

Opinion Article

Pierre Ambroise-Thomas: a loyal friend and a strong supporter of tropical medicine in Brazil

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Abstract

Our colleagues at the *Sociedade Brasileira de Medicina Tropical* have been informed of the demise of Professor Pierre Ambroise-Thomas (1937-2014). However, considering that the tribute we paid to him in 2015 – at the 20th anniversary of the *Seminário Laveran & Deane sobre Malária* – is equally true today, it is worth sharing it with the readers of the *RSBMT*, in recognition of his many virtues. Pierre Ambroise-Thomas (MD in 1963 and DSc in 1969) was Honorary Professor of Parasitology and Tropical Medicine at the *Faculté de Médecine de Grenoble* (France), Honorary President of the *Académie Nationale de Médecine*, member of the *Académie Nationale de Pharmacie* and *Officier dans l'Ordre de La Légion d'Honneur*. In addition to his important contributions to tropical medicine and parasitology, working in France during his long and productive career (50 years and 300 publications), Ambroise-Thomas became an admirer and supporter of Brazilian activities related to research, teaching and information in Tropical Medicine.

Keywords: Pierre Ambroise-Tomas. Brazil. France. Tropical Medicine. Friendship.

Our colleagues from the Brazilian Society of Tropical Medicine (SBMT) were informed of the passing of Professor Pierre Ambroise-Thomas (MD 1963, DSc 1969) on March 16, 2014 through a tribute to Pierre as a great physician and extraordinary person. In recognition of Pierre's many virtues, we share with you the thoughts imparted back in September 2015 during the celebration of the 20 years of the Laveran and Deane Seminar on Malaria on Itacuruçá Island, when he was made *Emeritus Professor of the Seminar, in memoriam*, as these thoughts remain true today.

Born in Paris on January 15, 1937, Pierre led a fulfilled life, characterized by achievements. He was an honorary professor of Parasitology and Tropical Medicine at the *Faculté de Médecine de Grenoble* (France), former chief of the Parasitology-Mycology Service at the University Hospital Center at the same city, honorary president of the *Académie Nationale de Médecine* (ANM), member of the *Académie Nationale de Pharmacie* and *Officier dans l'Ordre de La Légion d'Honneur*.

He began his career in Alger (Algeria, when it was still a French colony), where he obtained his medical degree. He had his first experiences there as a physician in particularly difficult conditions. In 1962, he was forced to leave the country suddenly,

with only the clothes he was wearing and some personal items. Brave and willful as always, he defended his MD doctoral Thesis in Lyon the following year.

In obtaining a *Docteur ès Sciences* degree in 1969, Pierre was nominated to the newly created *Faculté de Médecine de Grenoble* in 1970, where he started the first Parasitology Center that would become a National Reference Center and later, a *Collaborating Center of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Malaria and Parasitic Diseases*. He became a professor and developed an international lecturing, research, and clinical hospital career. He trained many students in several universities in France, including Grenoble, and numerous other countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia. He was *Honoris Causa* professor at the Medicine University of Shanghai where he lectured for almost 30 years. All of this earned him the renown as *the true ambassador of French Medicine abroad*.

Pierre's research activities involved immunology and malaria treatment involving artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACT), toxoplasmosis, and several other parasitic and opportunist mycotic diseases. He published over 300 articles in indexed journals, 1,000 articles in French journals or communications in international conferences, and 14 books, including *The Infectious and Parasitic Diseases*. Such activities and merits granted the election for the *Académie Nationale de Médecine* (ANM), at first, as a corresponding member (a tradition at the French Academy) in 1987, then as a Full Member in 1999. He later became ANM's President in 2008. At the ANM, his work concerned especially medical practice in

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hospitals and presiding the Commission on Medical Exercise in Public Hospitals and in University Hospitals. A great defender of medicine and general practitioners, he aimed to recruit generalist physicians as consultative members, valuing their enriching field experiences.

Meanwhile, Pierre contributed to many national and international high-level administrative and political actions as part of the Pharmacy and Drugs Directory and president of the *Société Française de Pathologie Exotique*. He joined the *Conseil National des Universités*, scientific councils such as the *Center National de la Recherche Scientifique* and Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-mer (currently *Institut de Recherche pour le Développement*), Federation of European Societies for Tropical Medicine, and the International Health Council. A WHO expert since 1974, he was nominated general-director of Strategic Technical Advisory Group in charge of advising the organization on fighting against neglected tropical diseases. He organized the XVI International Congress on Tropical Medicine and Malaria in Marseille, France, in 2005; at the time, he served as president of the International Federation for Tropical Medicine (IFTM) from 2008 to 2012.

Always willful to complement workbench research with fieldwork, Pierre conducted numerous missions on high-burden parasitic diseases (e.g., malaria, amebiasis, schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis, and lymphatic filariasis) in over 60 countries, frequently supported by WHO.

