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J Dent Res 85(8):701-704, 2006**ABSTRACT**

In the works of Cervantes, one can observe a detailed knowledge of dental matters. Although some of his biographers think that this is the result of the very broad cultural knowledge of this distinguished Spanish writer, the authors of this paper think differently. Having studied and analyzed many documents referring to the Cervantes family, especially those which dealt with the strong influence the teachings of Cervantes' father had on his son, we have reached the conclusion that his father must have been a 16th Century dentist.

KEY WORDS: Miguel de Cervantes, Rodrigo Cervantes, 16th Century dentist, barber, Don Quixote.

Cervantes: Father of Don Quixote and Son of a Dentist

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the whole of the works of the most universal of Spanish writers, Don Miguel de Cervantes, and especially in his book **The Ingenious Noble, Don Quixote from la Mancha** ("El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha") (Fig. 1), there are numerous references to illnesses of the mouth and other matters related to the mouth.

Although several biographers of Cervantes explain this by saying that Cervantes had a very broad cultural knowledge, the vast quantity of knowledge about the mouth which can be found in his works leads us to believe that, besides what he might have studied by reading, Cervantes had first-hand knowledge of dentistry, which implies that someone taught him directly.

Miguel de Cervantes was the fourth son of six children of his parents, Don Rodrigo Cervantes and Doña Leonor de Cortinas. He was born in the small town of Alcalá de Henares in 1547. Don Rodrigo, his father, was born in 1509 and died in 1585.

The enormous interest in the works and in the person of Don Miguel de Cervantes over the past four centuries has led his biographers to study in depth and examine all the details of the other members of his family, especially those of his father and his paternal grandfather.

As a result of these studies into of the life of Cervantes, Don Rodrigo, Don Miguel's father, has been described as being a doctor-surgeon, a surgeon-bloodletter, a surgeon-barber, a surgeon for minor operations, and a whole list of pseudo-professions which, in our opinion, come less than close to the truth.

THE CATHOLIC KING AND QUEEN AND MEDICAL SCIENCE

After the marriage of King Fernando and Queen Isabel¹, Spain became unified. The same cannot be said of society, including health and the professions associated with health. In different regions, the "sanitary" professions were partially divided into associations such as the association of surgeons, the association of barbers, etc. Similarly, the granting of licenses to practice these different professions varied from one region to another throughout the peninsula.

These monarchs decided to do something to lessen this therapeutic and organizational chaos, and so, in 1477, they issued a "Pragmatica", which regulated the various qualifications or licenses to practice all the professions connected with "healing". By royal order, the institution "Protomedicato" was founded, with the aim of regulating the healing duties of doctors and surgeons. This institution also had control over other related professions, such as pharmacists, spice retailers, herbalists, etc. There was also the possibility of practicing as a doctor or a lawyer if you were in possession of a Papal Bull or rescript, without having followed any of the compulsory studies connected with the profession. To do away with this situation, the

¹ When Fernando and Isabel married, they were practicing Catholics and staunchly defended Catholicism against all other faiths, even expelling their Islamic subjects from Spain. They are known in Spanish history as "The Catholic Monarchs".



Figure 1. Reproduction of the first page of the original 1605 edition of the book, *The Ingenious Noble, Don Quixote from la Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes, kept in the National Library of Spain.

Monarchs issued a law, in 1480, which made this way of obtaining any qualifications or licenses impossible. In the case of barbers and bloodletters in Castille (including Madrid), the influence of the Protomedicato Institution did not last long, with the creation, in 1500 (González, 2000), of a special institution, the Protobarbeirato, which absorbed the functions of the Protomedicato. In the reign of Felipe II (the second half of the 16th Century), there was a new ruling which stated that the Protomédicos should not interfere with the professions, such as spice retailers, midwives, faith-healers, etc., and with this new ruling, the Protobarbeirato was consolidated as a separate institution. This ensured that only those who were authorized by the Senior Barbers could practice as barbers. (This included opening an abscess, lancing surgery, bloodletting surgery, surgery for the application of cupping glasses, leeches, and surgery for the extraction of teeth.)

