

Chapter VI

**FRANÇOIS POURFOUR DU PETIT'S
NEUTRALIZATION OF THE CORNEAL
DIOPTRIC POWER**

INTRODUCTION

At the time of the debates at the French Royal Academy of Sciences between 1721 and 1730 on the anatomical position of the human crystalline lens, the Parisian academician, anatomist and physician *François Pourfour du Petit*, described the results of his experiments on human and animal cadaver eyes.

On the occasion of his lecture of 12th June 1728 he described the utilization of an innovative and original technique of corneal dioptric power neutralization for the elimination of the anterior dioptric power of the eye by the immersion of an ocular globe in a box filled with water. His lecture was entitled “*Démontrer que l’Uvée est Plane chez l’Homme*” (*Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human*). He repeated this experiment using an artificial eye as well. These contributions earned for *François Pourfour du Petit* the right to be counted with the experimenters on neutralization of corneal dioptric power, which is the underlying principle of contact lenses.

The presentation of the first neutralization of the optical dioptric power effect of the cornea by *Petit* cannot be separated either from the context of his works or from the debates of the Royal Academy of Sciences on ocular anatomy and topography in connection with the operation for cataract.

This is the reason why I chose the following topics to analyze:

- the memoir of *Petit* and the editorial of *Fontenelle*, Perpetual Secretary to the Royal Academy of Sciences, documented for this occasion,
- an assessment of the works of the Academy of Sciences regarding the anatomy and topography of the eye together with the operation for cataract at the time of the writing of the memoir.
- I shall then try to evaluate the importance of these investigations in the history of corneal dioptric power neutralization and contact lenses, and their appreciation by historians of ophthalmic history.

1 - SOURCE DOCUMENTS

The Memoir of François Pourfour du Petit and his Editorial

(Figure 6 – 1)

Petit's memoir "*Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane chez l'Homme*" (*Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human*), read in June 1728 before the Royal Academy of Sciences, is reproduced in the *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728*. It is accompanied, in the History Section of this published work, by Fontenelle's editorial entitled "*Sur la Structure des Yeux*" (*On the Structure of the Eyes*). (1)

1.1 - PETIT'S MEMOIR:

"DÉMONTRER QUE L'UVÉE EST PLANE CHEZ L'HOMME" (1728)

1.1.1 – THE CRITIC OF THE CONVEXITY OF THE IRIS

In the introduction to his presentation, Petit presents an historical survey, in which he notes that all the ancient anatomists drew the iris as a convex structure, curved and rounded forwards.

This classical description of the form of the iris would be due to three erroneous post mortem observations:

- Firstly, if you remove the cornea of the eyes of a recently deceased person, the iris drops backwards, the aqueous humor runs out and applies itself to the frontal surface of the crystalline lens and adapts to its convexity,

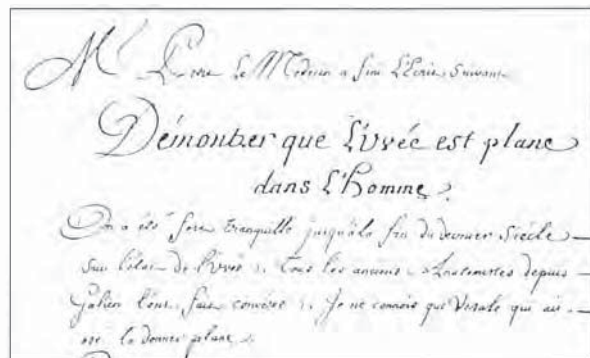


Figure 6 - 1

François Pourfour du Petit, "*Démontrer que l'Uvée est plane dans l'homme*" (*Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human*).

Transcription of Petit's presentation in the record of the proceedings of the Sessions of the Royal Academy of Sciences at the session of the 19th June 1728.

(Extract of the record of the proceedings of the Sessions of the Royal Academy of Sciences for the year 1728, p. 236 recto)

1. These studies can be consulted on microfilm or in original documents in the Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Institut de France, (28, Quai de Conti, Paris). I acknowledge the friendly support from the Archivists of the Academy of Sciences at the time of my studies. The printed text in the *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728* mentions the 19th June 1728. The record of the Proceedings for the Year 1728, volume 46, allows us to say that the lecture was given at the Academy in the course of three sessions:

1.) On June 19, 1728 (p. 230 recto and p. 230): "M. Petit le Médecin a commence à lire un écrit sur les yeux" (Mr. Petit, the Physician, commenced to read a paper on the eyes).

2.) On June 23, 1728 (p. 233 recto): "M. Petit a continue sa lecture" (Mr. Petit continued his lecture).

3.) On the June 26, 1728 (p. 236 recto to 246 recto): "M. Petit le Médecin a fini l'écrit suivant: '*Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane chez l'Homme*'" (Mr. Petit, the Physician, completed delivery of the following paper: '*Demonstration that the Uvea is plano in Humans*').

The lecture was prefaced on the 7th June 1728 by a demonstration (p. 119 verso): "M. Petit le Médecin a fait des démonstrations sur des yeux par rapport à un Mémoire qu'il doit donner sur l'opération de la cataracte" (Mr. Petit, the Physician, made some demonstrations on the eyes with regard to a Memoir which he has to give on the operation for cataract).

- Secondly, if an eye has been preserved in water for one day, the iris is pushed forwards by the hydration of the vitreous body. This observation is all the more evident "*if you have plunged into water an eye that is no longer fresh and in which a quarter, a third or a half of the aqueous humor has evaporated*". (2)
- Finally, if you open a frozen eye in which the aqueous has partially evaporated during freezing, the lens has pushed the iris frontward. (3)

Petit presents several other arguments drawn from his clinical observations and concludes:

"All these observations, I am told, are good ones and they prove well that Galen was incorrect to have the uvea slide on the crystalline lens, but they prove nothing against the convexity of the uvea, and there is undoubtedly quite a large distance between the iris and the crystalline lens."

