

Coinage of the eponym ‘maladie de Parkinson’

Brian Hurwitz

In their otherwise enlightening essay on the genealogy of the eponym ‘Parkinson’s disease’ (Parkinson’s disease — the story of an eponym. *Nat. Rev. Neurol.* **14**, 57–62 (2018))¹, Michel Goedert and Alastair Compston incorrectly attribute its coinage to the Edinburgh physician William Sanders in 1865 (REF.²). They also claim, “the first reference to *maladie de Parkinson* appears in a footnote of the second edition of volume 1 of the *Leçons [sur les maladies du système nerveux (1875)]*”, authored by Jean-Martin Charcot, drafted most probably by Désiré-Magloire Bourneville³.

In fact, Charcot co-coined the eponym with Edmé Vulpian 14 years earlier, in the first section of a three-part paper, *De la paralysie agitante: à propos d’un cas tiré de la clinique du Professeur Oppolzer*⁴, in which they praised the precision with which James Parkinson had set out a tableau of its symptoms in *An Essay on the Shaking Palsy*⁵. Addressing the significance of festinant features of the disorder characterized by earlier nosographers, Charcot and Vulpian emphasized their poor diagnostic value: “seule, en effet, la tendance invincible à marcher rapidement, à courir en avant, a été explicitement mentionnée par les deux nosographes; or, ainsi que nous le verrons, c’est là un symptôme assez habituel sans doute, mais non point pathognomonique de la *maladie*

de Parkinson.” This translates as, “in fact, only the invincible tendency to walk rapidly, to run forwards, has been explicitly mentioned by ... nosographers; as we shall see, it is without doubt a fairly common symptom, but not pathognomonic of Parkinson’s disease.” It was the need to distinguish conditions sharing features in common with the disease that Parkinson had delineated that led them to coin the eponym^{5–7}.

Charcot was generally meticulous in crediting the contributions of others, and his usage of the eponym 14 years before the 1875 footnote explains why he ignored the coinage that Goedert and Compston attribute to Sanders. Charcot knew well Sanders’ 1868 chapter on *paralysie agitante*, in which he used the term ‘Parkinson’s disease’ on three occasions⁸. In the first two editions of the *Leçons*^{3,9}, Charcot drew directly on the chapter: he reproduced data Sanders had collected on the incidence and sex ratio of the condition, and referred to a clinical case that Sanders had relayed, which Charcot believed illustrated one of the causes of *maladie de Parkinson*^{4,8,9}.

Though fluent in French, Sanders did not mention Charcot and Vulpian’s earlier coinage in his writings, and he seems not to have been aware of their 1861–1862 paper in *Gazette*

*Hebdomadaire*⁴. For his part, Charcot did not pursue Sanders’ 1865 paper in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, even though it was referenced in the 1868 chapter^{2,8}. That paper had reported a case of *paralysie agitante* in a young man who had suffered trauma to his back after falling from scaffolding. Interestingly, Sanders used the term Parkinson’s disease for a similar reason to Charcot and Vulpian, namely, to distinguish a different but similar condition from the one delineated by James Parkinson⁵. This 1861 usage makes Parkinson’s disease a French (not British) coinage^{6,7}.

Brian Hurwitz

Centre for the Humanities and Health, King’s College
London, London, UK.

e-mail: brian.hurwitz@kcl.ac.uk

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Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.