

# Sources and Studies on the History of Homeopathic Medicine (Volume 8)

**Katrin Schreiber, *Samuel Hahnemann in Leipzig. Supporters, opponents and patients: The social network of homeopathy between 1811 and 1821.***

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In her socio-historical work, Katrin Schreiber investigates Samuel Hahnemann's period of living and working in Leipzig between 1811 and 1821. At that time, Leipzig was already an important university and trading city, in which the founder of homeopathy, who had previously changed his place of residence and work on a regular basis, spent a relatively long period of his life.

The extraordinary significance of Leipzig for the further propagation of homeopathy has frequently been commented upon, by both contemporary and later homeopathic researchers. Schreiber has now tackled this theory critically for the first time. Accordingly, she has sought to answer the question of whether the foundation stone for the continued existence and further propagation of this method of treatment was laid there and, if so, which factors, people and constellations can be identified as being responsible for its development beyond 1821. At the core of her research are the people involved, along with their conflicts, although Hahnemann's patients are paid special attention.

As her sources, Schreiber primarily used sources close to homeopathy, such as letters and publications written by Hahnemann and also his patient journals. She also used documents critical to homeopathy, along with texts showing the position taken by the ruling classes towards homeopathy. However, there are only very few of these available to answer the question pursued in this work. For source analysis, Schreiber used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the lack of sources, some aspects could only be assessed as examples.

Schreiber structured the responses to her research questions into four topic blocks, with a dedicated chapter for each. Firstly, as part of a brief overview, she talks of Hahnemann's scientific and therapeutic work in Leipzig. During his period there, he taught at the university for several years, published works on a frequent basis and also carried out comprehensive experiments with medicines. With regard to his daily practice, it can be seen that, in its early phase, homeopathy was not a rigid, clearly fixed system of healing. At that time, Hahnemann was still keen to experiment and also borrowed from other medical systems.

Schreiber then deals with the question of the supporters of homeopathy. At first, these were mainly recruited from amongst Hahnemann's medical students. Even if, in numerical terms, this was a small group, its members were of enormous significance in the further propagation of homeopathy, as they were its most avid supporters. Ever more trained doctors turned to homeopathy, as they were open to new paths in medicine and/or had treated their patients successfully with this method of healing. Although they were comparatively few in number, they formed a key link to established medicine and thus helped homeopathy to a certain amount of renown, giving it weight in the eyes of the authorities and the medical community as a whole. However, the most important group of homeopathy's supporters were the patients. It is their great demand that has helped this method of treatment to survive. Even in this early phase of homeopathic history, the beginnings of a lay homeopathic movement were appearing and reached its high point in the last third of the 19th century, with several of tens of thousands of members organised in associations. Overall, when looking at the supporters, it becomes clear that the Leipzig years were certainly a period which set the direction homeopathy was to take. This can be seen not only in the structure of its supporters, but also in the change in the level of its awareness. At the start of Hahnemann's stay in the university city, his method of treatment was more or less unknown. By the time he left, the number of supporters and users had risen into the thousands. Accordingly, even in this early phase, homeopathy was far from being a fringe medicine.

The next chapter of Schreiber's monograph focuses on Hahnemann's opponents, whose anti-homeopathic activities - if the opinion of older research works is to be believed - finally led to Hahnemann's departure from Leipzig. This statement is not borne out by the author's evaluation of the sources. In particular, the pressure said to have been placed on Hahnemann by the local apothecaries and doctors was actually far less than stated by earlier homeopathic researchers, such as Richard Haehl. The founder of homeopathy was indeed in conflict with the two professions, but there is no evidence of a campaign against him by a group of opponents. The apothecaries who protested to the local authorities about Hahnemann were only keen on protecting their right of dispensation and did not want to ban homeopathy as a medical system. In addition, the apparently closed group of doctors protesting against homeopathy was, when examined more closely, actually a myth, as critical comments always came from individuals. In total, the number of doctors switching to homeopathy was considerably greater than the number of doctors who published texts against it. Apart from the doctors and apothecaries, there were few other noticeable opponents. The authorities only intervened once against Hahnemann, on the occasion when he broke the law regarding the question of dispensation. There is absolutely no evidence of official pressure on the part of the university. Finally, when the arguments between Hahnemann and his opponents are investigated, it is noticeable that they were more in the form of personal insults and were less of a professional, factual nature. This fact suggests that Hahnemann's opponents had less against the homeopathic method per se than against Hahnemann's less than diplomatic treatment of them.

Schreiber also dedicates a separate chapter to Hahnemann's patients, the analysis of whom is based on his patient journals. In it, she first disproves the statement, which has persisted through to recent research work, that Hahnemann had a flourishing practice in Leipzig (Genneper 1991). In this context, she is able to prove that the development of his practice, in quantitative terms, was much more "up and down", which had both above-average increases and also significant drops in patient numbers. For the further development of homeopathy - as summarised in this chapter - it is less the quantitative aspect of Hahnemann's practice during the Leipzig years which is of importance, but, far more, the change in the social-structural characteristics of his patients. The evaluation of the patient journals shows that he was able to win over increasing numbers of educated and upper-class citizens - primarily from the spheres of the church and the university. At the same time, he was able to expand the catchment area of his regular patients, who had, in previous years, come from a somewhat limited radius, as his medical activities increasingly drew in people from all over Germany and abroad.

In the last chapter, Schreiber completes the synthesis of her results by tackling the central aspects of her work anew and interpreting them, to some extent set against the background of a broader historical context. It becomes clear that not every group of people, area of conflict and structural pattern, which were of primary importance for the later years of homeopathy, appeared in Leipzig. In addition, it can be noted that Hahnemann and his supporters in the university city laid the foundation stone for the manner in which homeopathy expanded.