« Toutes ces observations, me dira-t-on, sont bonnes, elles prouvent bien que Galien n'a pas raison de faire glisser l'uvée sur le cristallin, mais elles ne prouvent rien contre la convexité de l'uvée, il y a sans doute une distance assez grande entre l'uvée et le cristallin. » (4)

Thus it is that *Petit* comes to admit:

- That the appearance is deceptive:

"Finally, what must determine absolutely to establish the convexity of the uvea, it is that, in whatever way you look at the human eye, the uvea appears very appreciably convex."

« Enfin, ce qui doit déterminer absolument à établir la convexité de l'uvée, c'est que de quelque manière qu'on regarde un œil humain, l'uvée paraît très sensiblement convexe. » (4)

- That certain animals really have a convex iris and that the Ancients only used to dissect the eyes of oxen and sheep:

"Most of the anatomists of past centuries did not distance themselves at all from the opinion of Galen, and besides they only dissected ox and sheep eyes, in which they always found the uvea applied to the crystalline lens, that very probably had to make them believe, like Galen, that the crystalline lens touched the uvea and caused this convexity."

« La plus grande partie des anatomistes des siècles passés ne s'éloignaient point du sentiment de Galien, ils ne disséquaient d'ailleurs que des yeux de bœuf & de mouton, où ils trouvaient toujours l'uvée appliquée sur le cristallin, ce qui devait vraisemblablement leur faire croire, comme à Galien, que le cristallin touchait à l'uvée et faisait cette convexité. » (5)

- And, above all, there was the decisive and basic argument that no anatomist had found before him, that the convexity of the iris is in reality only an **apparent** convexity, that nowadays we would call '**virtual**', for it is due to the "*refraction of the rays of light*" by the convexity of the cornea:

2. *Petit* 1728, p. 200 : "*si l'on a mis à tremper dans l'eau un oeil flétri dont le quart ou le tiers ou la moitié de l'humeur aqueuse est évaporée.*"

3. As *Petit* had shown in 1723 in the "*Mémoire sur les Yeux Gelés, dans lequel on Détermine la Grandeur des Chambres qui renferment l'Humeur Aqueuse*" (*Memoir on Frozen Eyes, in which one Determines the Size of the Chambers which contain the Aqueous Humor*).

4. *Petit* 1728, p. 212.

5. *Petit* 1728, p. 213.

6. *Petit* 1728, p. 213-214.

"It is true that when they examine the eyes of a living person or one who had recently died, the uvea appeared convex to them; but a little physics should have made them draw back from their error. Few anatomists and physicists were unaware of the effect of refraction, especially in this last century; thus they had to believe that the cornea was able to produce by virtue of its convexity quite a strong refractive effect, and they would have discovered that the convexity of the uvea is only apparent and that this appearance is caused by the refraction of the rays of light as they cross the cornea and the aqueous."

« Il est vrai que lorsqu'ils examinaient les yeux d'un homme vivant ou nouvellement mort, l'uvée leur paraissait convexe : Mais un peu de physique aurait dû les faire revenir de leur erreur. Peu d'anatomistes physiiciens ignoraient l'effet de réfraction, surtout dans ce dernier siècle, ainsi ils devaient penser que la cornée par sa convexité en pouvait produire d'assez fortes, ils auraient découvert que la convexité de l'uvée n'est qu'apparente, & que cette apparence est causée par la réfraction que souffrent les rayons de la lumière en traversant la cornée et l'humeur aqueuse. » (6)

In general, it would be sufficient to eliminate the corneal component of refraction in order to make the convexity of the iris disappear, thus making it appear in its normal topography:

"As proof that it is the refraction undergone by the rays of light that causes the uvea to appear convex, it is that if you find the means of eliminating refraction, you cause the convexity to disappear."

« Une preuve que ce sont les réfractions que souffrent les rayons de la lumière, qui font paraître l'Uvée convexe, c'est que si l'on trouve le moyen d'empêcher les réfractions, on fait disparaître la convexité. » (7)

1.1.2 – THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE FLATNESS OF THE IRIS BY MEANS OF THE CORNEAL NEUTRALIZATION BOX

A – François Pourfour du Petit's "Water-box"

(Figure 6 – 2)

In order to achieve this neutralization of corneal dioptric power, *Petit* constructed a square box made from glass, consisting of four flat sides and open above:

"I use for that purpose a square box PQ, which I had made for me especially. It is formed from flat panes of glass, which are held together in a copper frame, and joined together with some putty, which stops the water from running out. This box, thus constructed, has plano surfaces on all sides."

« Je me sers pour cela d'une boîte carrée PQ, que j'ai fait construire exprès. Elle est formée par des verres plans qui sont assujettis ensemble par un châssis de cuivre, & joints avec un mastic qui empêche l'eau de s'écouler. Cette boîte ainsi construite, présente de tous côtés des surfaces planes. » (7)

7. Petit 1728, p. 214. Petit adds, "dont je l'ai fait voir à la Compagnie" (which I have brought to the attention of the Society), when he was referring to his demonstration to the Academy of Sciences on 7th June 1728.

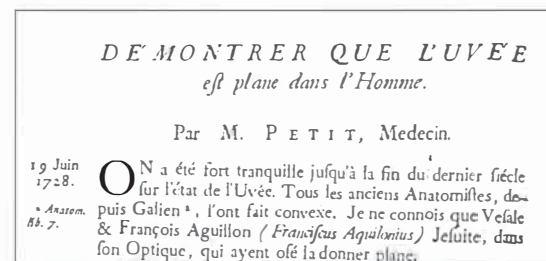


Figure 6 - 2

François Pourfour du Petit, "Démontrer que l'Uvée est plane dans l'homme" (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human).

