Anatomists Portal and Camper

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Baron Antoine Portal (January 5, 1742-July 23, 1832) was a French anatomist, doctor, medical historian and founding president of the Académie Nationale de Médecine. Born on January 5, 1742 in Gaillac, he was the eldest of 12 siblings. He studied medicine in Albi, Toulouse and Montpellier and started his career as a teacher of anatomy. In 1766, Portal moved to Paris to take up a similar post, and was appointed to the prestigious position of professor of anatomy to the Jardin du Roi. Louis XVIII named him the first Doctor to the King, a post he served under Charles X as well. His close relationship with King Louis led in 1820 to the creation of what became the Académie Nationale de Médecine, of which he was lifelong president. In 1803 he published “Cours d'anatomie médicale”, a 5-volume work on medical history. He was probably the first to describe amyloid in liver in 1789 when he noted a lard-like substance in an elderly woman’s liver. He was the first to describe bleeding due to esophageal varices and the name portal hypertension in chronic liver disease is named after him. He also published article on clinical features of epilepsy. Portal died in 1832 at the age of 90 and was buried in Saint Pierre de Montmartre.

Pieter Camper (1721-1789)

Camper trained as an artist and, in addition to studying medicine, was an outstanding eighteenth century anatomist. He discovered the processus vaginals and gave detailed descriptions of the arm, pelvis and the inguinal canal. The fascia of Camper, the thick superficial layer of lower abdominal wall is named after him. He was the first to distinguish different ethnic groups on the basis of the shape of their skull, and as a result of studying the works of painters and medieval manuscript illustrators, formulated the theory that intelligence was related to the facial angle. Camper also discovered the fibre structure of the lens. After studying the anatomy of the foot he wrote a treatise in 1781 on the best type of footwear which made an important contribution to the mechanics of locomotion.