaw. But more is known about Nicolas Regnier. In 1775, thanks to his efforts, the first department of childbirth in Lithuania was established, and in 1781 he took charge of the departments of the theory of medicine and obstetrics at the School of Medicine in Vilnius. His lessons demonstrate the knowledge and practices of surgery and obstetrics in the last quarter of 18th century.

Pierre Maignan and Nicolas Regnier were pioneers in obstetrics in the Commonwealth. Moreover, they were a good example of the fertile scientific cooperation between France and Poland-Lithuania in the 18th century.

Key words: obstetrics, Pierre Maignan, Nicolas Regnier, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 18th century

In the 18th century, childbirth remained a perilous process. In France alone it is estimated that 1–2% of women died in childbirth (which account-

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ed for 10% of all women of reproductive age). Furthermore, women gave birth at home – only impoverished and very young women gave birth in hospital, which at that time was a place of aid and charity. The conditions for childbirth were, in fact, rather poor (1).

But obstetrics had already begun to change the situation by the 17th century. There was a rapidly expanding body of scientific knowledge on the subject, and new tools and instruments were being used (of mention is Marguerite du Tertre, who wrote a book about midwifery) (2). In addition to female midwives, more and more male midwives began to appear, starting with the families of aristocrats and townspeople.

In 18th century France, physicians and surgeons gradually became more interested in the problems related to childbirth and began writing works on it. Especially noteworthy are Pierre Dionis' *Treaty on Accouchements* (*Traité des accouchements*, Paris, 1724) and Jean-Louis Baudelocque's *Principles of Art of Accouchement* (*Principes sur l'art des accouchements*, Paris, 1775).

Furthermore, a midwifery school was in operation at the *Hôtel-Dieu* hospital in Paris, and King Louis XV appointed Angélique-Marguerite du Coudray (1712–1791) to teach new methods of delivery to aid in the process of childbirth. She worked in this capacity from 1759 to 1783 and her course consisted of theory and practice (using a mannequin made of wicker).

Thus, by the second half of the 18th century, midwifery was well-developed in France, and the state took care of training new midwives. The French surgeons Pierre Maignan and Nicolas Regnier (docent Vytautas Baronas (3) and professor Stasys Biziuolevičius (4) were the first Lithuanian scholars to draw attention on N. Regnier's work in Lithuania) were responsible for disseminating this new knowledge in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Pierre Maignan (*Pierre François Julien Maignan* or *Maignain* or *Magnen*) (5) was born in 1752 in Cherlieux, France, not far from the city of Besançon. In 1776, he obtained degrees as Doctor of Philosophy (at that time one had to learn philosophy before studying medicine) and Doctor of Obstetrics in the city of Nancy, after which he served as a surgeon in the French army for two years. From 1778 to 1780 he improved his knowledge of anatomy, surgery and obstetrics in Paris.

After that P. Maignan moved to Poland where he quickly learned the Polish language. A gifted obstetrician and surgeon, he was the first person to teach obstetrics and methods of bandaging at the

new Warsaw School of Surgery. When Prussia arbitrarily closed the school after the third partition of the Commonwealth (1795), he obtained degrees as a professor of surgery and obstetrics, but no longer taught at the School of Surgery. Instead he gave private lessons. In 1794, while still teaching surgery, P. Maignan became head surgeon of the Polish Army. He took part in most of the battles against the Russian army and distinguished himself by ably caring for the wounded. He died in Warsaw in 1811. P. Maignan was distinguished among his peers and students for his in-depth knowledge and eloquence.

More is known about Nicolas Regnier (1723–1800), whose works hold a special place in the field of obstetrics in Lithuania (13). N. Regnier, the son of an army officer, was born in Strasbourg, which at the time was an independent royal city in France. He studied surgical theory and practice at Strasbourg University's Faculty of Medicine, which was held in high regard in France. Incidentally, in 1728, on the initiative of Jean-Jacques Fried (1689–1769), who is considered to be the "father of modern obstetrics", a midwifery school was founded in Strasbourg in 1728 – the first of its kind in Europe. And another native of Strasbourg – Jean-Georges Roederer (1726–1763) – founded the first obstetrics clinic in Europe, in Göttingen (6–7).