Transcription of François Pourfour du Petit's presentation in the Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, (Extract of the Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 206)

B – The Experiments on Fresh Human Eyes

(Figures 6 – 3 & 6 – 4)

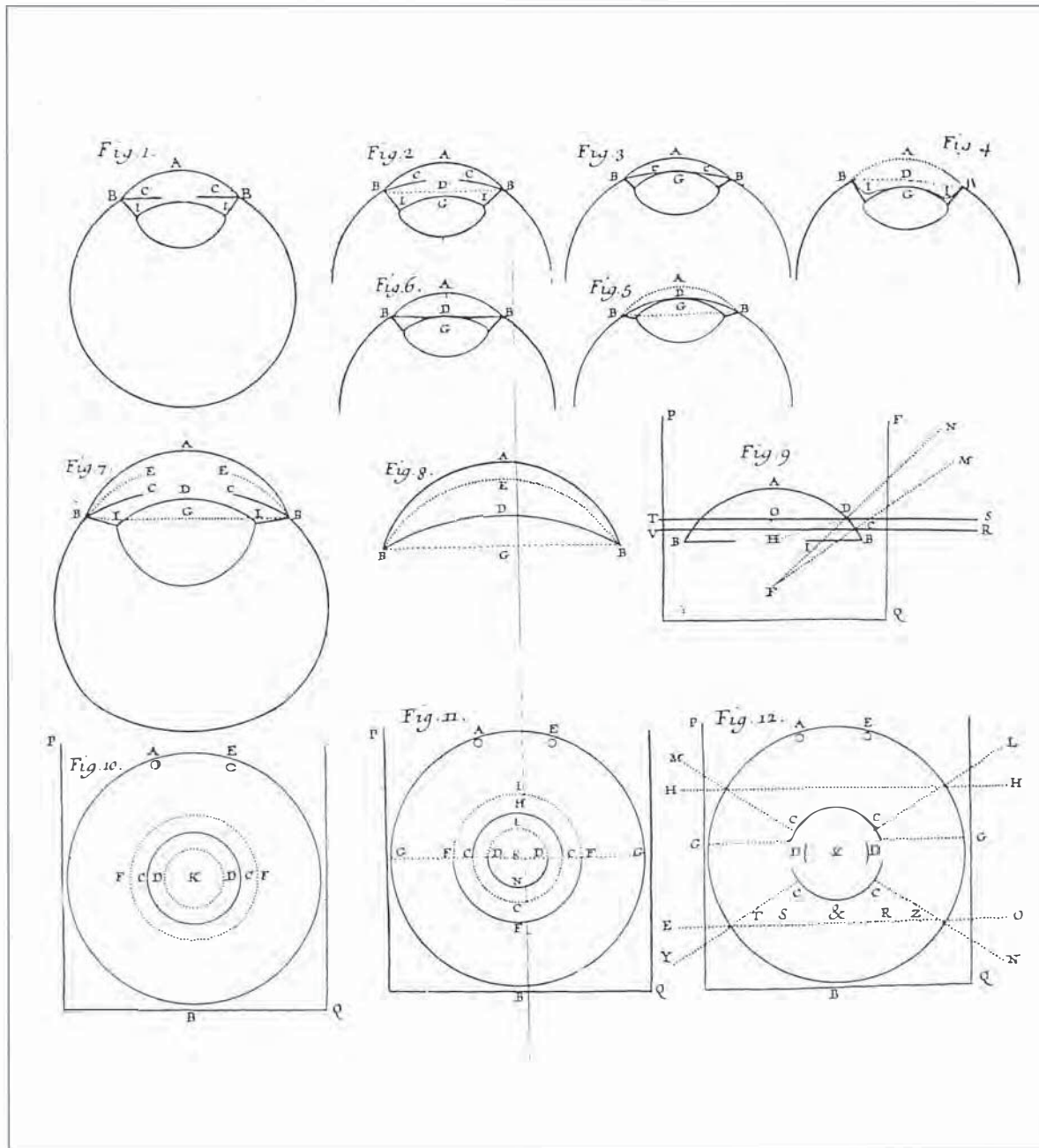


Figure 6 - 3

François Pourfour du Petit, "Démontrer que l'Uvée est plane dans l'homme" (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human).

Figures 1 to 12 on plate 15 illustrating François Pourfour du Petit's presentation in the Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728,

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, plate 15, p. 300)

