Mirko Dražen Grmek was born on January 9, 1924, in Krapina, a small town in the northern part of Croatia, famous for the nearby archeological site where Gorjanović, a Croatian archeologist, excavated the bones of the Krapina Neanderthals in 1899 (1,2). Mirko was the only child of Milan Grmek and Vera Santovac. They got married and settled in their home town of Krapina, after Milan got a degree at the Zagreb University Law School in 1921. The 1920’s were the years of Croatian national revival in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croat and Slovenes and the most powerful political party in Croatia at the time was the Croatian Peasants Party, led by Stjepan Radić. Milan Grmek was a member of that Party and he got elected as the representative of Krapina in the Zagreb District Assembly (3), in 1927. Soon afterwards, Grmek family moved to Zagreb. Milan Grmek also got elected into three important committees of the Zagreb District Assembly, which made great efforts to bring northern and southern parts of Croatia to work together on their economic, tourist and cultural development as a common goal (4). With equal eagerness, he fought against the illiteracy in the Krapina region, where only 30-50% of children attended school and there was only one teacher on more than 200 pupils.

The Croatian national movement ended abruptly with the assassination of Stjepan Radić and two of his close associates during the session in the State Parliament Building in Belgrade, on June 28, 1928. The Zagreb District Assembly tried to continue with its work, but quite soon got dissolved by the representative of the Serbian royal authorities in Zagreb. This happened in 1928, and after king’s coup d’Etat on January 6, 1929 and proclamation of Kingdom of Yugoslavia, open military dictatorship followed.

Mirko Dražen Grmek finished primary and secondary school in Zagreb. From his youth, he had felt a strong aversion toward politics, which he regarded as the activity impregnated with various forms of lies, in which “macht sucht” plays a crucial role, as he said in his last interview (5). The causes of such resentment were his father’s bad political experience and political murders of Stjepan Radić in 1928, and J. Predavec, the Vice President on the Croatian Peasants Party, in 1933.

As a teenager, Grmek got interested in natural sciences and, in spite of his mother’s objections, turned his room into a small chemical laboratory (5). He planned to study medicine at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb, but the war broke out and he had to postpone his studies. He was recruited as soon as he graduated from a classical grammar school in 1942, and was sent to the Military Polytechnic Academies in Torino and Lucca in Italy. After the defeat of Musolini’s fascist regime in September 1943, Grmek decided not to return to Croatia because Croatian government collaborated with Hitler’s Nazi regime. So, he joined the Resistance, went to France and as a maquis participated in the liberation of France. At that time, he started writing poetry “not to overcome the fear, which could be overcome by action only, but to overcome war atrocities” (5). Most of his poems are in Croatian, although he wrote them in Italy, Switzerland and France. There is only one in French and one in Italian. This was Grmek’s way to keep his ties with homeland alive.

By the end of the World War II, Grmek achieved a rank of lieutenant in the French Liberation Army. He finally started his medical studies in October 1945, after he returned to Zagreb. He was eager to “learn and get deep insight into the physical and mental aspect of human nature” (5). He wanted to be a physician completely dedicated to the highest ideals of his call, to help people, to treat each patient as an individual different from all the others with the same attention and dedication. At the University, Grmek was influenced by the two of his professors, both quite impressive men with strong personalities. The first one, Andrija Stampar (Drenovci 1888 – Zagreb 1958), was a professor of hygiene and social medicine at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb, where he had been lecturing continuously since 1939, except in the period while he was imprisoned in Graz, Austria,
during the World War II. When Grmek met him, Dr Štampar had already had 25 years of experience in the field of social-medical reform, working as an expert for the Health Organization of the League of Nations and thus participating, among other things, in organizing a health protection system in pre-war China. He also took part in the international project of establishing the World Health Organization and became its first president on June 19, 1946. It was Štampar who taught Grmek how important social and economic conditions were for the health of the people.

The second teacher that had great influence on Grmek, was Lujo Thaller (Osijek 1891 – Zagreb 1949), the first professor of the History of Medicine at the Zagreb University Medical Faculty. He helped Grmek realize that gaining medical knowledge was long and tedious process. It was “nothing like the birth of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom who simply sprang from Zeus’s head, with shield and helmet already in her hands” (6). Grmek liked this metaphor and was thrilled by the idea of knowledge as a never ending process, that gave the opportunity to every following generation of physicians for their own contribution to medicine.

