

Julien Marmont, Joséphine's dentist and sometimes, that of Napoleon 1st

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Julien Marmont has always been a famous dentist in the history of dental art, but lately, he has just been given a whole new dimension.

Until recently, Napoleon's only known dentist was Jean-Joseph Dubois-Foucou (1747/1748-1830) who was also that of King Louis XVI, Louis XVIII and Charles X [5-7].

And yet, it is highly likely that Marmont met and treated Josephine de Beauharnais and Napoleon. Thus, the questions to raise are when did they meet and did Marmont cure Napoleon occasionally or repeatedly? Had he grown arrogant enough of this occasional status to the extent of ensuring himself a permanent status ?

Who was Julien Marmont? In his book *L'esthioménie, procédé découvert depuis l'année 1807, contre toutes* dated 1839, Marmont not only undertook a scientific study but he also gave a basic fact-based report on his career and told the story of an important but short-lived meeting, so it seemed, given the events. So these are facts based upon his story [4].

He started practising dentistry in 1800. According to him, there were 14 dentists in Paris at the time. He became the 15th.

Still according to Marmont, he discovered the process of "esthiomeny" (i) in 1807. It consisted in using a specific device that he had made and which roughly was used to make the cavity watertight. It aimed at avoiding a iatrogenic diffusion of the used liquids, made originally from animal and vegetal substances, on all the tissues; at applying this oily liquid on the cavity, when exposed to high temperatures to burn the decayed tissues; and at

immediately making it cold thanks to a refrigerating shower, which preserved the vitality of the pulp.

He invented a specific mirror which inflamed Joséphine de Beauharnais's curiosity. He was informed of it by Mrs Ristre, the wife of the Emperor's assistant and one of Joséphine's friends. Thus, Marmont decided to make a mirror especially for the Empress and offered it to her. From then on, he became her favourite dentist. At that time, Napoleon was still Emperor and married to Joséphine. Therefore, it is easy to date this episode between 1804, date of the coronation and 1809, date of Napoleon and Joséphine's divorce. Marmont only mentioned Napoleon by his title of Emperor. He met Joséphine in the Château de Malmaison, that of the Empress, while Napoleon was there.



Dental mirror in silver made by Marmont [4].

(i) Word invented by Julien Marmont as he invented the process.

From that day, the Empress regularly consulted Marmont. "She only had two wisdom teeth left which supported too heavy dentures on the upper part, which subsequently threatened to make the two remaining teeth fall. When inspecting her mouth, I was inspired to make cylindrical dentures which she could assemble with the key of her watch, and which would maintain the two supporting teeth by strengthening them in their sockets. The Empress was so thankful that she made me meet the Emperor, who likewise showed great interest in me.

I had been dental surgeon of the old and young Imperial Guard for years and after having "esthiomenised" many of the Empress's teeth in the presence of the Emperor, on whom I performed the same technique, I was then appointed "dental surgeon-esthiomenisator" of the children of France and of the Ecole Polytechnique."

Like Marmont said so well, Napoleon always cared for what could be a boon to mankind despite his political concerns and aims [4]. When he was "esthiomenising" Joséphine's teeth at the Château de la Malmaison, the Emperor told the dentist the following words:

"Monsieur Marmont, now that we can rely on the efficiency of esthiomeny to prevent tooth decay, wouldn't you be flattered to make your device universal in the interests of society? It would be a great honour, Sire, I told him, etc.

Well, would 50,000 francs now handed over, 6,000 francs in life annuity as "dental surgeon-esthiomenisator" of the children of France and the Cross of the Legion of Honour be right for you?

I thanked him for so much kindness and he gave me a note to submit to the Garde-des-Sceaux [the Minister of Justice], to whom I brought this new technique under seal. However, with the circumstances that had led to a change of Government, everything was given back to me in the same condition. Hence, I remained the only person who knew my secret."

Along with this account, Marmont mentioned his fees in his 1839 book:

"One decayed tooth with esthiomeny (6 francs); gold filling (5 francs), tooth filling (3 francs), separated tooth (3 francs), equalised tooth (3 francs); ozone gas-treated teeth (6 francs); oral bleeding (5 francs); tooth ligation (3 francs); teeth cleaning (according to the state of the mouth); a flask of Armenian bole (6 francs), of Marmont liquor (6 francs) or of dental putty (5

francs); a box of tooth powder (5 francs)."

Two essential things need to be said: Marmont was presumably the only one to perform "esthiomeny" and the process fell into disuse after his death which makes its description difficult due to the lack of photographs and secondary sources (besides, he wrote about a "secret" that he had kept for years); the dentist sold his own mouthwash and toothpaste which is forbidden today with respect to ethical motives. Indeed, a healthcare professional is a caretaker, not a grocer [4].

