Editorial

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Medical Parasitology represents a scientific discipline that has been linked with a continuous increase of relevance during the past years and decades. The reasons are intensive global tourism on one hand and millions of migrants leaving their countries due to hunger, political repression and war and entering countries free of violence and turmoil of war on the other hand. Thus, physicians living and working in Central European countries are more and more frequently confronted with the diagnosis and therapy of rare and “exotic” parasitic pathogens and parasitoses.

Parasites *sensu stricto* are not viruses, bacteria or fungi, but are unicellular protozoa (e.g. amoebae, trypanosomes, *Toxoplasma gondii*,...), multicellular helminths (e.g. flukes, tapeworms,...) and arthropods (e.g. mites, ticks, insects,...). Parasitological research is concerned with the biology and epidemiology of the parasites and with the nosology, particularly the diagnosis and treatment, of diseases caused by these parasites *sensu stricto*.

Research in the field of parasitology has a long tradition in Austria; the first comprehensive collections of parasites have been established in the eighteenth century, when Carl Franz Anton Ritter von Schreiber (1775–1851) and particularly Johann Gottfried Bremser (1767–1827) worked in the ‘k.k. Naturalienkabinett Wien’, which has become later the ‘Naturhistorisches Museum Wien’. Other pioneers of parasitological research in Austria were Josef Natterer (1786–1852), Carl Moritz Diesing (1800–1867), Josef Fiebiger (1844–1928) and Adolf Posselt (1867–1936).

Parasitological research and teaching at university level has been established in Austria in 1966, when Univ.-Prof. Dr. Horst Aspöck became the (first) head of the Department

of Medical Parasitology within the Institute of Hygiene (head: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Heinz Flamm) of the University of Vienna. He initiated the establishment of a modern laboratory for the diagnostic examination of all kinds of parasitic diseases on one hand and the intensive research on several parasites and parasitoses (e.g. toxoplasmosis) particularly occurring in Central Europe on the other hand.

In July 2009, the Department of Medical Parasitology became a member of the Institute of Specific Prophylaxis and Tropical Medicine of the Medical University of Vienna. During the past decade, the diagnostic activities have increased and intensified by the continuous improvement of methodological tools comprising now a broad spectrum of microscopic, serologic and also numerous molecular genetic tests. Main emphasis is on endemic (e.g. toxoplasmosis, babesiosis, free-living amoebae, echinococcosis, toxocarosis) and also “exotic” parasitoses (e.g. leishmaniasis).

This special issue of *WMW* will provide a short and rather incomplete insight into recent parasitological research activities in Austria. Although the majority of research and teaching in the field of medical parasitology is carried out in the Institute of Specific Prophylaxis and Tropical Medicine, also other Austrian institutions are involved in parasitological research projects, e.g. the clinical departments of the Medical Universities in Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck; the Institute of Parasitology at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna; several institutes of the University of Vienna and the ‘Naturhistorisches Museum Wien’.

The different chapters are dedicated to very different topics and cover immunological aspects, parasites of the eye, parasites of the central nervous system, helminths and helminthoses and an article on protozoa and protozoan infection-caused diseases in Central Europe.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

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