After the war, Grmek continued to write poems. He devoted several of his love sonnets to Sida, whom he married later, in 1946. In December 1945, he tried to publish his poetry, but the communist censorship did not allow it, judging his poems as decadent, provincial and “petit-bourgeois” (5). The attempt to publish them as a private edition, in April 1946, was hindered by the authorities again, with an explanation that printing paper stocks were scarce (7).

Disappointed, Grmek concentrated on medicine and scientific research. He became one of the initiators of the medical students journal, Medicinar, and a member of its first editorial board. The first issue of Medicinar, published in December, 1946, brought Grmek’s article on famous physician and scientist, Gj. A. Baglivi (Dubrovnik 1668 – Rome 1707) (8). In this article, Grmek described Baglivi’s place in medicine and tried to explain why all the relevant contributions to medicine that came from those born in Croatia before the 20th century, were produced out of Croatia. Professor Thaller asked him to join the Section for the History of Medicine of the Croatian Medical Association (CMA), the association of physicians established in Zagreb in 1874. At the meeting of the Section on February 19, 1947, Grmek, a sophomore, delivered his first lecture of a three-lecture course on Santorio Santorio (Kopar 1561 – Venice 1636), a physiologist and iatrophysicist from Istria, to whom we owe the use of thermometer in medicine (9). Later on, Grmek published that lecture in Medicinar (10). Grmek had been an active researcher at the Biology Department for three years as well, and he published his research in Medicinar and Liječnički Vjesnik, latter a journal of the Croatian Medical Association (11,12). He won several prizes for his research work and was highly appreciated for the excellent presentations at meetings and congresses (13,14), which spared him from being expelled from the University after he refused to become a member of the communist-controlled student organization (5,15). Fortunately, this conflict took place in the period of the notorious Tito’s breech with Stalin’s communist block in 1948, when political changes lessened the rigidity of the University (5).

Although still a student, Grmek was repeatedly elected a secretary of the Section for the History of Medicine of the Croatian Medical Association. The first task he got was to bring in order and classify the items in the Museum of History of Medicine in Croatia, established in Zagreb in 1942 by Vladimir Čepulić (Novi Vinodolski 1891 – Zagreb 1964), a professor of phthisiology at the Zagreb Medical Faculty and the president of the Croatian Medical Association from 1935 to 1945. In 1947, Grmek published his first article on the history of medicine in Liječnički vjesnik (16). In 1949, he became the technical editor of Tuberkułosa, the official journal of the Yugoslav Association of Pulmonological Societies (17,18). In that journal, Grmek published a small article on R. Koch, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the scientist’s death (19). A year after, he extended his research on this topic and included it in his book (20).

Grmek graduated in September 29, 1951, and started his obligatory one-year internship in hospital in Zadar, a town at the Adriatic Coast. He chose Zadar because of its extraordinary rich Archives and Library. He published two articles based on the data collected during this internship (21,22), but more importantly, he discovered that Zadar had had a fully developed Medical Faculty in 1811, established by the Emperor Napoleon’s Authorities (23-26).

Dr Grmek finished his internship in Zagreb. In summer 1952, he became the official member of the Croatian Medical Association and was re-elected as the secretary of the Section for the History of Medicine (27). By the end of 1953, Dr Grmek became the editor-in-chief of Liječnički vjesnik, and remained on that post until 1958 (28). After he left, nevertheless he stayed on its Advisory board and continued to publish his articles. The last one, on Etruscan ceremonial kept in the Archeology Museum in Zagreb as the longest preserved Etruscan text, was printed in 1995 (29).

Although Dr Grmek brought his medical studies to completion wishing to help people as a physician, after his internship, he gave up medicine as a profession sensu stricto. The atmosphere in hospitals and hospital hierarchy did not suit him (5). He felt that a hospital was “like a military structured system”. He could not stand “being ordered by superiors and giving orders to the others”. Just as well, Dr Grmek was aware that advancement in medicine as a practice required specialization, whereas he preferred to acquire more profound,
synthetic knowledge. Therefore, he chose the history of medicine “as a bridge between natural sciences on the one hand and humanistic and social sciences on the other” (5).

In 1952, Dr Štampar, his former professor and the president of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) in Zagreb from 1947 to 1958, invited Grmek to become an assistant at the Academy. Grmek’s task was to establish the Department for the History of Medicine at the Institute for Medical Research. Aside his professional success, Dr Grmek soon got one more reason to be happy. His son, Smiljan, was born in 1953.

