

Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas, Volume 1, Number 1

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Figure 1. Cover of the first issue of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*. At its inception, and until a few years ago, the president of the Academy (initially, Society) was also the journal's director. The founding director—Juan de Azúa (1858-1922)—was assisted by a recording secretary, a position later changed to that of editor-in-chief. The Society's treasurer was also the manager of the journal. In fact, the address that appears on the journal's cover—C/ Núñez de Arce 14, 1.º, Madrid—was the home of the first treasurer, Miguel Serrano.

Abstract. The first issue of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* appeared in May-June of 1909. Although not the first Spanish dermatology journal, it did provide a lasting forum where dermatologists could publish in Spanish at the same time as opening a window to the practice of dermatology throughout the world. Initially, the journal only included minutes of the Spanish Society of Dermatology (currently the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology [AEDV]), certain obituaries, and a section on foreign journals. The first issue of the journal is a good snapshot of the situation of the specialty in Spain 100 years ago. The proportion dedicated to venereology was substantial—more than half the total content. Venereology itself was dominated by syphilis, explaining why the journal retains the word “*sifiliográfica*” in its title. The catalyst for starting the journal was Juan de Azúa, who was also president of the society, with the help of Sánchez-Covisa as recording secretary, and Miguel Serrano as the society’s treasurer and journal manager. The first collaborators were drawn almost entirely from the now defunct Hospital San Juan de Dios in Madrid.

Key words: history of dermatology, history of Spanish dermatology, Spanish dermatology journals, dermatological journalism, *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*.

ACTAS DERMO-SIFILIOGRÁFICAS, AÑO 1, NÚMERO 1

Resumen. El primer número de *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* vio la luz en mayo-junio de 1909. No era la primera revista dermatológica española, pero su aparición supuso el impulso definitivo y la consolidación de un espacio de publicación en español abierta a la dermatología mundial que ha perdurado en el tiempo. Inicialmente se publicaban sólo las actas de las sesiones de la Sociedad Española de Dermatología y Sifiliografía (actual Academia Española de Dermatología y Venereología), algunos obituarios y una sección de revista extranjera. El primer ejemplar de la revista es un buen retrato de la situación de la especialidad en España hace 100 años. La venereología ocupaba un espacio muy importante: más de la mitad del volumen de trabajo. La sífilis dominaba la venereología y eso explica que la revista sea precisamente «sifiliográfica». El catalizador de la revista fue Juan de Azúa, presidente también de la Sociedad, auxiliado por José Sánchez-Covisa como secretario de Actas y por Miguel Serrano como tesorero de la Sociedad y administrador de la revista. Los colaboradores iniciales provenían casi en exclusiva del ya desaparecido Hospital de San Juan de Dios de Madrid.

Palabras clave: historia de la dermatología, historia de la dermatología española, publicaciones dermatológicas españolas, periodismo médico dermatológico, *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*.

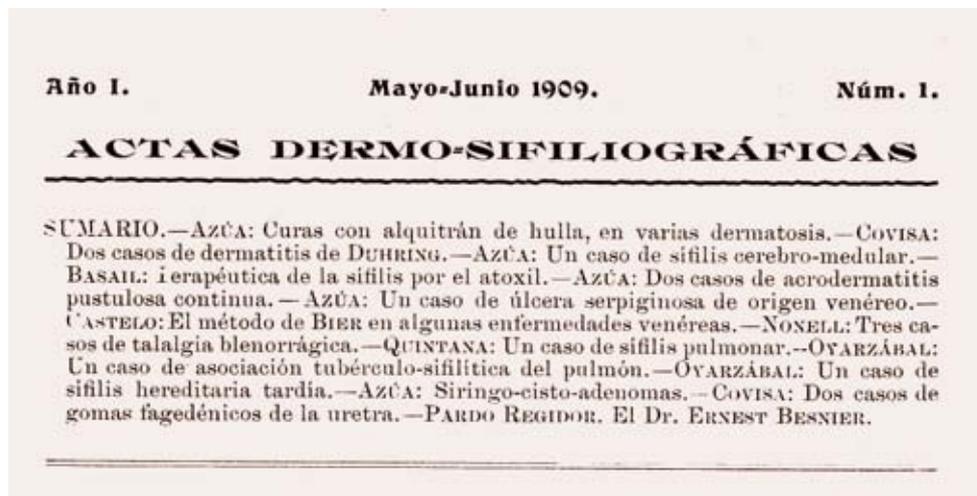
This coming June will mark the 100th anniversary of the appearance of the first issue of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*. It has been the flagship journal of Spanish dermatology, and has arrived regularly in our mailboxes since its inception, excepting a few months at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War between June 1936 and October 1937. Today *Actas* clearly evidences its vigor and solidity, and is moving toward a new stage in its development, one of a progressive globalization that wisely balances tradition and modernity in equal measure. Here we take a brief backward look at what the journal was like when the first issue appeared in 1909.

