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## Research Article

# Jean-Joseph Dubois-Foucou (1747-1830), Napoleon's Personal Dentist

*which had been affecting him for a while and for that purpose, he appointed citizen Dubois-Foucou."*

This was not allowed after a deliberation from the Council who refused to give a decision on solicitation on December 22, 1792.

As an extremely law-abiding citizen, Dubois-Foucou brought an action against Dubois de Chemant, another dentist, concerning the invention of mineral teeth. Numerous exchanges in newspapers, among which was the "Journal de Paris" of 1789, preceded the lawsuit (the issue of April 26 1788; April 22, 1789; April 26, 1789, etc.). On January 26, 1792, he filed a nonsuit and had to pay the trial fees according to a previous verdict. Later on, when Dubois de Chemant went to England, Dubois-Foucou carried on with his research and made his own porcelain dentures [6,7].

On February 25, 1793, Dubois-Foucou demanded the avoidance of his judicial expenses. On May 12, 1794, he issued a writ against Bourdet's widow and asked him the refund of 120,000 pounds. On November 2, 1794, the dentist lost his trial and Bourdet's widow did not have to pay off a cent.

On January 1805, he offered his services to hold the position of dental surgeon serving the Emperor without treatment.

In 1806, Gervais-Chardin, "*perfumer of Their Imperial and Royal Majesties*", delivered 52 boxes of opiate toothpaste worth 306 francs, 15 dozens of toothpicks made of boxwood and ivory. On October 25, 1808, he delivered 24 dozens of these toothpicks, 6 boxes of thin dental coral worth 36 francs and 28 boxes of opiate of superior quality valued at 168 francs.

On March 20, 1815, the perfumer Teissier supplied 3 boxes of ebony worth 18 francs and 28 pots of rose-scented opiate worth 56 francs. All these products were aimed at the Emperor's oral hygiene [8]. Was it under Dubois-Foucou's request that these two perfumers made those deliveries? We can foresee this possibility. Indeed, each of the King's "operators for teeth" recommended him the use of these ointments and personal potions. It is highly-likely that Dubois-Foucou could have recommended the same things to Napoleon. And yet, nothing confirmed it [9].

His request was approved and he practiced on Napoleon from 1806 to 1813 [10]. It seems that Napoleon never had to ask for Dubois-Foucou's treatments during his reign apart from teeth cleaning [11]. During the time he spent around the Emperor, he earned 600 francs of annual salaries which were only mentioned in 1808 for the first time. For instance, Corvisart, the Emperor's personal doctor earned the tidy sum of 30,000 francs per year [1,5].

In 1808, Dubois-Foucou published « *Exposé de nouveaux procédés pour la confection des dents, dites de composition* » ("Presentation of

## Research

Jean-Joseph Dubois-Foucou was born in Toulon on February 19, 1748. He studied surgery in the hospital of the same town and in the "Hôpital de la Charité", the current University of Medicine. He graduated from surgery and was entitled master surgeon in 1766. On July 22, 1771, he officially became the member of the Royal Academy of Surgery in Paris. From this day, he practiced as a dental surgeon.

As a matter of fact, his name was simply Dubois, but he added the name of Foucou, which was taken from one of his relatives, who was an artist [1].

On July 22, 1775, Dubois-Foucou became a master in art and surgical science when he upheld his thesis entitled: "*De dentis vitiose positorum curatione*" [2].

From 1783 to 1785, he practiced in "rue sainte Marguerite" in Paris with his uncle Vincent. From 1785 to 1796, he practiced in "rue Croix-des-petits-champs" in the same house as Bourdet, the official dentist of the King Louis XV. From 1797 to 1805, he practiced in 1325/6, "rue des bons enfants, butte des moulins". From 1806 to 1807, he was in "1, rue des bons enfants". Finally, from 1808 to 1830, he ended his career in "2, rue Caumartin" [3,4].

In March 1783, Bourdet, the official dentist of Louis XV and Louis XVI sold him his charge to the King for 150,000 pounds. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1783, in Versailles, Louis XVI appointed him his "operator for teeth through patent". During this period, from April 6, 1783 to be more specific, he treated the soon-to-be Louis XVIII, the soon-to-be Charles X, and the royal family [5].