I met Pierre around 1980 when I was performing my doctoral training in immunology at the Department of Parasitology, *Centre Hospitalo-Universitaire (CHU) Pitié-Salpêtrière*, Paris. He came to one of the famous staff meetings, held on that day at the CHU. I was impressed by the elegance and clarity with which he offered his opinions and overviews on the cases presented. Pierre's PhD thesis in Science was on the use of the Immunofluorescent Antibody Test (IFAT) in 10 parasitic diseases. He became one of the most important serologists in parasitic diseases. When writing my first articles and my doctoral thesis, as most PhD students, I wanted to quote articles written by international authors that I had met. For the malaria IFAT reference we had the classical options of Aristides Voller's or Pierre Ambroise-Thomas's works, and as far as I remember, Pierre's work has always been my choice.

It was natural and expected that having decided to create the *Reuniões Nacionais de Pesquisa em Malária*, by organizing the International Symposium on Malaria in 1986 in Rio de Janeiro, I invited Pierre to chair the session on Immunological Diagnostic Methods. He made a bright Introduction and wonderfully conducted the session. I invited him again when organizing in 1990 the first International Course on Malariology that would be chaired by Cór Jesus Fontes in a National version for several subsequent years. To this first Edition of the Course we had the who label, thanks to Pierre, who escorted me to the late Dr. Peter Beales in Geneva, in charge of the WHO International Courses at that time. Pierre lectured in Manaus that year and invited me to integrate the board of the *Fondation Internationale Laveran*. Sponsored by the *Fondation Charles Merieux* and presided

by the also late Clinical Tropical Doctor Raymond Lasserre, *la Fondation* had, at that time, Luiz Hildebrando Pereira da Silva and myself as the only representatives of a developing country in its Scientific Council.

Convinced of our ability for organizing scientific events of high quality in a scenario of great natural beauty and privileged human relationships, Pierre proposed to Merieux and Lasserre to host the forthcoming "4th International Congress on Malaria and Babesiosis" in Rio de Janeiro. I had the privilege of Organizing the Event in 1991, for the first time in the South hemisphere, having Hooman Momen (former Editor of the WHO Bulletin and Coordinator of the WHO Press for several years) as co-organizer, the late Leônidas de Mello Deane as its Honorary President, and Pierre as an active participant.

Invited by us, Pierre started, from 1997 on, to participate at the *Seminário Laveran & Deane (SLD) sobre Malária* that Maria de Fátima Ferreira-da-Cruz and I have been organizing for the last 21 years at the island of Itacuruçá, Rio de Janeiro. Last year, in September, the 20th SLD edition was filled with consternation and *saudades*, knowing that we shall miss his kindhearted presence and effective contribution forever.

As Probably impressed by the growing international impact of the Brazilian academic community and the quality of the national proceedings he had participated in, Pierre, then Secretary General of the IFTM, invited me to join its board as Treasurer, in 2001, and encouraged me to make the XVIII Edition of the ICTMM happen in Brazil in 2012. We first met in 2004 at the lobby bar of the then Meridien (now Windsor) Hotel in Leme, Rio de Janeiro with Vera Bittencourt that would become the Executive Secretary of the Congress eight years later. Its is a tradition at the IFTM that the ICTMM Organizer candidates first apply to the forthcoming Event two Editions before the intended Congress and I was honored by the company of the late Professor Aluizio Rosa Prata and an Embratur (the Brazilian Tourism Company) employee in Marseille to first propose Brazil for holding the XVIII Edition of the ICTMM. The Assembly of the Brazilian Society of Tropical Medicine (SBMT) in 2006 designed Professor José Rodrigues Coura as the President of the forthcoming ICTMM. Coura and I travelled together at the Assembly of the IFTM to confirm the Brazilian's candidacy during the XVII ICTMM in Jeju (Korea) in 2008. Rio de Janeiro was announced as the next destiny of the Congress and a new board of the IFTM, having Pierre as its President and myself as Vice-President (President Elect), was declared. There is no doubt that it was because of Pierre's idea, suggestion, indication and committed support that the Rio de Janeiro ICTMM happened eight years after our first meeting and his first suggestion.

As proposed by the academician José Rodrigues Coura, Pierre became an honorary foreign member of the Brazilian ANM in 2009. He insisted on wearing a tuxedo in the ceremony according to the protocol for Brazilian academicians.

I am deeply saddened by Pierre's absence, as he was a beloved longtime friend and an enthusiastic supporter of Brazil. His last contribution to Brazil was the proposal and committed

support to the use of ACT for the treatment of *Plasmodium vivax* malaria. As a result, a randomized clinical comparative study to assess the efficiency and tolerability of artesunate/amodiaquine versus chloroquine for uncomplicated vivax monoinfection malaria was conducted in the last two years at the *Fundação de Medicina Tropical do Amazonas Heitor Vieira Dourado*. Professor Marcus Vinícius Guimarães Lacerda was the principal investigator, and I have been

honored by acting as the coordinator investigator. The results are now in press.

I end this tribute by quoting Professor Parodi's (from de French ANM) statement on Pierre: ... *a man of faith: faith in his mission... faith in his great family of which he was so proud and did him so well ... faith in friendship to which he was faithful in all circumstances ... and deep religious faith ... that he practiced with equal conviction and discretion.*



FIGURE 1. Pierre was a fan of his family, with whom, he used to tell me, he shared the best moments of his life. Here, he appears with his beloved wife Colette Ambroise-Thomas (his beloved wife) and all his 16 grandchildren (from seven children), and a friend of one of the grandchildren, at their home at Grenoble.