FINDING A PROFESSION FOR DON RODRIGO CERVANTES

Having researched many documents from that period which the biographers of Cervantes have uncovered, we have been unable to find any specific reference to the profession of Don Rodrigo Cervantes (neither have the biographers of Cervantes been able to find any specific reference to any profession), nor are there any records of his having registered in any college or university, nor does his name appear in any of the official lists of any profession (Astrana, 1948; López, 1997).

At that time, it was customary to put in writing, in the presence of a lawyer, all sorts of daily occurrences: accusations, complaints, claims for payment, recognition of debt, receipt of payment, appointments to posts, legal authorizations, donations, inheritances, recognition of paternity, and many, many other things, which have given us an insight into society at that time. Together with all this, the fact that Don Miguel's grandfather was a graduate in Law (Astrana, 1948), and Don Rodrigo and his son, Don Miguel, had numerous encounters with the law (even to the extent of their being imprisoned²) (Astrana, 1948) allows us, having analyzed the documents referring to these episodes, to reach a conclusion, with little margin for error, as to his possible profession.

All these documents began with a very precise description of the person for whom they were being written. If the person had a profession or had socially recognized qualifications, these were included along with the personal identifying information. This is why, in documents where Don Juan is mentioned, it states "Graduate in Law". However, this is not the case in documents which refer to Don Rodrigo, except in two documents which we will later analyze. The fact that in only two of the large number of documents where a reference is made to Don Rodrigo is there any mention of his profession gives us, and all the biographers of Cervantes, reason to doubt the accuracy of the information given referring to his profession.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSIONS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY IN CASTILLE (SPAIN) AND THE POSSIBILITY OF DON RODRIGO'S HAVING BEEN A MEMBER OF ONE OF THEM

To become a doctor in the first half of the 16 Century, you had to have studied for three years at a university and be a "bachiller en Artes" (an Arts graduate, which included the study of Grammar, Logic, and Philosophy). After this, it was necessary to have studied an additional three years to become a "bachiller en Medicina", and a further two years to become a full-fledged graduate, when you could sit for some examinations and become a "Doctor". With any of the three qualifications—"bachiller", graduate, or doctor—one could practice medicine. All these studies were carried out in Latin (Alvar, 1999).

Doctors wanted nothing to do with the profession of "surgeon", which was not socially well-considered, and so, to call oneself in those times a "doctor-surgeon" was not very precise, since a license to perform surgery would come after any medical treatment, to give the individual more "importance".

The profession of surgeon was learned as an apprenticeship

² When a person signed a relevant legal document, he wrote, at the top, his career or area of study, because in those times the law was not the same for everybody. It was very different for people with education or of high social rank. However, in these documents, designed to help him avoid imprisonment, we find no reference to Rodrigo's legal studies title.

alongside the master surgeon. Many apprentices tried to improve their knowledge by reading the odd books translated into Spanish (Romance), and a few actually managed to study medicine, but those were rare. Although, a short while later in Spain, there were attempts to get surgery accepted as a subject by the universities, it was not until long after the working life of Don Rodrigo that this was achieved.

In a place of even lower social status than surgeons were "barbers". Barbers trimmed and cut beards, and, since the mouth was nearby, they began to clean "tova" (tartar) from teeth, and once they had ventured into the area of mouths, they started to lance gums and pull out teeth with cutting instruments made of iron. These extra jobs, together with placing leeches on "patients" and doing bloodletting (considered beneficial for curing many illnesses at that time), brought them closer to the concept of "surgeon". Thus, in those times, differentiating between surgeons and barbers was possible only if, in addition to doing the same things, one of them had permission to open a "barber's shop". The Pragmatica Law that the Monarchs had passed in 1500 regulated the granting of licenses to individuals to open a barber's shop and recognized the ability of these "professionals" to, among other things, extract teeth (González, 2000) (Fig. 2). Don Rodrigo lived at the time when this law was in force.

BARBERS AND THE BARBER'S SHOP IN THE 16TH CENTURY IN SPAIN

To describe in detail what the barber's shop was like and what it represented would take far too long and make this paper much longer than is desirable, and for this reason, we have chosen only certain aspects which allow us to reach a conclusion.

