

# Preface

Henry E. Sigerist (1891–1957) is recognized as the foremost historian of medicine of his time. In addition, he was an activist in the fight for a reform of the American health system and, last but not least, he was a scholar with an exceptional breadth of interests and with engaging human qualities.

Charles Singer (1876–1960) was an outstanding British medical historian. As a colleague he first came into contact with Sigerist, who was fifteen years younger, at an early stage of his career as a medical historian in Switzerland. Their correspondence lasted from 1920 through all of Sigerist's career, almost to his death in 1957.

Most of Sigerist's correspondence had been a hidden treasure for a long time until the publication of the incomplete correspondence with George Rosen (Viseltear, 1978) and with George Urdang (Sonnedecker, 1983). In 2008, an edition of Sigerist's correspondence with four Swiss historians of medicine (A. C. Klebs, B. Milt, H. Fischer, E. Hintzsche) was published (Bickel, 2008), and two years later, that between Sigerist and the American colleagues Welch, Cushing, Garrison, and Ackerknecht (Bickel, 2010).

There are several reasons that make an edition of Sigerist's correspondence worthwhile:

- 1) Most of the correspondence is stored in a well-organized and accessible form in only two archives.
- 2) Not only do they contain the letters received and collected by Sigerist, but also the carbon copies of his own letters since about 1923.
- 3) Most of them are almost complete with very few letters missing.

These three facts are rarely combined in editions of correspondence and are therefore an invaluable advantage. To this must be added the interest in both Sigerist and Singer. This correspondence is therefore likely to allow a true insight into the lives and mentalities of the two correspondents, including their private lives and scientific work, as well as relationships with persons, books, and topics. Hence, the correspondence is a source for the correspondents' biographies and for many topics and features of the twentieth century.

I have tried to adopt modern criteria for the edition of correspondence (Steinke 2004). The three reasons given above have allowed an edition of all the surviving letters to and by Sigerist in a chronological sequence, and without selection, which in any case would have been questionable. A complete edition with totally transcribed letters was also feasible because the correspondence is limited in size and contains very few trivialities. Future editors will need to add letters missing in this edition and alter the footnotes.

Problems of transcription are dealt with in the introduction (chapter 1.3.1). The footnotes follow the transcribed letters, and a bibliography of most of the literature mentioned in the letters and footnotes is also given (chapter 3). All persons mentioned in the letters and major topics of the correspondence are listed in the index.

Most of the letters to and by Sigerist are stored in the following archives:

- 1) Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library

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P. O. Box 208240

New Haven, CT 06520–8240

(the Sigerist-Singer correspondence of 1920–1925 [incomplete] and 1947–1956).

2) The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives

The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions

5801 Smith Avenue, Suite 235

Baltimore, MD 21209

(the correspondence of 1932–1947).

Both archives have lists of the correspondence under the heading “Henry E. Sigerist Papers”. Letters of 1925–1932 are in the Universitätsarchiv Leipzig (incomplete). The collection of Sigeristiana at the Department of the History of Medicine of the University of Zurich, although extensive, contains but few letters.

Both Sigerist and Singer played a major role in medicine and academic life in the United States and Britain. Their correspondence is more voluminous than the ones previously edited, except for that of Ackerknecht. It is one between two colleagues, showing their plans and achievements, books read and people met. The reader becomes acquainted with the two personalities and watches as the first half of the twentieth century unfolds in many of its aspects.

For the present edition I am grateful to many who have helped me in many ways. The university archives of Yale, Johns Hopkins, and Leipzig mentioned above, were kind enough to let me publish their materials. Their staff’s competence, co-operation, and friendly advice is highly appreciated. I extend my thanks to my colleagues in the departments of the history of medicine in Bern and Zurich for stimulation and help with the transcription and footnotes: Urs Boschung, Pia Burkhalter, Gertraud Gamper, François Ledermann, Luc Lienhard, Iris Ritzmann, and Hubert Steinke. Nora Sigerist-Beeson, Sylvia Bonner, Martina Fierz, and many others offered their help, as did my wife Leni and our daughter Susanne. I wish to express my gratitude in particular to Vivian Nutton and Caroline Overy for their critical dealing with the manuscript, for their improving it by adding new footnotes, and for all other help and cooperation. I also thank The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL for offering to publish this work as a Supplement to *Medical History*.

Bern, 2010

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