Title

The first issue of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* (Figure 1) is a small bibliographic and historical gem that gives us a very precise “snapshot” of what dermatology was like at the beginning of the 20th century. The journal’s first print run

was small, probably not more than 100 copies, as was to be expected for a publication sent to the members of the recently created Spanish Society of Dermatology and Syphilology, a handful of public institutions and libraries, and a few Spanish and foreign journals with which it exchanged publications. Its size was also smaller than it is now, just 23 × 16 cm. But if *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* has one defining feature, it is that it has preserved its name intact since its inception. Some prestigious dermatological journals in existence for a long period have changed not only their image with the passage of time, but their name as well. For example, not many years ago *Dermatológica* changed its name to *Dermatology*, and even earlier *Archives of Dermatology and Syphilology* abbreviated its title to *Archives of Dermatology*. *Actas*, however, is a faithful reflection of what it originally was: a publication consisting of the scientific papers presented at the periodic meetings of the Spanish Society of Dermatology and Syphilology, now the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology. And thus it is that this first issue reproduces the papers from the

Figure 2. *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* came into being with nothing by way of introduction or preamble. The first thing the reader saw upon opening the journal was the table of contents. This gives today's reader a clear picture of what the practice of dermatology was like at that time, since the majority of the articles were about venereal disease, especially syphilis. This dominant emphasis was reflected in the journal's title.



meetings held by the Society on May 6 and June 3, 1909, so faithfully that they even include the comments made by the participants following the presentations. The journal continued to record “proceedings” until a few years ago, although with decreasing importance in relation to other contents as this section was gradually replaced by original articles, reviews, case reports, scientific studies, obituaries, and news, as was also the case in the majority of dermatological journals and scientific journals in general.

A second peculiarity of the journal's title is that Azúa chose to use the more elegant form “dermo-” instead of the more commonly used “dermato-,” which is probably what would be used today. In reality both forms are equally correct in Spanish.¹

The third word of the title, “sifilográficas” (“syphilologic”), also has important connotations. Syphilis accounted for the immense majority of the venereological content of the specialty, and the rich variety of its clinical presentations transformed it into a true superspecialty. In fact, as noted above, the Spanish Academy of Dermatology itself originally included “Syphilology” in its name.

Actas Dermo-Sifilográficas begins with startling abruptness. We find not even a few lines by way of greeting in this first issue of *Actas*. From its inception the journal was filled with scientific content. Bejarano makes reference to this fact in the celebration of the Academy's first 25 years²: “This eminent man of exceptional tenacity and intelligence had created, with the help of a group of colleagues, the Academy in which Spanish dermatologists would be trained, and had provided it with an instrument for expression, *Actas Dermo-Sifilográficas*, which, in exemplary manner for scientific publications, has never published a column, a sentence or even a word on nondermatological matters that might conceivably cause or deepen differences among professionals.”

Contents

Looking beyond the title and the cover, an analysis of the contents of this first issue (Figure 2) provides us with a representative sample of what the specialty was like 100 years ago in Spain: only 4 of the 13 scientific contributions refer to dermatological subjects, while the remaining 9 deal with venereal diseases. Syphilis is the foremost among them, being the subject of 8 of the 9 articles, while only 1 deals with blennorrhoea.

As is only appropriate, the first article of the 1909 *Actas* is by Juan de Azúa, entitled “Treatment with coal tar for various dermatoses.” Azúa presents the results of this classic dermatological treatment—very novel at the time—in 29 patients. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the journal in 1984, this first article was republished in *Actas* along with the following one, written by José Sánchez-Covisa and entitled “Two cases of Dühring's disease (hepatitis herpetiformis).” For that issue, the article was preceded by a brief editor's note by Antonio García Pérez³ and followed by a succinct article on “The medical uses of coal tar today.”⁴

An aspect that we now find surprising is that the majority of the patients whose cases are detailed in these first articles are identified by name: for example, Antonio Fernández, stable hand, 54 years of age; Basilio Pérez, 79 years of age, unemployed (author's note: that is, retired), Isabel Entrambasaguas, etc. In fact, the patients themselves were often brought to the grand rounds presentations held at the Madrid Colegio Médico or at the Hospital de San Juan de Dios, and in this way those who attended had the opportunity to see their lesions at first hand, *in vivo*. Such violations of patients' privacy, though acceptable according to the standards of the time, would be difficult to justify in current practice, but many of our older colleagues

second issue of the journal.⁵ Only one figure (Figure 4) appears in the first issue, included in the text of a contribution—also by Azúa—entitled “Cerebrospinal syphilis. Incipient meningomyelitis and basal meningitis. Hearing and vision disorders. Extraordinary acoustic sensations,” about an extremely complex case in which he relied on the assistance of 3 colleagues—Mansilla, an ophthalmologist; Ernesto Botella, an ear, nose and throat specialist; and Clementino Basail—in order to perform, of all things, a musical examination. This drawing shows each area of the auricular branch of the superficial cervical plexus from which very painful cutaneous-acoustic sensations originated. Even so, most of the neurological examination of this patient was performed by Juan de Azúa, whose meticulousness shows that examinations of this type were routine for the dermatologists of the time.

The only personal reference appears at the end of the issue: a death notice for the French dermatologist Ernest Besnier, signed by Pardo Regidor. This constitutes the first contribution to an obituary section that, apart from honoring the dead, provides us today with an interesting source of historical information about the field of dermatology.

Conclusion

Today, 100 years after the publication of this issue, dermatology and venereology have changed. Physicians have changed, and the journal has changed along with us.⁶ But what remains intact are the journal’s title, and the enthusiasm and solid work of those pioneers. *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* retains the best from its past: prestige and tradition. It enjoys vigorous health in the present, and looks forward to a promising future. Happy 100th anniversary, *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*!

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Errata

Writing this article has allowed me to identify 2 errors that appear in an earlier publication of mine entitled “Breve historia de *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*” (“A Brief History of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*”) (*Actas Dermosifiliogr.* 2006;97:159-68), in the captions of 2 figures. Although some time has passed, I feel obliged to mention and correct them:

First. On page 161, in the caption of Figure 2 Azúa’s year of birth appears as 1857, when it should be 1858.

Second. On page 165, Figure 7 shows the cover of the catalog of the first volumes of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* compiled by Navarro Martín. This catalog was not published in 1959 for the 50th anniversary of the journal, as the caption indicates, but 5 years earlier, in 1954, nor does it include the first 50 years of the journal, but only the first 44 volumes.

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