If we wanted to choose a symbol which represented barbers and their shops in the 16th Century, we would surely have to choose the barber's bowl. That object was made of earthenware or brass, in the shape of a dish with the familiar scalloped edge, and with the central part much deeper than the sides, to catch the blood from the bloodlettings and the water from the shaving of beards. The bowl was synonymous with the fact that there was a barber nearby (recall Mambrino's 'helmet' in the story of Don Quixote). However, if there were another symbol, which, popularly, is on a par with the barber's bowl, it is not the razor, nor the scissors, but the guitar or the small guitar, typical of the 16th Century, called the "bigüela" (or "vihuela" or "viguëla"). The barber's shop served as a meeting place in the poorer urban districts, and at the door, one could stop for a chat, and sometimes someone would play the guitar and sing when there were no customers.

CERVANTES — SON OF A DENTIST?

Although in two documents dated 30 October 1564, Don Rodrigo is mentioned as a "doctor-surgeon" (Rodríguez, 1905; Sliwa, 2000), no scholar of this period would accept that he was a doctor, and there are no other documents with this information among the vast number of documents studied. This is not mentioned even in those documents in which he is referred to as being of "noble blood" (Astrana, 1948)—either for him, to get him out of prison, or to free his son, Miguel, from captivity in Algiers (Cotarello, 1905). Of these two documents, the first is an authorization for his wife, Doña Leonor, and for his nephew, Juan, so that, in his absence from Seville, they could collect money owed to him. If he declared himself to be a "doctor-

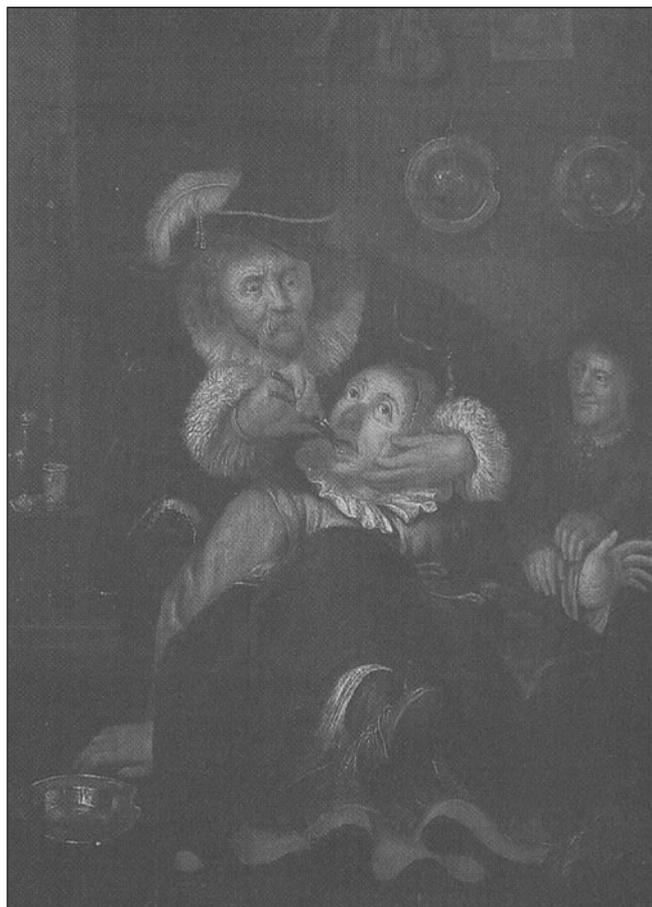


Figure 2. A painting entitled, "At the barber and dentist's house", by Joos Van Croebeeck (1606-1660). We can observe how he is extracting a tooth from a patient. Meanwhile, in the rest of the room, we notice some basins ("bacias" in Spanish) that the barber used to contain shavings, as well as the blood from extractions and bloodlettings—two activities performed by Miguel de Cervantes' father.

surgeon" and, if, as we have said, he was not a doctor, it is logical to think that the debts were from surgery he had performed. The second document, dated the same day, with the same witnesses and in the presence of the same lawyer, is a receipt for a debt collected. It is logical to expect the information at the top of the document to be the same. However, we have never seen any similar information at the top of any other document.

