

## Albert Eckstein: a pioneer in pediatrics in Turkey

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A historical perspective is presented on Ord. Prof. Albert Eckstein, who was a pioneer of modern pediatrics in Turkey. 2005 marks the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prof. Albert Eckstein's death and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Pediatric Clinics of Ankara University, where he served as the founding director for five years.

**Key words:** pediatrics, history, noma.

The year 2005 marks the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prof. Albert Eckstein's death in Hamburg and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Pediatric Clinics of Ankara University, School of Medicine, where he served as the founding director for five years.

Albert Eckstein was born on 9 February 1891 in Ulm, Germany. He studied medicine in Freiburg. He was called up to serve in the First World War and was awarded a "Eisernes Kreut First Class" medal at its close<sup>1</sup>. Following the war, he started working at the Physiology Institute of the University of Freiburg. In 1920, he moved to the University Hospital for Children and worked under the auspices of Carl T. Noeggerath, a very famous pediatrician of his time. In 1923, he became a senior lecturer with his work on the "Influence of natural and artificial light sources on the growth of young rats with simultaneous variation of their living condition". He then married Erna Schlossman, a pediatrician and daughter of a reknown pediatrician, Arthur Schlossmann, who was the head of the Children's Hospital of the Academy of Medicine in Dusseldorf. After the death of Schlossmann, Dr. Eckstein was appointed as the chief of the department. In 1935, during the Hitler regime, he was expelled from his position; although there were opportunities in England and USA, he selected Turkey as a host country<sup>1-3</sup>.

During his stay in Ankara between the years 1935 and 1950, he worked at the Numune State Hospital of Ankara, which was the largest hospital of the city at that time. In 1945, he

was appointed as the head of the Pediatrics Clinic of Ankara. Medical School, which became a part of the newly established Ankara University in 1946.

His first associated professor was Bahtiyar Demirağ who had received his training in pediatrics in Berlin between 1936 and 1939. Dr. Demirağ became his successor after Dr. Eckstein left Turkey in 1950, and he continued in this position for 30 years. Drs. Selahattin Tekand, İhsan Doğramacı and Sabiha Acura were his other assistants who later established the Children's Hospital of İzmir, Hacettepe Children's Hospital of Ankara and Aegean University Pediatrics Department of İzmir, respectively.

In 1941 and 1947, Eckstein published two exclusive pediatrics textbooks in Turkish<sup>4,5</sup>. He scientifically focused on treatment of noma, a *Borrelia* infection of the oral mucosa appearing in immune compromised and malnourished children. His other main research topic was malaria (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Noma.

He was a member of the Editorial Board of *Annales Paediatrici* in 1938/1939, which was a leading journal on pediatrics in Europe<sup>3</sup>. In October 1938, he organized the first Turkish Pediatrics Congress in Ankara<sup>6</sup>.

During the summers of 1937 and 1938, he and his wife Erna made several journeys to the villages of 25 cities in Anatolia in order to prepare a report on the health of Turkish children and their living conditions. Preventive measures to decrease infant mortality was the aim of the Turkish government. The infant mortality rate at that time was about 50%.

He took hundreds of photographs during these visits to the villages, which can be seen at the German Archeological Institute of İstanbul. One of his photographs, taken in Bürnük Village/Bolu, a city located in the Northwest of Anatolia, was printed on the 10 Turkish Lira banknote which was circulated in 1942. This was also important as it was the first time that a photograph of a woman had appeared on a Turkish banknote (Fig. 2). Another photograph taken by him was displayed at the Turkish Pavillion of the World's Fair which was held in New York in 1939 (Fig. 3)<sup>3</sup>.



Fig. 3. A photograph which was displayed at the Turkish Pavillion of the World's Fair in New York in 1939.

Following the end of the Second World War, Eckstein received calls from German Universities such as Freiburg, Giessen, Münster, Würzburg and Düsseldorf. However, he declined these offers.

In September 1948, he experienced a great disappointment. In 1935, on his first arrival in Ankara, Turkish Health Minister Refik Saydam promised him a new children's hospital with 300 beds. In 1935, the population of Ankara



Fig. 2. Photograph taken by Prof. Eckstein in Bürnük Village/Bolu, which was printed on the 10 Turkish Lira banknote in 1942.

was about 120,000. The death of Refik Saydam in 1942 and the continuing World War II prevented the realization of this promise. In 1948, his project was stopped at the last minute, after which he decided to leave Turkey and serve as the director of the University Children's Hospital in Hamburg.

During this period, he and his wife, along with their Turkish colleagues, organized the sending of food packages to German professors<sup>3</sup>.

Albert Eckstein died on 18 July 1950 in Hamburg at the age of 59 from a heart attack, just six months after he left Ankara (Fig. 4). With an unbelievable coincidence, the banknote had been taken out of circulation on 1 April 1950.



Fig. 4. Ord. Prof. Albert Eckstein.

His pediatrics clinic has reached its 60<sup>th</sup> year of establishment. Since the first day of its establishment, preventive pediatrics has been the utmost aim of this department. Moreover, scientific contributions have been produced by his successors on several subjects in pediatrics.

The Turkish people still remember his and his wife's great effort provided for Turkish children. A memory from Erna Eckstein depicts this:

"We could not have chosen a better country than Turkey when we had to leave Germany. From the first day, we were received with cordiality and helpfulness. After our journeys into all the different provinces, the name of Eckstein was known everywhere, for in most villages and small towns, no doctor had ever been before.

When we left Turkey and I asked for a customs officer, the Director of Customs said that he would personally come on Sunday. He asked: "What do you want to take with you?" I had thought of all the silver that had been given to Albert, but he was not interested in that, but said: "You are going to a poor country. How many kilos of rice, sugar, raisins, tea and coffee do you want to take?" And when I said that the export of coffee was forbidden, I got the answer: "I should like to know what could be forbidden in this country for an Eckstein!"<sup>1</sup>.

### Acknowledgement

Figures 2 and 3 are courtesy of the German Archeological Institute.

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