

## Obituary

# Lino Rossi (1923–2004): cardiopathologist and historian

With great sorrow, I inform the scientific community that, on August 11, 2004, Dr. Lino Rossi passed away suddenly while on holidays in Innsbruck, Austria. Pathologist and cardiologist, Dr. Rossi (Fig. 1) was known worldwide for his contributions to the histology of the cardiac conduction system and innervation, of which he was a pioneer.

Born in Milan on December 31, 1923, he was the son of a humanist Medical Practitioner, who played a crucial role in Lino's vocation as a pathologist. He had a classic High School education and then graduated in Medicine from the University of Milan in 1947. During the 2nd World War, he participated in the partisan struggle against the Fascist Republic of Salò. For the help given to the soldiers of the British Commonwealth of Nations, which enabled them to escape from a capture by the enemies, he received an Award from the Supreme Allied Commander H.R. Alexander, Mediterranean Theatre. In 1951, the Director of his Institute at the University of Milan, Prof. Redaelli, sent him to Bristol to study parathyroids, with a scholarship of the Italian National Council for Research.

He trained in Pathology, attaining the Professorship in Pathological Anatomy in 1957, and then qualified in Cardiology in 1959. In 1955, he married Graziella, a devoted and inspiring wife, a true "musa" along all his life, in whose arms he eventually died. Unfortunately, they had no children, but this even reinforced their relation.

In the period 1948–1967, his career in morbid anatomy and clinical pathology moved from Assistant and Senior Assistant to Head of the Service in a Community Hospital. He was then associated with the University of Milan, becoming Director of the Cardiovascular Laboratory in the Institute of Pathology.

Soon after graduation, he turned his interest to the study of the conduction system and innervation of the heart with several publications and original articles, culminating in the book *Histopathologic Features of Cardiac Arrhythmias* (Casa Editrice Ambrosiana, Milan, 1969), which represented an extraordinary example of correlations between ECG features and microscopic substrates of arrhythmias. The book had a second edition in 1979, with a little change of the title to *Histopathology of Cardiac Arrhythmias*. The



Fig. 1. A recent picture of Lino Rossi.

histologic pictures of atrioventricular block and ventricular preexcitation are still unique. The method of serial sections that he introduced was quite novel, with only two large blocks of tissue embedded in paraffin, and still represents the only reliable way to investigate histologically the conduction system. He frequently did the sections personally at the microtome, a true artisan of research without any grants. He collaborated in the 1970s with Dirk Durrer and Rudolph T. Van Dam in Amsterdam on experimental electrophysiology, an opportunity he considered fundamental and memorable. He corresponded with Jean Lenegre and, at difference from Rosenbaum, they were in agreement on the impossibility to establish a morpho-electrophysiological correlation of left bundle branch hemi-block. In 1980, Dr. Rossi was invited to the 53rd Scientific Session of American Heart Association to deliver the P.D. White lecture and was then elected Honorary Fellow of the Council on Clinical Cardiology. The British Cardiac Society nominated him as corresponding member in 1982. He had working relations with several prominent scientists in the field of cardiac arrhythmias (amongst whom are, Michael Rosen, Thomas James, Philip Coumel, Michiel Janse, Robert Anderson, Anton Becker).

I had the privilege to have Lino as mentor, sharing with him memorable sittings at the microscope, where he trained me to recognize the sinus and atrioventricular nodes, the His bundle and bundle branches, as well as the cardiac nerves and ganglia. He was a fantastic teacher, conveying to me the curiosity of observation and the enthusiasm of discovery. He was a true cardiopathologist with the unique skill “to read the electrocardiogram at the microscope”, a capacity which I keep as a legacy.

He taught me how sudden cardiac death is mostly an “electrical” phenomenon due to dyshomogeneity of impulse transmission within the working myocardium, either in the ischemic or cardiomyopathic setting. The writing of the book *Arrhythmologic Pathology of Sudden Cardiac Death* (CEA; Milan, 1983), which we coauthored, was actually, for me, an exercise in intellectual gymnastics for understanding the pathophysiology of cardiac arrest and precluded the advent of the cardiac defibrillator.

In the beautiful colour atlas *Clinico-Pathologic Approach to Cardiac Arrhythmias* (CSE; Turin, 1990), a true piece of art which he coauthored with Dr. Matturri and illustrated with personal drawings, he collected the best of his pictures in the various cardiac pathologic conditions presenting with electrical instability.

This method of clinico-pathologic correlations was applied in the joint study of sudden death due to arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy, which our group first reported with Lino in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1988 and then in several articles leading to the book *Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Cardiomyopathy/Dysplasia* (A. Nava, L. Rossi, G. Thiene; Elsevier, 1997), the only monograph published on the topic so far.

He received the Honorary Membership of the Italian Group of Cardiovascular Pathology in 1991 and of NASPE in 1993.

He held a tight collaboration with the University of Padua, becoming Honorary President of our Foundation that supports the investigation of arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathies.

Lino was not only a scientist, but also a humanist, a painter, a historian, in other words truly a “homo universalis”. He enjoyed modestly defining himself as a “Jack of all trades and master of none”. His interest in the Roman Empire and Army culminated in the book *Trajan's Column and the Dacian Wars* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1972), in which he gave an outstanding demonstration of

how a morphologist is able to interpret the scenes sculptured in low profile in the stone column.

Last but not least, his expertise in Roman and Greek coins was so extraordinary as to deserve the fellowship of the Royal Numismatic Society of London in 1982.

For these cultural achievements, Lino was nominated Corresponding Member of the Olympic Academy of Vicenza, to which I had the honour to introduce him. He delivered the last, outstanding lecture at the University of Padua in May 2003 on a historical topic he liked very much, namely on the *Defeat of Quintilius Varus in the Forest of Teutoburg (Saltus Teutoburgensis) in 9 A.D.*

Lino Rossi was Professor of Pathology as L.D. (Libero Docente=Free Teacher), but he never held a permanent position at the University. The Italian Academy, although granting him as a first class Scientist, never offered him the honour to become Ordinary (=Full) Professor. He well deserves the motto “Nemo propheta in Patria” (nobody is acknowledged in his own country). However, a research center entitled to his name has been recently implemented at the Institute of Pathological Anatomy, University of Milan, thanks to the will and initiative of Dr. Matturri, Professor of Pathology, formerly student of Lino Rossi.

When I became Full Professor in 1990, he was so happy for my achievement (which I would not have got without his mentorship), as to give me a wristwatch as a present, with the printed writing of the Roman Centurion promotion, when back winner from the War in Empire Borders “Gaetano, primorum ordinum, libens laetus merito” (To Gaetano, holding to the Order of the Firsts, very glad because well deserved). Actually, he never recommended to fight for being the first. On the contrary, he taught me that the engagement in a scientific contest is not comparable to a sports competition. What is important is to share a skillful and dedicated liability. He usually quoted the popular saying “Who cares who came second?”, here intended in an entirely positive, even laudative sense. His memory will remain in my heart, forever.

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