Just as the documents mentioned do not in any way recognize him as being a doctor, they almost state the opposite. In addition, they lead us to believe, even oblige us to think, that he must have been involved in some sort of surgery. Also, there is another document which leads us to the same conclusion. It is a document from the year 1568, where an Italian gentleman called Don Juan Francisco Locadello makes a generous gift to Doña Andrea for she and her father, Don Rodrigo (Pérez, 1897; Astrana, 1948; Cotarello, 1905), supposedly, having taken care of him and looked after his health. Among these gifts was the small guitar, the "vihuela", typical of the 16th Century barber's shop.

There is an earlier document dated 4 July 1552, in which there is reference to the seizure of goods belonging to Don Rodrigo, among which were three books on medicine and

surgery, and a "bigüela" (guitar) (Rodríguez, 1914; Astrana, 1948; Sliwa, 2001). These are not many books for a doctor or a surgeon to possess, but enough for a barber who did bloodletting, minor operations, and the extraction of teeth. In addition, a "bigüela" was seized in 1552 and another was given to him as a present in 1568, which leads one to suppose that he knew how to play the guitar, which is another piece of information leading to the conclusion that he was a barber-guitarist.

Our research into the documents about Cervantes in which Don Rodrigo's name appears leads us to think that he was not a doctor, and yet he might have carried out surgery. However, there is no reference whatsoever, in any document, relating his name with any hospital—not in the Antezana in Alcalá de Henares, nor in Cordoba, Seville, or Cabra. If he did actually perform surgery, it was certainly not in a hospital; and, at that time, the only other place where surgery was permitted was in a barber's shop. His carrying out surgery in his shop could explain why people owed him money or were grateful for the attention he gave them, as certain documents show. It was very common for barbers to play the guitar, and the two documents mentioned above associate Don Rodrigo with that instrument. If Don Rodrigo, father of Miguel de Cervantes, was a barber-surgeon, then he also extracted teeth, as did all the authorized barbers of the time. As a result, if Don Rodrigo knew how to extract teeth, it is logical to suppose that his son, Miguel, learned many things about this directly from his father.

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NOTES ON THE TEXT

The document dated 4 July 1552 refers to the seizure of goods from the house of Don Rodrigo in Valladolid. Among the goods seized are the following: "...*And three books, one by Antonio, and the other one about surgical practice, and another about the four illnesses. In addition, a 'bigüela', and a box of golden knives...*" (Sliwa, 2000).

In the document dated 30 October 1564, Don Rodrigo authorizes his wife, D^a Leonor de Cortinas, and his nephew, Andrés, to collect debts owed to him in his absence, while he was away from Seville: "...*I, Rodrigo de Cervantes, doctor-surgeon, citizen of this city, Seville, resident in the San Miguel part of the city, hereby authorise ...*" (Sliwa, 2000).

The document dated 30 October 1564 is a "receipt" for payment of a debt (Alvar, 1999; Sliwa, 2000). The fact that it was written by the same lawyer and with the same witnesses, and in the same location as the previous one, makes it logical to assume that the personal information at the top of both documents would be the same. These two documents were discovered and published by Rodríguez Marín in the pamphlet "Cervantes studied in Seville", in the Protocol Archives in Seville. In another document which dates from the same period, (10 April 1565), he is mentioned simply as "...*Señor Rodrigo de Cervantes...*" (not as a doctor-surgeon).

In the document from 9 June 1568, D. Juan Francisco Locadelo gives to D^{ña} Leonor de Cortinas a series of very generous gifts (Sliwa, 2000), citing as his reason the somewhat suspicious excuse that she and her father, Don Rodrigo, had treated him for certain illnesses: "...*they have treated and cured me of some illnesses I had, both she and her father...*". Among the gifts he gave them was "a vihuela" (Sliwa, 2000). This document gives us another reason to believe that D. Rodrigo was in the medical "trade", and that there was a definite relation between the Cervantes' and the "vigüela", an instrument similar to the guitar and closely associated with the barbers of that time.

In the document dated 22 December 1569, D. Rodrigo asks for assurance that his son, Miguel's, blood is clean (Rodríguez, 1905). (Translator's note: By this, he means he wants assurance that there is no Arab or Jewish blood in his son's veins; and yet he does not say that he is a doctor, which would be like asking if his own blood were "clean": "...*I, Rodrigo de Cervantes, citizen of this city, state that Miguel de Cervantes, my son, and Doña Leonor de Cortinas, my lawful, wedded, wife...*" (Sliwa, 2000).