

Obituary

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A Tribute to Dr. Elio Corti, August 23, 1942–September 9, 2017

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This year we mark the 80th anniversary of the renowned and internationally recognized Italian poultry writer, expert, fancier and breeder Dr. Elio Corti (Figure 1) and the 5th year since he passed away.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. Elio as we remember him: (a) at a local meeting at the beginning of his physician's career; (b) in summer 1997 when visiting Dr. Romanov and friends at the former Poultry Research Institute, Merbitz, Germany. Figure 1a was gifted to the authors by Dr. Corti himself; and Figure 1b was taken by the authors.

Elio was born in Valenza, Piedmont, Italy, on 23rd August 1942. He was trained in medicine and surgery at the University of Pavia, with a first-class degree gained in 1967, and in cardiology at the University of Turin with specialization attained in 1970 [1]. In addition to his professional achievements as a physician, he was also known for his private research on poultry, which had been propagated in scientific journals and poultry magazines, as well as in several privately published books. Among his publications, there

were a number of fascinating articles he provided for the Aviculture Europe digital magazine (e.g., [2,3]). As an example of his studies, we can also mention research on five-toed chickens, carriers of the polydactyly mutation, in which he traced the history of the possible occurrence of this remarkable chicken mutation and its spread in different parts of the world, including Europe [4,5]. Importantly, Elio thoroughly examined and translated many ancient, mostly Latin texts on poultry written by Aristoteles, Ulisse Aldrovandi [3], Conrad Gessner [2] and others, making them available to contemporary readers and investigators.

Elio Corti was in exchange with poultry experts from all over the world and a vivid participant of national and international meetings (Figure 1a). With extensive international contacts, he was one of the prominent poultry enthusiasts, writers and researchers, namely, Loyl Stromberg (1914–2011; [6]), William Plant (1921–1996; [7]) and Dr. Irina Moiseyeva (1932–2015; [8]), and maintained a close friendship with them as well as with us for many years (Figure 1b, Table 1). He supported Loyl Stromberg in creating the National Poultry Museum [9].

Table 1. Memories of Elio written by Elly Vogelaar, Michael N. Romanov and Annett Güntherodt. Excerpts of the biographical profiles from the *Summa Gallicana* website [10].

| Elly Vogelaar | Michael N. Romanov | Annett Güntherodt |
|---|---|---|
| <p>I hit Elio’s website <i>Summa Gallicana</i> several years ago and I found so many interesting things that I bookmarked the site and every now and then I spend some time looking at all the wonderful information.</p> <p>I cannot understand Italian but I used the Babel Fish free online text and web page language translation tools—although that doesn’t always work out as it should.</p> <p>Both being devoted to chickens and able to write in English, we started in 2009 to discuss by email all sorts of chicken questions. Elio even allows me to be parasitical on his historical researches and occasionally add to them. I am proud to call him my friend.</p> | <p>In 1995 Mr. Stromberg suggested one “very special” Italian friend, Dr. Elio Corti, for further communication. The wonderful meeting with Elio occurred in Moscow in October 1995, when I introduced the Russian world to him and acquainted him with Dr. Irina Moiseyeva. We also attended the Kremlin, Red Square and many other places and bought some pictures and books of Russian Czars including an album <i>The Romanovs and Crimea</i> and a small icon of St. Nicholas II. Two months later, Crimea and Crimean historical Romanovs’ places became my destination by chance.</p> <p>In the meantime, I was involved in studying poultry genetic resources, my major field of interest. Thanks to Loyl, Elio and other people my contacts are extended to many, many world’s countries. I spent a year (1997–1998) in Germany for a research project on genetic diversity of chicken breeds at DNA level; some of those breeds like the Yurlov Crower have a mysterious destiny. Then, I could visit Elio’s friend Achim Güntherodt and his kind family, and Elio and Annett could visit me [see Figure 1b].</p> | <p>One of these important friends is Elio Corti for me. We got to know ourselves on a showing in Zuidlaren 1994 in the Netherlands. In May 1996, he visited us in Germany with his long-time friend Bill Plant from Australia together. We rummage with it the “library” of my father and found interesting facts for him over single races of poultry in partially very old books, which Elio required for the investigations of his book “<i>Summa Gallicana</i>.” Until our cooperation looks today so that I seek on the basis of headwords in the German literature and translate it for him. Mikhail Romanov (at that time Ukraine) could help also in this way, which information of a German book over the poultry-breeding (Dürigen, 1923) required. With Elio’s visit in Germany 1997 he asked me, to get contact with Loyl Stromberg (USA), because he interests in getting to know the poultry museum in Thuringia very much and he plans his Europe-tour for 1999. So I turned into a type of mediator of my father as well as his “library” and some intensive researcher of poultry on the whole world more or less.</p> |

Elio had a variety of interests, frequently focusing on perfection. These included photography, with a preference for the macro, and computer programming [1]. Use of the dBase language allowed him to implement the supervision of practically all outpatient

activities at a local hospital, the AVIS (Association of Italian Blood Volunteers) branch of Valenza, and the Dialysis Center of Bollate's Hospital in Milan province [1].

His favorite pastime, however, was raising chickens. He was able to realize a lifetime desire in 1991 by starting a chicken farm on the ranch he named "Elio e Claudia" [1]. Here, in the tranquility and verdure of the Monferrato hills, he was able to collect practically all of the genetic variations developed and accumulated in chickens throughout the centuries.

A central work of Elio Corti was "*Summa Gallicana*," a chicken genetics treatise in three volumes [10], that addressed the complex issues posed by the genetic cross-breeding of chicken breeds and varieties. All of his research was published on www.summagallicana.it [10], and the Italian Poultry Union (FIAV) keeps this informative website online.

Elio Corti passed away suddenly in his hometown of Valenza on 9th September 2017, at the age of 75 years, following a brief illness. He wed Claudia whom he tragically and prematurely lost in 1986 [1]. Despite his immense knowledge, he remained a kind-hearted person who loved, valued and respected his fellows. We and all his friends throughout the poultry world miss him greatly as a unique human being and are grateful that we got to know him.

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