Grmek’s habilitation dissertation, The life and works of Dinko Dubrovčanin, the medieval physician and medicine scriptor, brought him veniam legendi for the course History of Medicine at the Medical Faculty of the University of Zagreb, on January 16, 1954. He was appointed a lecturer for the course the “Introduction to Medicine” (30) and he had to rewrite the notes for that course. The second edition of these notes was published in 1957. In 1959, Dr Grmek became the Assistant Professor of the History of Medicine at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb. After two editions of his lecture notes, he published a book, An Introduction into Medicine, in 1961. The book remained the standard textbook for the course, and was enlarged and re-edited in 1971 and 1996 [6]. Dr Grmek’s meticulous and long search of different archives in the country and abroad, resulted in the first part of the Croatian Medical Bibliography, which was published in 1955. The three parts of that important and useful book were published before 1984, encompassing a total of 5,542 works on medicine, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy, printed between 1470 and 1940 and connected to Croatia either by the authors, language, content, or place of publishing. Grmek defended his dissertation Medical Faculties in Dalmatia in the period of French governing (1806-1813) at the University of Zagreb on December 19, 1958, as the first PhD in the field of the history of medicine. Now a research associate at JAZU, he got the task to establish the Institute for the History of Natural, Mathematic, and Medical Sciences at JAZU. Several months later, on June 10, 1959, Dr Grmek became the first director of the Institute and launched a journal of the Institute. As one of two assistant editors, he helped A. Šercer (Slavonska PoZT 1886 – Zagreb 1968), a professor at Medical Faculty in Zagreb and the Head of the Department of Ear, Nose and Throat, in editing the first edition of the Medical Encyclopaedia, which was published by the Yugoslav Lexicographic Institute in Zagreb. After Professor Šercer passed away, Grmek continued to work as the editor-in-chief of the Medical Encyclopaedia.

In 1963, the French Ministry of National Education offered Dr Grmek the position of Scientific Lecturer at the National Center for Scientific Research (Centre national des recherches scientifiques) and to become a professor at the Postgraduate Studies School (École Pratique des Hautes Études) at Sorbonne, Paris. He was to lecture on the history of biological sciences at the Department for the History of Scientific Ideas. Dr Grmek accepted both offers because he felt he had reached the academic top in his homeland. He was also dissatisfied with the limitations politics could impose on a scientist in a communist country (31). The Teachers’ Council at the College de France offered Grmek to classify, catalogue, and publish Claude Bernard’s manuscript legacy, and part of the work he did while he was still published in Zagreb. In the scientific community of Paris, though, Dr Grmek found really inspiring working conditions. His interests soon outgrew the borders of the history of medicine and spread to the history of science, philosophy of science, and epistemology. Dr Grmek used what the progress of modern medicine and various modern scientific disciplines brought to explain riddles of some old diseases as well as to predict the appearance of future pestilence. He insisted on the synthetic approach to a problem, which led him to the concept of the pathocenosis (32).

He became a Laureate of the French Academy in 1966, of the Academy of Science in Paris in 1967, and of the French National Medical Academy in 1974. Dr. Grmek obtained a doctorate in philosophy and humanistic sciences at Sorbonne, Paris, in 1971, and his dissertation La raisonnement experimental et les experiences toxicologiques chez Claude Bernard was published in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1973. That study, based on the analysis of Bernard’s laboratory protocols and notes on experiments with poisonous substances such as curare and CO, was accepted as the golden standard, a pioneer approach in the history of science. He tried to reconstruct the way the scientists in the past had developed their concepts, to follow their creative activity, to analyze the inner logic of both the production of scientific discovery and the psychology of a research process. With his work, Dr Grmek opened new avenues in the research and scientists from various parts of world regarded him as their mentor (33). After Dr Grmek published his Les maladies a l’aube de la civilisation occidentale (Payot, Paris, 1963), which were translated in English (Diseases in the Ancient Greek World, John Hopkins University Press; 1989) as well as into several other languages, the concept of pathocenosis became accepted and connected with his name worldwide. Dr Grmek took the same approach to the problem of AIDS as he did to the problem of tuberculosis, leprosy, and syphilis in the Ancient world, which he researched (34). Grmek postulated that AIDS was not a new disease, but a disease that had already existed in the past (35), but appeared again as an epidemic on the basis of favorable ecological, biological, and social changes (36,37).

In 1989, Dr. Grmek officially retired from his post at Sorbonne, but continued to lecture worldwide and publish. The monograph, La premiere revolution biologique, was published in 1990. The three

He received a number of awards for his work, i.e., Sarton's medal, the highest international award in the field of the history of science, in 1991, and many acknowledgments. Grmek's Maladie et maladies was published as an homage to him by his friends in Geneva in 1992 (7); a scientific journal Eurêca from Paris, France, proclaimed Dr Grmek the scientist of the year in 1996; the oldest European University in Bologna, Italy, awarded Grmek a honorary doctorate, honoris causa, on October 10, 1998.