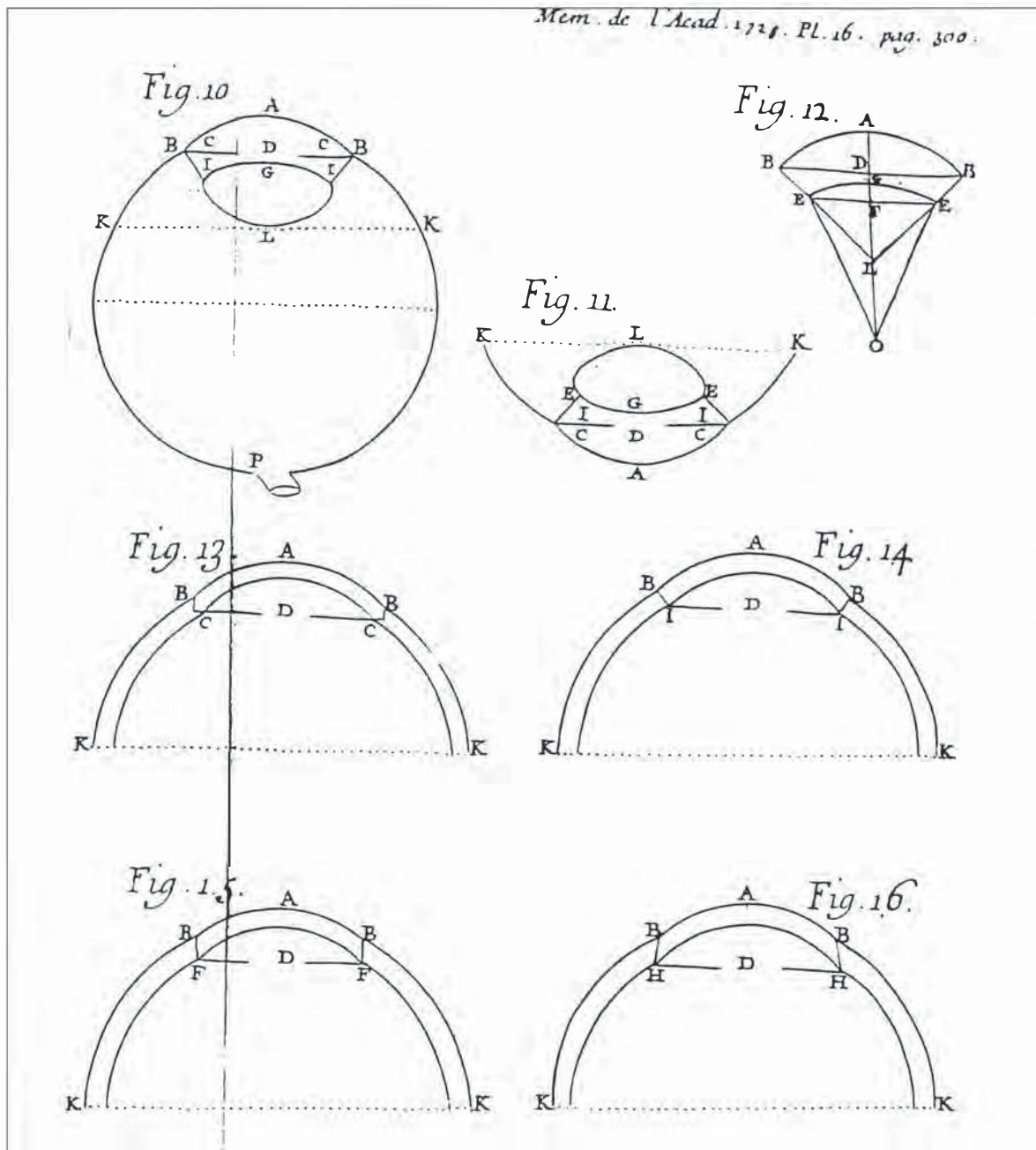


Figure 6 - 4

François Pourfour du Petit, "Démontrer que l'Uvée est plane dans l'homme" (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human).

Figures 10 to 16 on plate 16 illustrating François Pourfour du Petit's presentation in the Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, plate 16, p. 300)

Human Eye in an Empty Box

When a fresh human eye is suspended in the **empty box**, the iris appears to be protuberant and convex frontward when it is observed from the side, this being by reason of refraction of the rays of light by the convexity of the cornea:

"I take the eye of a recently deceased human. I look at the cornea by the rays RV, ST parallel to the uvea BB, I find the uvea to be convex with the result that the pupil H appears to me to be at O. I know that the rays of light have to break when they meet the cornea at the points C, D, because of its convexity, and they come together from the perpendiculars MF, NF."

« Je prends l'œil d'un homme nouvellement mort, je regarde cette cornée par des rayons RV, ST parallèles à l'uvée BB, je trouve cette uvée convexe de sorte que la prunelle H, me paraît être en O. L'on sait que ces rayons sont obligés de se rompre à la rencontre de la cornée aux point C, D, à cause de sa convexité, & s'approchent des perpendiculaires MF, NF. » (7)

Human Eye in an Box filled with Water (Figure 6 – 5)

However, when the box containing the eye is **filled with water**, the iris is no longer seen to be convex forwards; the iris is no longer even visible when viewed from the side. In fact, the liquid has neutralized the refraction of the plano-convex dioptric power formed by the corneal curvature and the aqueous:

"I place this eye at the bottom of the box as described above and fill the box with water. I look at the cornea through the glass EQ, by the rays RV, ST. I no longer see the iris or the pupil, because the rays enter the box perpendicularly as far as the cornea, and although these rays may be able to be diverted a little on reaching the cornea at points C and D, they nevertheless put themselves back in the same direction on entering the aqueous humor and are found to be parallel to the uvea which appears in its natural state."

« Je place ensuite cet œil au fond de la boîte dont je viens de parler, je la remplis d'eau, je regarde la cornée à travers le verre EQ, par les rayons RV, ST. Je ne vois plus ni l'iris, ni la prunelle, parce que les rayons entrent perpendiculairement dans l'eau de la boîte jusqu'à la cornée, & quoique ces rayons puissent se détourner un peu à la rencontre de la cornée aux points C & D, ils se remettent néanmoins dans la même direction en entrant dans l'humeur aqueuse & se trouvent parallèles à l'uvée qui paraît dans son état naturel. » (8)

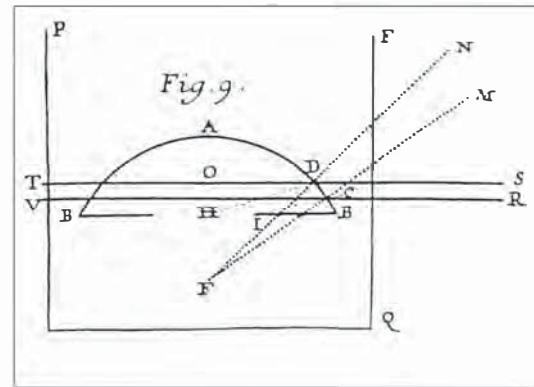


Figure 6 - 5

Diagram of the neutralization box for corneal dioptric power, constructed by François Pourfour du Petit for "Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane chez l'Homme" (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plane in Human).

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, plate 15, fig. 9, p. 300)

Petit constructed a square box PQ with plane glass walls. The cornea and the iris, BAB, after being submerged in water, are observed by the rays of light RV or ST, which are parallel to the iris plane BB.

In air, "the uvea is viewed as convex with the result that the pupil 'H' appears to be at 'O'". In actual fact, the rays break up when they meet the cornea at points C D and approach from the perpendiculars M F and N F.

