On the History of Angioedema (From Donato to Strübing): A Journey for Three Centuries

“What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
William Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene II).

Introduction
The beloved, not the name, may be all important to a lady in love about the man she adores. But when it comes to a disease that took about three centuries to attain a specific name becomes an interesting story in the arena of medical history. Here is a small article on the history and evolution of how an unnamed swelling occurring to skin and mucous membrane transformed into “angioneurotic edema.”

The Early Days
Marcello Donato (1538–1607) was the first physician to deliver a clear description of angioedema in his book De medicahistoriamrabil libri sex [Figure 1] in 1586 about a young man who developed the disease after consuming an egg. The next report came from Franz Anton Mai (1742–1806) in his book Stolpertus, einjungerArzt am Krankenbette (1777) illustrating a picture of a man of 62 developing a progressive swelling of lips that gradually involved the larynx. The next important and vivid account came from Robert James Graves (1796–1853) who noted: “….sometimes the lips, inside of the mouth, palate, and uvula are attacked giving rise to a very considerable inconvenience.”

The Giant Urticaria
It was John Laws Milton (1820–1898), the senior surgeon to St. John’s Hospital for diseases of the skin, who published “giant urticaria” in the sixth issue of volume 22 of the Edinburgh Medical Journal in 1876 and subsequently as a 28-page book from London in 1878 that gave a description of a condition about “swelling attacking the skin.” Milton commented that the condition was unknown to the contemporary physicians and described about four patients with this kind of ailment.[2]

The Story of “Two Theses”
Eugen Dinkelacker, a doctoral student of Heinrich Irenaenus Quincke (1842–1922) [Figure 2], collected and presented 14 cases as dissertation to the Kiel’s Christian-Albrechts University for doctoral degree. Quincke published a case series in 1882 with similar disorders and the condition was eponymously termed “Quincke’s oedema” by Felix Mendel in 1902, but it was assumed that he (Quincke) must have been conscious about his pupil’s cases. Bannister of Chicago published a case in Chicago Medical Review in 1880 and referring to this along with other case reports including that by Milton, protested against the naming of the condition erroneously on the name of Quincke.[3] Subsequently, Bannister’s name was also attached to the condition by some American authors leading to the development of “Bannister’s disease.”[1,4]

Old Disease, New Name
Be it Quincke’s edema or Bannister’s disease, the condition attracted many medical researchers. Paul Strübing (1852–1915) was of opinion regarding an underlying relation between nervous system and edema formation mechanism and finally named the condition as angioneurotic oedema in 1885 … almost three centuries after Donato’s first
description. William Osler (1850–1920) identified the familial form of this disorder in 1888. Thus, an “orphan disease” received a name, and in recent years, further research led to a clearer view regarding the etiopathology as well as management of this uncommon but grave condition.[4]

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