Although working abroad, Dr Grmek remained in close contact with his colleagues and students in Croatia. On June 23, 1966, he became a corresponding member of Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts in Zagreb. He participated in many scientific meetings of Croatian scientific associations. Some of his French postgraduate students did their research work partly in Croatia (38). One of Dr Grmek's special concerns was informing international community about great scientists of Croatian origin: he succeeded in putting a bilingual (French and Croatian) inscription on the building in Paris in which R. J. Bošković had lived and worked from 1773 until 1777. He was also among those who placed a memorial to G. A. Baglivi, in Italian and Croatian, in the St. Marcel church in Rome, Italy, on May 27, 1995.

Grmek intensified his communication with Croatia after it gained independence and sovereignty in 1990. He became the first president of Alumnæ Mater Croaticae Alumni in Paris (1991-1992). Dr Grmek was one of the creators and devoted activists of the International Croatian Initiative (1992), whose aim was development different non-governmental programs for quicker integration of the Republic of Croatia into the European Union. He supported Croatian Medical Journal, the official journal of four medical faculties in Croatia, launched in 1991. Dr Grmek had been on the Advisory board of Croatian Medical Journal and published in it (39).

Keeping in mind Pasteur's saying that "science has no homeland, but scientists have" (40), Dr Grmek joined spontaneously, albeit never formally, instituted Croatian Anti-Difamation League and many other Croats living in the country and abroad. With a great conviction, Grmek wrote to French newspapers to correct their distorted reports, sometimes even lies, about the war events in Croatia. Together with M. Gjidara and N. Šimac, he published a 340-page book on the sufferings of Croatian people during the war and the ideology of "Great Serbia" (45). They reminded French people and the rest of the world, that A. Einstein, T. Mann, A. Gide, R. Schumann, all had risen their voices against the dictatorship and tortures in Yugoslavia. Grmek coined the word memoricide to define the systematic annihilation of civilian targets (churches, cemeteries, schools and museums), purpose of which was the destruction of the memory of nation. His work contributed to A. Finkelkraut's understanding of "how one can stand being a Croat" (46). However, strong pro-Croatian activity prevented Dr Grmek from getting a prestigious award Legion d'Honneur—although he had been nominated for that award twice, the late French president F. Mitterand refused to approve his nomination both times. When J. Chirac became the French president, Grmek finally got the award. This was in May 1996. At the reception ceremonial, Dr Grmek stated that he regarded this decision not only as a recognition of his work and contribution but as a sign of a friendship between the two countries, both of which he considered his homelands.

Dr Grmek was especially pleased and touched by the recognition and awards coming from Croatia. In 1991, he became a visiting professor at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb. He was elected honorary member of the Croatian Medical Association, on February 26, 1994. Dr. F. Tudman, the late President of the Republic of Croatia, awarded him with high Croatian State Award in 1995. Dr Grmek took part in the preparation of the exhibition Centuries of Natural Science in Croatia: Theory and Application, that was held in Zagreb in 1996 (47). In October 1997, the Croatian Society for the History of Medicine, CMA, awarded Dr Grmek with the Dr Lujo Thaller memorial plaque, the award named after Grmek's first mentor in the field of the history of medicine.

With Louise Lambrichs, his second wife, he published the book Les révoltés de Vilefranche, which was the result of their research of German Archives. In the book, published in Paris in 1998, they described antifascist rebellion of Croat soldiers which served in German army. The rebellion took place in Vilefranche, France, where they were trained, in September 1943.

At the Fourth International Alpe-Adria Joint Meeting on "Mechanisms in Local Immunity", held in Opatija in 1998, he gave an introductory lecture (48). That was his last public appearance.

Since he knew his poor health was not going to improve, Dr Grmek wanted to finish all of his projects as soon as possible. One of them was publishing his poems written during the World War II. Finally, in 2000, his poetry got published.

Dr Grmek's last publication was a treatise in Croatian about the three scientific revolutions that took place in the second millennium (49).

Although Dr Grmek had been ill, the news about his death, on March 06, 2000, came rather unexpectedly. Croatia and the whole scientific community have lost a distinguished scientist, supreme thinker, and prolific author with a bibliography of around 1,500 entries. But, more than anything, Dr Grmek will be remembered as a good and faithful friend and a patriot. It was a privilege to know him as a teacher, scientist, and a person.

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