In water, when the cornea is observed through the glass F Q by the rays R V and S T parallel to the iris B B, one does not see either the iris or the pupil. In fact, "The rays enter perpendicularly in the water of the box as far as the cornea and although these rays may be able to be diverted a little when they meet the cornea at points C and D, they are turned back to the same direction on entering the aqueous humor and they are parallel to the uvea which therefore appears plane as in its natural state."

What we have therefore is not only an elegant demonstration of the flatness of the iris, but also of the first experiment of the neutralization of the dioptric effect of the human cornea to be reported in the literature. *Petit* interprets his observation in a very precise and appropriate fashion as follows:

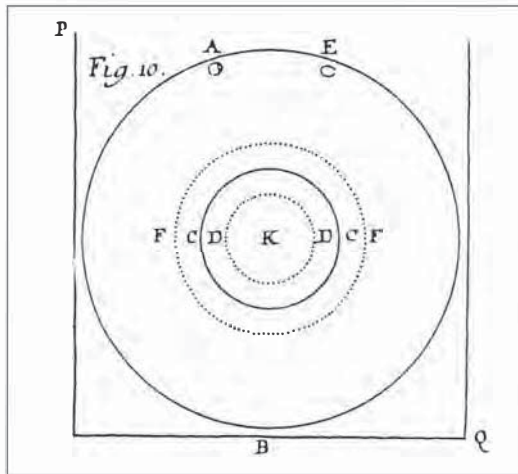


Figure 6 - 6
 François Pourfour du Petit "Démontrer que
 l'Uvée est Plane chez l'Homme"
 (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in
 Human).
 (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences
 pour l'Année 1728, Plate 15, Fig. 10, p. 300)

Experiments of neutralization of corneal refractive power of the anterior segment of an artificial eye.

Pourfour du Petit has manufactured a flat enamel disk AB of 50 mm diameter, onto which he has an iris painted of 17mm diameter with a pupil K in black. On this disk is also adhered a watch glass of 26mm radius of curvature which represents the cornea, the whole depicting the anterior chamber of the eye. Two holes A and E are pierced in the upper part in order to introduce water at those points and allow air to come out. A thread is passed through the holes to suspend the device with greater ease.

In air, when this "anterior chamber" is filled with water, the pupil appears larger, like the circle FF and the iris appears rounded, convex anteriorly.

Immersed in the neutralization box filled with water, the pupil appears at its normal, natural height C C and the iris appears flat.

- the water has almost the same refractive index as the aqueous and refraction no longer occurs between these two liquid media,
- the corneal curvature is neutralized by water and replaced by the flatness of the glass walls of the box,
- therefore neutralization of the corneal convex dioptric power occurs and this is replaced by the plano dioptric power of the glass wall of the water-box.

C - The Experiments of Neutralization of Corneal Dioptric Power by the Anterior Segment of an Artificial Eye.

(Figure 6 - 6)

For those who could doubt the exactness and the soundness of his experiment, *Petit* repeats his demonstration with the 'anterior segment of an artificial eye' formed from a painted enamel disk depicting the iris and the pupil, anterior to which is sealed a watch glass.

"But to avoid all the difficulties which one could make for me, I have had made an enamel plaque AB, round and completely flat, 22 lines in diameter on which I have had painted an iris approximately like the iris of a human; the pupil has been represented on it in black and is 7 ½ lines in diameter. I adhered this iris to a watch glass replacing the cornea, the convexity of which forms part of a sphere of 23 lines in diameter. The composite structure represents the anterior chamber of the eye. I made two holes A, E, in the upper portion, so that I could introduce water into one of these holes, and let air be released from the other. I passed a thread through these holes in order to suspend the device with greater facility."

« Mais pour éviter toutes les difficultés que l'on pourrait me faire, j'ai fait faire une plaque d'émail AB, ronde, tout à fait plane, de 22 lignes de diamètre, sur laquelle j'ai fait peindre un Iris à peu près semblable à celui de l'homme ; on y a représenté la prunelle en noir, qui a 7 lignes ½ de diamètre. J'unis cet iris à un verre de montre qui tient la place de la cornée, la convexité de ce verre fait la portion d'une sphère de 23 lignes de diamètre. Le tout représente la chambre antérieure de l'œil. On a pratiqué deux trous A, E, à la partie

supérieure, pour y pouvoir introduire de l'eau par un de ces trous, & laisser sortir l'air par l'autre. Je passe un fil dans ces trous pour les suspendre avec plus de facilité. » (8)

An Artificial Anterior Chamber in an Empty Water-box

This device is suspended in the empty neutralization box by a thread slipped across two holes in its upper part. When the artificial anterior chamber is **empty**, the drawing of the flat iris appears in its natural proportions, with a flat iris. However, when this artificial anterior chamber is **filled** with water, it causes the pupil to appear larger and the view of appearance of the iris becomes convex, just like the appearance of the anterior chamber of a human eye:

"I fill its cavity with water through the hole A, the pupil becomes larger by one line and [...] the iris appears convex."

« Je remplis sa cavité d'eau par le trou A, la prunelle devient plus grande d'une ligne et [...] et l'iris paraît convexe. » (9)

An Artificial Anterior Chamber after filling a Water-box with Water

When the anterior chamber structure is filled with water and immersed in the neutralization box after filling this with water, the iris plane appears at its natural height and the iris has regained its original appearance of flatness:

"If I immerse it in the box PP, filled with water, the pupil FF becomes its natural size and the whole iris appears flat again."

« Si je la plonge dans la boîte PP, remplie d'eau, la prunelle FF devient de la grandeur naturelle, & tout l'iris reparait plan. » (9)

Petit pursues these attempts by further observations from different angles and only immersing in the water a portion of the artificial anterior chamber, or only filling the anterior chamber partially.

D - The Experiments of Neutralization of the Corneal Dioptric Power in the Human and Animal Eyes

In order to confirm these observations, *Petit* repeats the same experiments on human and animal eyes.