N. Regnier continued his studies in Paris, where he interned as a war surgical assistant for two years. Upon completing his studies, he began to work as a doctor. He became acquainted with the Bishop of Vilnius, Ignacy Massalski, when the latter was in Paris in 1768. When the bishop returned to Lithuania, the doctor came with him to work at his palace (8). In 1772, Bishop I. Massalski sent N. Regnier to Paris to broaden his knowledge of surgery, anatomy, physiology, pathology, diseases of pregnant women, hygiene and obstetrics. On 2 May 1775, N. Regnier received a certificate from the Paris Society of Surgery which attested to his credentials to teach surgery and obstetrics (9). That year he returned to Lithuania.

On 6 May 1775, I. Massalski, who was then the chairman of the Commission of National Education, asked N. Regnier to found and organize the first school of obstetrics in Lithuania (as part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania High School, today known as Vilnius University). He was also appointed as a teacher of anatomy and surgery as

well as serving as director of the school (10). His official title was *Professor of Practical Surgery and Obstetrics*. In 1775, N. Regnier also pioneered the establishment of the first maternity ward at the Hospital of St. Roch in Vilnius, which started out with ten beds.

Prior to N. Regnier's arrival, only older women helped women in labour; furthermore, in the opinion of the clergy, only women could help in childbirth as it was considered a sin for men to assist a woman in giving birth. As a result of this attitude, men who worked as surgeons or obstetricians in Lithuania were looked upon with contempt at the time. The midwifery profession was also ignored. But little by little, lectures on obstetrics became of interest both to students and society.

In 1777, the Commission of National Education allocated money to N. Regnier so he could go to Paris to improve his skills, purchase tools and look for a teacher of anatomy and surgery. Along the way he bought surgical instruments in Warsaw. When he was in Paris, he met the anatomist Jacques Briotet (1746–1819). N. Regnier invited him to be his laboratory assistant at the Great Duchy of Lithuania High School and J. Briotet agreed. This freed N. Regnier to concentrate on surgery and teaching obstetrics. In 1780, he gave his first speech in Polish during the ceremonial inauguration of the academic year (11–12).

After the abolition of the Jesuit Order in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (21 July 1773) and the establishment of the Commission of National Education (14 October 1773), whose duty was to reform the state educational system, it was decided to establish a medical college. On 24 November 1781, a faculty of medicine – the Collegium Medicinæ – was officially founded as part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania High School, and was housed in a building at 22 Didžioji Street in Vilnius (10–13).

The Royal School of Medicine was incorporated into the newly created faculty of medicine. This School (which was located in Grodno, today in Belarus) was founded in 1776 by the administrator of the estates of the Great Duchy of Lithuania Antoni Tyzenhaus, but it had to close in 1781 because of financial difficulties. We know that a midwife from Paris was already giving courses about childbirth in this school (8–9).

In 1781, along with teaching surgery and obstetrics, N. Regnier headed the Department of Theoretical Medicine and Obstetrics at the Collegium Medicinæ. However, in the absence of a doctoral degree, he could not be a school board member.

On 17 June 1786, N. Regnier received a patent as Lithuanian Armed Forces Staff Surgeon General (14), and we know that he served as a medic for the subunit headquarters for twenty years (that is to say Pierre Maignan was Staff Surgeon General in the Polish army and Nicolas Regnier performed the same role in the Lithuanian army). In 1789, he finally earned a degree of Doctor of Medicine at the University of Königsberg (Prussia) for his dissertation on the dangers of suffocation for newborn babies (*Specimen inaugurale, de asphyxia neonatorum*).

On 15 March 1793, the Lithuanian Commission of Education recognised him as a full professor. In 1797, N. Regnier presented his work *Comments on the Benefits and Necessity of a Practical School of Medicine (Remarques sur l'utilité et la nécessité d'une école pratique en médecine)*, in which he elaborated on the principles of organisation of the university clinic in Vilnius to the Lithuanian Commission of Education. Professor N. Regnier died on 18 July 1800 and is buried in the cemetery of the Church of St. Stephen in Vilnius.

The Lithuanian State Historical Archives (*Lietuvos valstybės istorijos fondas – 1511 Fund*) has course materials used by the Great Duchy of Lithuania High School professors, among which are N. Regnier's lessons on surgery and childbirth. As an example, we may find a course on bones, composed of two parts: "About Bone Diseases" (*Des maladies des os*) and "About Fractures" (*Des fractures*) (15).

