

Editorial

Empress Sissi (1837-1898)

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Editorial

Sissi was born with two teeth. This was interpreted as “a good omen”. Two fragments of milk teeth coming from the same milk molar (?) are today exposed in Sissi’s former Imperial Apartments which are located in the center of Vienna. These fragments are sometimes displayed during significant events. In 1864 she was described having “very red lips [and] a sweet smile.”

As soon as she got married she was humiliated by Sophie her mother-in-law who controlled everything. In the face of her entrances Sissi was asked to brush her teeth regularly. Franz Joseph thanked his mother for this: “Thanks to you, her teeth have become completely white and she has become adorable.” [1].

The rumor had it that she would have quickly had bad teeth. The fan became an essential accessory for her to hide the imperfections of her missing or bad teeth. But this rumor is certainly pure fabrication. In the 1898 autopsy written by Dr Reverdin of Geneva, the latter mentioned “a perfect dentition”. In the closing years of her life, that is to say at 60, the Empress of Austria would have had good teeth in spite of habits - heavy smoking, cocaine consumption - that are today described by the dentistry sphere as disastrous [2,3].

Sissi’s dentist came from a foreign country. He came from the United States of America and was called Levi Spear Burridge (1829-1887) who also was the dentist of the Rothschild family, of the king and the queen of Naples, of Pope Pius IX [1].

He settled down in Rome, Italy, after he had graduated from the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery in 1850 and from the College of Medicine of Maryland in 1851. From about 1869 onwards he moved to Paris. As a hero of the War of 1870, he was awarded the Legion of Honor for his service. He also took care of the Empress and her husband. When he brutally died, due to the consecutive wounds he got after his carriage fell down, the State Councillor, Dr. Raimund Günther took over. Invoices prove that Sissi regularly scaled her teeth. The respective invoices are still available in the archives of Vienna today. At a later age, she was provided a more extensive care, but there are no trace kept about it. Dental fillings and crowns have very likely

been fixed, but it is certain that there have been neither partial nor full removable prostheses fixed, as it was claimed by Rosa Albach-Retty, a famous actress who was Romy Schneider’s grandmother. This fact would definitely have been put down on the 1898 expert report which was as precise as to mention the post pregnancy stretch marks of the Empress (Figure 1 and 2). There was another rumor that she would have washed her dental prosthesis in the garden of the Zauner Café and Cake Shop in Ischl. When one knows the importance Sissi gave to her appearance in public, this assertion is also completely absurd [3].

As an inveterate traveler, Sissi would not go out without her doctor and her medical kit. The latter was composed of 63 items. This included sage which provides well-known dental benefits: halitosis, mouth ulcers or toothaches control thanks to its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. This also included a sour mixture of ether and opium, for topical application, used to soothe odontalgia and pains of the oral mucosa. The Empress would therefore have had trouble with her teeth [1].

A death mask was made after her assassination in Geneva [3].



Figure 1: Tooth brush of Franz Joseph I of Austria, her husband [2].

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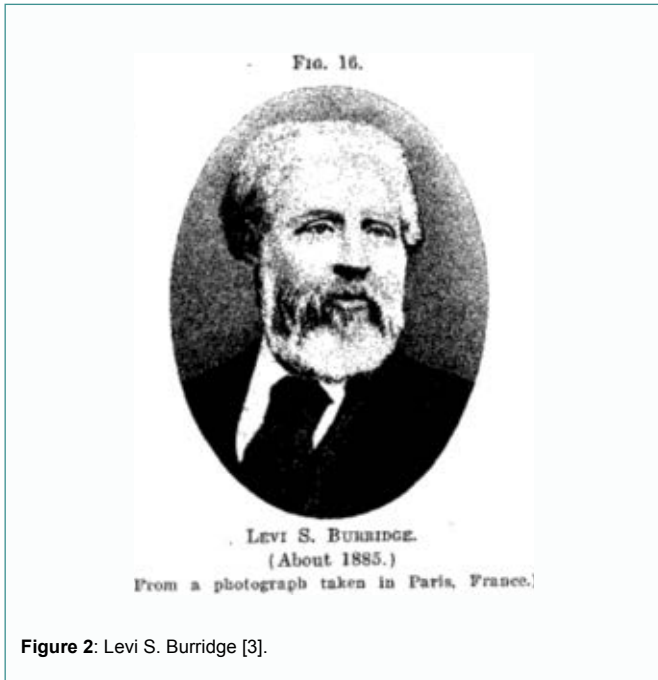


Figure 2: Levi S. Burrige [3].

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