"In regard to all of the various appearances that I have just found in this iris in water and out of water, I find these in the iris of the recently deceased human, except that I cannot examine the human iris emptied of aqueous in the same manner as I examined the artificial iris emptied of water."

« Toutes les diverses apparences que je viens de trouver à cet iris dans l'eau & hors de l'eau, je les trouve à

8. *Petit* 1728, p. 214. Thus, *Petit* even takes account of the weak refraction at the time of passage of rays of light across the cornea, as he describes: "Although these rays may be able to be deviated a little when they meet the cornea, they revert back to the original direction when they enter the aqueous humor and are parallel to the uvea that appears in its natural state." (" quoique ces rayons puissent se détourné un peu à la rencontre de la cornée, ils se remettent néanmoins dans la même direction en entrant dans l'humeur aqueuse et se trouvent parallèle à l'uvée qui paraît dans son état naturel. ").

9. *Petit* 1728, p. 214 - 215. The indicated dimensions correspond to: 50 mm for the diameter of the plate (22 lines); 17 mm for the diameter of the pupil (7 ½ lines), 26 mm for the radius of curvature of the watch glass (23 lines).

l'iris de l'œil de l'homme nouvellement mort, excepté que je ne puis l'examiner vide d'humeur aqueuse, comme j'ai examiné l'iris artificiel vide d'eau. » (10)

In Air

When examined in air, the iris of the human eye appears just the same as was the case with the artificial iris, i.e. very little convexity when it is viewed from in front, but it appears more and more convex in proportion to how much you look at it in an oblique and parallel plane:

"In looking at the eye of the human with rays perpendicular to the iris, I find this iris slightly convex: but it appears more convex when I look at it from an oblique line of sight, or one parallel with the iris, just as I did when I observed the artificial iris."

« En regardant l'œil de l'homme par des rayons perpendiculaires à l'iris; je trouve cet iris un peu convexe : mais il paraît plus convexe en le regardant par des lignes obliques, & parallèles de la même manière que j'ai regardé l'iris artificiel. » (10)

In Water

When immersed in the box filled with water, the human iris and pupil appears of a size and position, which is natural, when examined from in front. When viewed in a plane parallel to the iris, the latter is seen to be flat.

"I plunge this eye in water and I look at the cornea by lines perpendicular to the iris; I find this iris a little convex, the pupil appears smaller; and just as it is in its natural state in this eye. But when I look at it along lines parallel to the iris, as I said above, I find the surface of that structure to be plane."

« Je plonge cet Œil dans l'eau, je regarde la Cornée par des lignes perpendiculaires à l'Iris ; je trouve cet Iris un peu convexe, la Prunelle paraît plus petite, & telle qu'elle est naturellement dans cet Œil ; mais en le regardant par des lignes parallèles, comme je l'ai dit ci-dessus, j'en trouve la superficie plane. » (11)

E - The Iris of Oxen and Sheep is really Convex

(Figure 6 – 7)

The repetition of the experiments on the eyes of oxen and sheep shows that, contrary to the human eyes, the iris of these eyes is truly convex:

"It is not the same when I make these experiments on an eye of an ox or a sheep, all freshly killed. The uvea B, CC, B really is convex, in which ever way I look at it and by whichever means, and I find in each of these animals a large convexity."

« Il n'en est pas de même lorsque je fais ces expériences avec un œil de bœuf ou de mouton tout frais tués. L'uvée B, CC, B est véritablement convexe, je la regarde de toutes les manières, je lui trouve une grande convexité. » (11)

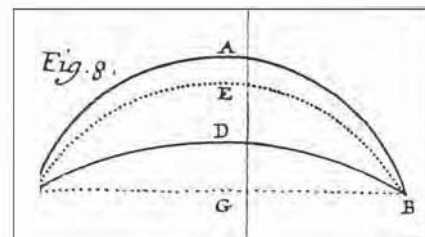


Figure 6 - 7

François Pourfour du Petit
"Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane
chez l'Homme" (Demonstration that
the Uvea is Plano in Human).

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des
Sciences pour l'Année 1728, Plate
15, Fig. 8, p. 300).

The experiments immersing eyes of
oxen and sheep in the neutralization
box filled with water shows that,
contrary to the human eyes, the iris
of these eyes is truly convex.

10. Petit 1728, p. 216.

11. Petit 1728, p. 217.

Finally, *Petit* repeats these experiments on eyes of which the humors had been partially evaporated in air and on eyes that are no longer fresh, then put back into water to soak in order to explain the errors that he and others had made before.

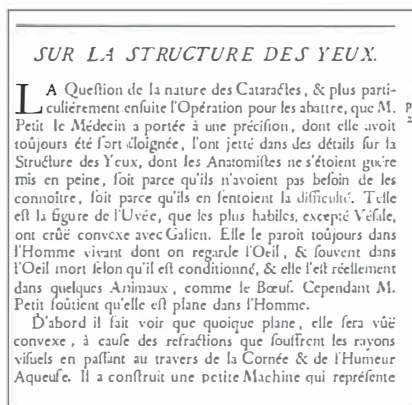


Figure 6 - 8

Fontenelle's comment to Petit's work.