The courses of the French surgeon are beautifully and lucidly written. The phraseology he used was typical of the Age of Enlightenment: "We will confess that in the works of the ancient authors, many things are invaluable, but they often show certain ignorance and superstition. The prejudices are persistent, the bad habits prevail... most of female midwives follow a deadly routine lacking elementary principles, they are guided by lethal and numerous prejudices, and they act blindly" ("... nous avouerons qu'il se trouve dans les ouvrages des anciens quantité de choses inestimables, quoique

souvent marquées du voile de l'ignorance et de la superstition... Les préjugés sont opiniâtres, les mauvaises habitudes impérieuses... La plupart des sages femmes [sont] conduites par une routine meurtrière et dénuée de tout principe, entraînée par des préjugés aussi funestes que nombreux, [elles] tâtonnent et marchent à l'aveugle" (16).

N. Regnier speaks of his experiences and quotes the tractates of many European surgeons, including François Dujardin's *History of Surgery* (*Histoire de la chirurgie*, Paris, 1774), Guillaume Moquest de La Motte's *Treaty on Accouchement* (*Traité sur les accouchements*, Paris, 1715, 1765), and Pierre Amand's *Observations on Accouchement* (*Observations sur les accouchements*, Paris, 1715). N. Regnier also refers to the works of the French Royal Academy of Sciences and Academy of Surgery in Paris (16).

N. Regnier pointed out that women die more frequently giving birth than they do from disease: "The number of women who die in labour almost exceeds that of those who die of disease or sorrow" ("Le nombre des femmes qui meurent en couches surpasse presque celui des autres victimes qui périssent de maladies aiguës ou de langueur..."). For this reason he thought that teaching was the most significant act of charity, and he emphasised that the state must improve the process of childbirth: "When science will be used to help women in childbirth, by how many citizens the state will be enriched? ... some miserable victims destined to defend and support the state die during their birth" ("Quand la science présidera à la délivrance des femmes en couches, de combien de citoyens l'état ne se retrouvera-t-il enrichi? ... de malheureuses victimes destinées à la défense et au soutien de l'état, lui sont enlevées en naissant...") (16).

Furthermore, N. Regnier, benefitting from the help of his colleague and friend anatomist J. Briotet, emphasized how "anatomical knowledge is necessary to successfully reduce a bone fracture. Without this knowledge, a surgeon won't do better than rough countryside bonesetters" ("Les connaissances anatomiques sont indispensables pour bien réduire une fracture. Sans le secours de cette science, le chirurgien agira aussi aveuglément que ces rabilleurs grossiers qui courent les campagnes") (15).

On the whole, N. Regnier's lessons show how the science of surgery and childbirth developed in

the last quarter of the 18th century; blood-letting, for example, was still widely practiced.

Delivering his obstetrics course, N. Regnier held to the opinions of the most well-known Western European gynaecologists, such as Jean-Louis Baudelocque, the Scotsman William Smellie, and midwife Marie-Louise La Chapelle, as well as the viewpoint of other scientists (9). In addition, N. Regnier was a correspondent for the Paris Faculty of Medicine.

Not only did N. Regnier lecture at the Faculty of Medicine but he also held annual public lectures in Vilnius for midwives from Lithuania. To this end, he also created a manual: *Manual on the Art of Childbirth, Composed of Questions and Answers* (*Abrégé sur l'art des accouchements par demande et par réponse*). The Commission of National Education printed the manual and distributed it free of charge throughout the entire territory of Lithuania. N. Regnier set forth his material in a plain fashion so that it would be understandable even to laypeople: the course was described as being "for the eye and the mind" ("C'est autant aux yeux qu'à l'esprit qu'on y parlera") (16). He wanted to undertake such a project in Poland as well ("May this teaching, the first of this kind, be imitated in all the parts of Poland" ("Puisse cet établissement, le premier en ce genre, être imité dans toutes les parties de la Pologne").