Dubois-Foucou succeeded to Etienne Bourdet after his death in 1789 by becoming Louis XVI's personal dentist but he only appeared in the Royal Almanac from 1791. On August 1, 1790, he was called to Louis XVI's bedside for a dental abscess of minor importance. As soon as he entered the Temple on August 10, 1792, Louis XVI asked for "a sponge for his teeth" that his dentist immediately supplied him.

When they were hastily locked up, the royal family was without everything. In December 1792, the King had a new fluxion [6].

*"In front of his guardians, Louis Capet (as he was then called) demanded the help of a dentist for a matter of dental inflammation*

new methods for the making of teeth, known as composition”) and « *Lettre adressée à MM. les dentistes sur les dents minérales* » (“*Letter on mineral teeth addressed to MM. the dentists*”) [2].

The attributions and obligations of Napoleon’s personal dental surgeon were mentioned in “*Regulations on the health service of the houses of Their Imperial and Royal Majesties*” which were written in 1811 [1].

“*Article 1: The dental surgeon must introduce himself before the Court when he is immediately called or must be reported by the first surgeon.*”

“*Article 2: He also has to report to the imperial infirmary when he is summoned by the first doctor or after the summoning of the first doctor or that of the local surgeon to practice in their ministry for emergency cases: he will have to go there upon immediate invitation.*”

In a dissertation on the repairing of one of Napoleon’s dental sets, his signature appeared on a receipt dating back to 1810:

“(…) sold for the service of his Majesty the Emperor and King:

made two missing instruments to His Majesty’s set... 36 francs

made six shanks for raspatories as a replacement, on handles assembled with golden pearls... 54 francs

made a handle with a ferrule in gold on the portable mirror of the set... 15 francs

Signed: Grangeret with the mention “approved the objects mentioned above”.

Signed: Dubois-Foucou, dental surgeon of Their Imperial and Royal Majesties [1,8].

These instruments aimed at achieving conserving treatments on Napoleon. Dubois-Foucou intervened in the repairing of another set on March 27, 1815.

“Sold for the service of his Majesty the Emperor, and following the orders of Monsieur Gourrean et Monsieur Dubois, dentists of His Majesty :

Full repairing of the instruments as good as new, and of the dental set of His Majesty... 94 francs

“Certified genuine”

Signed: Grangeret with the mention “Received in good condition”

Signed: Dubois-Foucou [1,8].

Hence, Napoleon highly trusted his dentist. Indeed, the dentist was quite free to prepare, to eventually repair and to maintain the imperial dental sets, especially those with respect to dental hygiene. The two previously-mentioned essays dealing with the repairing and the scaling of the ferrules proved beyond dispute Napoleon’s recurrent summoning of his dentist for tartar removal. However, if Dubois-Foucou could do as he wished, he was still supervised by Corvisart [1,8,12].

Then, Jean Joseph Dubois-Foucou also was Louis XVIII’s personal dentist which only kept him because he had treated the beheaded King, and then Charles X [2]. Louis XVIII also summoned him from January 9, 1815. On January 14, 1815, upon the return of monarchy, Dubois-Foucou foresaw, designed and placed an order of a dental set in lieu of Louis XVIII, and which expected to arrive before April 1814. However, on March 6, 1815, despite the real satisfaction of the new king, the Secretary-General of the king’s Home Minister demanded Dubois-Foucou the justification of the extremely expensive sum of 1162 francs demanded by the cutler for the making of the set [5].

In 1826, Jean-Joseph Dubois-Foucou stopped practicing but on December 15, 1826, he was still allowed to keep his title. That is why his name is still quoted in the *Royal Almanac* of 1830, the year of his death in Paris.

Dubois-Foucou was married. He never received the Legion of Honour and was never elevated to Imperial noble ranks.

This kind of manuscripts can help the readers and actually help dental students to make a bridge between past and present, and improve their knowledge.

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