Fontenelle wrote in the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*, an editorial entitled "Sur la Structure des Yeux" (On the Structure of the Eyes) in which he enhances the importance of Petit's demonstrations. (*Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728*, extract of p. 17)

« D'abord Petit fait voir que quoique plane, l'uvée sera vüe convexe, à cause des réfractions que souffrent les rayons visuels en passant au travers de la cornée & de l'humeur aqueuse. Il a construit une petite machine qui représente toute la disposition de la partie antérieure de l'œil, et selon qu'elle est pleine d'eau ou vide, on y voit qu'une même surface plane, qui tient la place de l'uvée, paraît ou convexe, ou plane, comme elle l'est. C'est donc l'eau ou l'humeur aqueuse qui fait l'effet dont il s'agit. » (12)

1. 2 - FONTENELLE'S EDITORIAL: "SUR LA STRUCTURE DES YEUX"

(Figure 6-8)

The importance of *Petit's* demonstrations did not escape *Fontenelle*, the editor of the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*, which takes up this work in elegant fashioning in an editorial entitled "*Sur la Structure des Yeux*" (*On the Structure of the Eyes*):

"First of all, *Petit* makes us see that the uvea, although plan, will be seen as convex, because of the refractions which the visual rays undergo as they pass across the cornea and the aqueous. He has constructed a little device, which represents all the anatomical disposition of the anterior portion of the eye, and, depending on whether this is filled with or emptied of water, one sees that one and the same flat surface, which represents the uvea, appears either convex, or plane, as it is in reality. Thus, it is either the water or the aqueous which causes this effect."

12. Fontenelle 1728, p. 17.

2 - DISCUSSION

2.1 – FRANÇOIS POURFOUR DU PETIT'S WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEBATES OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ON THE CRYSTALLINE LENS AND CATARACT OPERATION

(Table 6-1)

Chronology of the publications of the French Royal Academy of Sciences on the anatomy and the topography of the eye (between 1721 and 1730).

1721

Winslow. Observations sur la Mécanique des Muscles obliques de l'Oeil, sur l'Iris, et sur la Porosité de la Cornée Transparente, etc. (Observations on Mechanics of the oblique Eye Muscles, on the Iris and on the Porosity of the Transparent Cornea, etc.). *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1721*, p. 310 - 322.

1723

Petit le Médecin. Mémoire sur les Yeux Gelés dans lequel on Détermine la Grandeur des Chambres qui renferment l'Humeur Aqueuse. (Memoir on Frozen Eyes in which one Determines the Size of the Chambers which contain Aqueous Humor).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1723, p. 38 - 55.

1725

Petit le Médecin. Dissertation sur l'Opération de la Cataracte. (Dissertation on the Cataract Operation).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1725, p. 6 - 20.

1726

Petit le Médecin. Sur plusieurs Découvertes faites dans les Yeux de l'Homme, des Animaux à quatre Pieds, des Oiseaux et des Poissons. (On several Discoveries made in the Eyes of Human, Quadrupeds, Birds and Fishes).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1727, p. 69 - 89.

Petit le Médecin. Mémoire dans lequel on Détermine l'Endroit où il faut piquer l'Oeil dans l'Opération de la Cataracte. (Memoir in which the Site is Determined at which one must enter the Eye with a Needle in the Cataract Operation).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1726, p. 262-272.

1727

Petit le Médecin. Mémoire dans lequel il est Démontré que les Nerfs Intercostaux fournissent des Rameaux qui portent les Esprits dans les Yeux. (Memoir Demonstrating how the Intercostal Nerves furnish Branches that bring Spirit to the Eye).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1727, p. 1 - 19 & Plate.

Petit le Médecin. Pourquoi les Enfants ne voient pas clair en venant au Monde et quelque Temps après qu'ils sont nés. (An explanation of why infants see poorly when they first arrive in the world and for some time afterwards).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1727, p. 246 - 254.

1728

Petit le Médecin. Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane dans l'Homme. (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plano in Human).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 206 - 224 & Plates.

Fontenelle Sur la Structure des Yeux (On the Structure of the Eyes).

Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 17 - 19.

Petit le Médecin. Différentes Manières de Connaître la Grandeur des Chambres de l'Humeur Aqueuse dans les Yeux de l'Homme. (Various Methods to Measuring the Size of the Chambers of Aqueous Humor in Human Eyes).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 289 - 300.

1730

Petit le Médecin. Sur le Cristallin de l'Oeil de l'Homme, des Animaux à quatre Pieds, des Oiseaux et des Poissons. (On the Crystalline Lens of the Eye of Human, of Quadrupeds, of Birds and of Fishes).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1730, p. 4 - 26.

Petit le Médecin. De la Capsule du Crystallin. (On the Capsule of the Crystalline Lens).

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1730, p. 435 - 449.

It is essential to position *Petit's* lecture, describing neutralization of corneal dioptric power by means of a water-box, in the context of the works and debates of the French Academy of Sciences. We have seen, in the foregoing chapter, that, in 1708, following the works of *Jean Méry* and of *Gabriel-Philippe de La Hire junior* and the publications of *Pierre Brisseau* and *Antoine Maitre-Jan*, the French Academy had recognized that cataract consisted of the opacification of the crystalline lens and that “*you really can see without the crystalline lens, i.e., without what has always passed for the principal organ of sight*”. The French Academy of Sciences seemed thus to have closed the debate on the nature of cataract in deciding that cataract was not a concretion or a solidification of the aqueous humor behind the iris, as had always been believed, but that it consisted of the opacification of the crystalline lens which condition had previously been designated by the term ‘glaucoma’.

2.2 - THE RATIONAL APPROACH TO CRYSTALLINE LENS TOPOGRAPHY

It remained to explain the mode of action of cataract surgery by displacing the crystalline lens down into the vitreous body by ‘couching’. The opponents of the new theories depended, in actual fact, on representations of the topography of the crystalline lens situated in the center of the eye, such as were found in the classical treatises and on the argument that there existed a large wide posterior chamber filled with aqueous humor, the precipitation of which was at the origin of the membrane of opacification of the cataract. It is to the credit of *François Pourfour du Petit* that he demonstrated irrefutably, between 1723 and 1730, the precise position of the crystalline lens. These studies on topographical

anatomy advanced at the same time the proof of both the virtual non-existence of the posterior chamber and of the flatness of the iris.