N. Regnier was wholly dedicated to his mission: "I worked not for fame, but only for the overall welfare, for good" ("Ce n'est point pour la gloire que j'ay travaillé, mais uniquement pour l'utilité publique: ce n'est point pour faire du bruit, mais du bien") (16); in 1785 his colleagues even wrote an *Ode to Honour Professor Regnier* (17). We also know that the Faculty of Medicine appointed him as Paris Academy of Sciences correspondent (18) and that he was granted a title of nobility during the period of the Four-Year Sejm (The Four-Year Sejm was the Parliament of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1788 to 1792). One can see today a bust of N. Regnier in the Aula of Vilnius University, and the university's bookshop *Littera* houses his portrait.

Pierre Maignan and Nicolas Regnier were pioneers in scientific obstetrics in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Both teachers raised a new generation of specialists. For instance, Andrius Matusevičius (1760–1816), born to a peasant fa-

mily in the Grodno district, studied at the medical schools of both Grodno and Vilnius. In 1785, he completed his studies and stayed at the Faculty of Medicine in Vilnius to work as an obstetrician. In 1797, having defended his dissertation and received a doctoral degree, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, and in 1798–1799 he studied and polished his skills in Vienna.

On the death of N. Regnier, A. Matusevičius was appointed Professor of Theoretical Surgery and Obstetrics, first local professor of obstetrics. He lectured about normal and pathological obstetrics. In 1803, the Department of Obstetrics was established at the University of Vilnius on the initiative of A. Matusevičius who headed this department until 1816. N. Regnier's student successfully continued the work of his teacher (19).

The contribution of Pierre Maignan (in Poland) and Nicolas Regnier (in Lithuania) to the Commonwealth, even though there is less information about P. Maignan's work, is a significant example of French science at the time and its broad social application. Together, they serve as an outstanding example of successful cooperation between scientists from France and Poland-Lithuania in the 18th century.

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Arnaud Parent**PRANCŪZŲ CHIRURGŲ VEIKLA SKLEIDŽIANT
AKUŠERIJOS MOKSLĄ LENKIJOS-LIETUVOS
RESPUBLIKOJE XVIII A.***Santrauka*

XVIII a. antrojoje pusėje gimdymas buvo gana pavojingas procesas. Lenkijos-Lietuvos Respublikoje gimdymo riziką didino ir ta aplinkybė, kad tuo metu šalyje nebuvo akušerijos studijų. Praeityje labai įtakingo švietimo srityje jėzuitų ordino panaikinimas (1773 m. liepos 21 d.) sudarė sąlygas reformuoti Respublikos švietimo sistemą. 1773 m. spalio 14 d. įkurta nacionalinė Edukacinė komisija ėmėsi šalies aukštojo mokslo, ypač medicinos studijų, reformos. Respublikoje nesant vietinių specialistų, teko kreiptis į užsieniečius, galinčius dėstyti medicinos dalykus.

Prancūzijoje akušerijos mokslas tuo metu jau buvo gana gerai išsivystęs. Skleisdami akušerijos mokslą Res-

publikoje daug nusipelnė prancūzų gydytojai Pjeras Menjanas (Pierre Maignan) ir Mykolajus Renjė (Nicolas Regnier). P. Menjanas pirmasis dėstė akušerijos ir tvarymo kursus Varšuvos chirurgijos mokykloje, o M. Renjė pastangomis 1775 m. Lietuvoje buvo įsteigtas pirmasis gimdymo skyrius; nuo 1781 m. šis gydytojas ėmė vadovauti teorinės medicinos ir akušerijos katedroms Vilniaus medicinos kolegijoje. M. Renjė paskaitos apie chirurgiją ir gimdymą atskleidžia, kaip XVIII a. paskutiniame ketvirtyje vystėsi chirurgija ir pagalba gimdyvėms.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad P. Menjanas ir M. Renjė, skaitę pirmąsias akušerijos paskaitas Lenkijos-Lietuvos Respublikoje ir ugde naujos kartos akušerius, buvo akušerijos (obstetrikos) pradininkai Respublikoje. Kartu tai rodo vaisingą Prancūzijos ir Lenkijos-Lietuvos Respublikos mokslininkų bendradarbiavimą XVIII amžiuje.

Raktažodžiai: akušerijos mokslas, Pjeras Menjanas, Mykolajus Renjė, Lenkijos-Lietuvos Respublika, XVIII a.