Marmont's other literary works:

- *Traité sur les maladies des dents*, 1807; [Treatise on dental diseases],
- *Odontotechnie ou art du dentiste : poème didactique et descriptif en 4 chants, dédié aux dames*, 1825; [Dentistry or the dental art: an educational and descriptive poem in four songs, dedicated to the Ladies],
- *L'esthioménie, procédé découvert depuis l'année 1807, contre toutes* [Esthiomeny, a process discovered since 1807, against all odds], 1839.

Other inventions :

- An odontoscopic mirror (1803);
- A reformer, a device to align children's teeth (1804);
- A cooking process of human teeth to get rid of the unpleasant effects that people, who generally wear natural teeth, experience, and to extend their duration (1811);
- Pliers to retighten artificial teeth (1817);
- A gas to get rid of the greenish polish that forms on teeth due to unpleasant odour emanating from the stomach due to digestive disorders (1817);
- An oral vice with which the teeth can be filed without being undermined and annoyed (1833).

What degree of credit should be given to Julien Marmont's account in his book *L'esthioménie, procédé découvert depuis l'année 1807, contre toutes*, published in 1839, for it seems to me that one should remain cautious regarding this account?

- A lack of testimonies or secondary sources corroborating the author;
- In his work published in Amsterdam, Pierre Baron made the inventory of dentists practising in Paris. Besides the fact that the number of dentists exceeded the number 15, Marmont's name was never mentioned even if Pierre Baron listed dentists beyond the year 1800. Pierre Baron estimated that 34 dentists practised in

the French capital city that year. Even if Baron is a historical specialist, this figure is obviously not exhaustive, which thus implies that Marmont could have worked in Paris. But why was he not indexed when Baron quoted the directories and the almanacs of the time? Why not believing him when he said he was [2]?

- There were several reshuffles within Napoleon's government, one in 1808 and two in 1809. One minister was appointed for the same responsibilities as the minister of Justice on May 18th 1804 and there was a reshuffle in 1813, but this last date cannot be right since Napoleon divorced in 1809 [3] ;

- The "esthiomeny" is a process which I had never heard of and about which I had never read before. It is a process that Marmont invented and which disappeared with him. What has become of it? What did it look like? It seems impossible to depict it.

- In January 1805, Corvisart, the Emperor's first doctor, proposed Jean-Joseph Dubois-Foucou to become the Emperor's dental surgeon. He was mentioned for the first time in the 1806 Imperial Almanac. From then on, Dubois-Foucou became Napoleon's official dentist. If needed, he was the one who was summoned and nobody else. If Marmont had been Napoleon's dentist, it must have been between May 18th 1804 and mid-1805, the year of Dubois-Foucou's acceptance and appointment as the Emperor's dental surgeon [1, 5].

- Was Marmont systematically or occasionally appointed dentist? As for his treatment of Joséphine's mouth, there is little doubt in my mind, his description being extremely accurate. Alexandre de Beauharnais was disgusted with Joséphine, his former wife, because she was not sophisticated enough for him and because she had black and rotten teeth due to eating too much sugar when she was a child. And yet, she used a tooth brush and a tongue scraper. At the end of her life, she was said to be edentulous. Moreover, there were many dental kits in the Château de la Malmaison. Even though he was getting older, Marmont liked to please women as corroborated in his book *Odontotechnie ou l'art dentaire : poèmes... dédié aux dames* (1825). What could be more laudatory for him than being Napoleon's favourite dentist or becoming it within a matter of lines! He stated that he was finally able to testify now that Joséphine had passed away for he was forbidden to do so when she was still alive. However, she died in 1814. Why did he wait until 1839 and the 4th edition of his

book to testify? Was it speculation or conjecture but it is best to remain cautious about it [4].

- As we said, Joséphine had poor teeth and was married to Napoleon from 1796 to 1809. Bacteria from tooth decay are easily transmitted. Marmont stated that he used the process of "esthiomeny" on Napoleon, which meant that he treated cavities in the Emperor's mouth with this process. Dubois-Foucou, his favourite dentist from 1805, treated Napoleon until 1813. This latter maintained that he had only removed tartar when he served His Majesty. We know for a fact that Napoleon only had serious dental problems when he was in Saint Helena. All the evidence agreed on that. Therefore, why Napoleon only had cavities when Marmont treated him and why was it not the case when Dubois-Foucou was appointed? It is unbelievable. That was probably speculation but once again, one needs to remain cautious about it.

- Finally, after that, Marmont disappeared from the imperial tabloids. Why? Under the Empire, under a totalitarian regime, either this account was the result of disproportion, or either it was the result of disgrace. For what reasons?

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