2.2.1 – WINSLOW’S OBSERVATIONS ON FROZEN EYES (1721) (Figure 6 – 9)

During the winter of 1721, *Jacques Winslow*, an academician and anatomist of Danish origin, had reopened the controversy over the depth of the posterior chamber. *Winslow* presented studies on frozen eyes at the time of his lecture “*Observations sur la Mécanique des Muscles obliques de l’Oeil, sur l’Iris, & sur la Porosité de la Cornée transparente*” (*Observations on Mechanics of the oblique Eye Muscles, on the Iris and on the Porosity of the transparent Cornea*). *Winslow* there attributed the convexity of the iris to the absence of the posterior chamber and to the fact that it rested against the crystalline lens. (13)

13. *Winslow, lectures of the 15th and 19th February 1721 and a presentation on frozen human eyes of 22nd February 1721.*

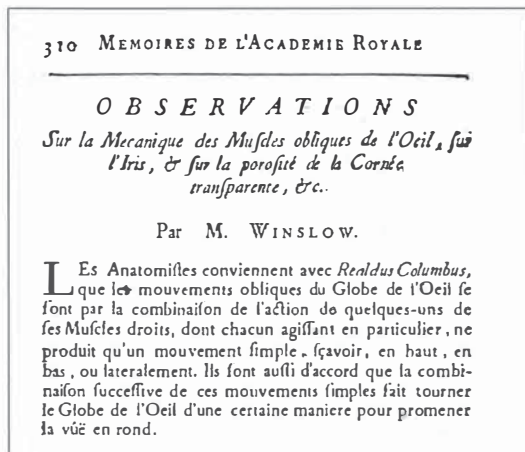


Figure 6 - 9

Winslow: "Observations sur la Mécanique des Muscles obliques de l'Oeil, sur l'Iris, & sur la Porosité de la Cornée transparente"
(*Observations on Mechanics of the oblique Eye Muscles, on the Iris and on the Porosity of the transparent Cornea*).

In this lecture, *Winslow* presented studies on frozen eyes. He attributed the convexity of the iris to the absence of the posterior chamber and to the fact that it rested against the crystalline lens.

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1721, extract p. 310)

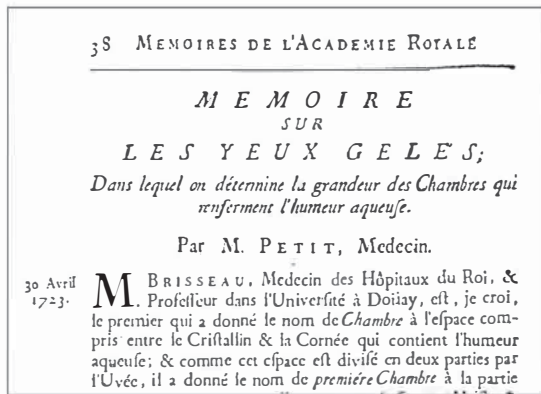


Figure 6 - 10

François Pourfour du Petit : "Mémoire sur les Yeux Gelés dans lequel on détermine la Grandeur des Chambres qui renferment l'Humeur Aqueuse" (Memoir on Frozen Eyes in which one Determines the Size of the Chambers which contain Aqueous Humor).

In the course of the winter between 1722 and 1723, Petit carried out freezing experiments on some human and animal eyes. He presented before the Royal Academy his observations and deductions concerning the dimensions of the eye and particularly of the anterior and posterior chambers. Petit gave details of his observations on human eyes, ox eyes, dog eyes and sheep eyes, all of which had been frozen by the great frosts of winter and sectioned in their horizontal axes with great care. He used only eyes, which had been freshly removed after death and denuded of their fat, muscles, and tendons.

In this presentation, *Petit* gave details of his observations on human eyes, ox eyes, dog eyes and sheep eyes, all of which had been frozen by the great frosts of winter and sectioned in their horizontal axes with great care. He used only eyes, which had been freshly removed after death and denuded of their fat, muscles, and tendons. After freezing by exposure to the cold, they were placed on their corneas or they were suspended with the cornea facing down. He wrote:

"I am going to make note again of one particular point and one that can only be well seen in frozen eyes, namely that the uvea in the human has a flat surface, [...]. However, in quadrupeds, this surface is convex in its anterior part and this convexity is that much greater, as the eyes are larger."

2.2.2 – Petit's observations on frozen eyes (1723) (Figure 6 – 10 & 6 - 11)

After his admission to the Royal Academy of Sciences, in 1722, *Petit* had been commissioned with a review of a work by *Nicolas Andry* who recommended bloodletting in cataract surgery, the cataract being described as a membrane in front of the crystalline lens. *Petit* indicated his reservations on this study and presented, in the following years, a series of communications to demonstrate the errors of the anatomical explanations of the procedure for the operation of cataract described by this author. (14)

In the course of the winter between 1722 and 1723, *Petit* carried out freezing experiments on some human and animal eyes. He presented before the Royal Academy his observations and deductions concerning the dimensions of the eye and particularly of the anterior and posterior chambers under the title of "*Mémoire sur les Yeux Gelés dans lequel on détermine la Grandeur des Chambres qui renferment l'Humeur Aqueuse*" (Memoir on Frozen Eyes in which one Determines the Size of the Chambers which contain Aqueous Humor). (15)

14. *Nicolas Andry* (1658 - 1742), professor of Medicine in Paris and author of "*Le Régime du Carême considéré par Rapport à la Nature du Corps et des Aliments*" (Lenten Fasting considered in Relation with Bodily Requirements and Foods) (Editions Coignard, Paris 1710, 2nd Edition 1713), of several treatises on "*Vers dans le Corps de l'Homme*. (Worms in the Human Body) and of a treatise on "*Les Maladies des Os*" (Bone Diseases).

In the same year 1722 appeared also the "*Nouveau Traité des Maladies des Yeux*" (New Treatise on Diseases of the Eyes) by *Charles de Saint-Yves*.

15. Lecture to the Royal Academy of Science on 30th April 1723. *Petit* made a presentation on frozen eyes at the session of the 26th January 1723 (record of the Proceedings of Sessions for the year 1723, 42, p. 7 recto).

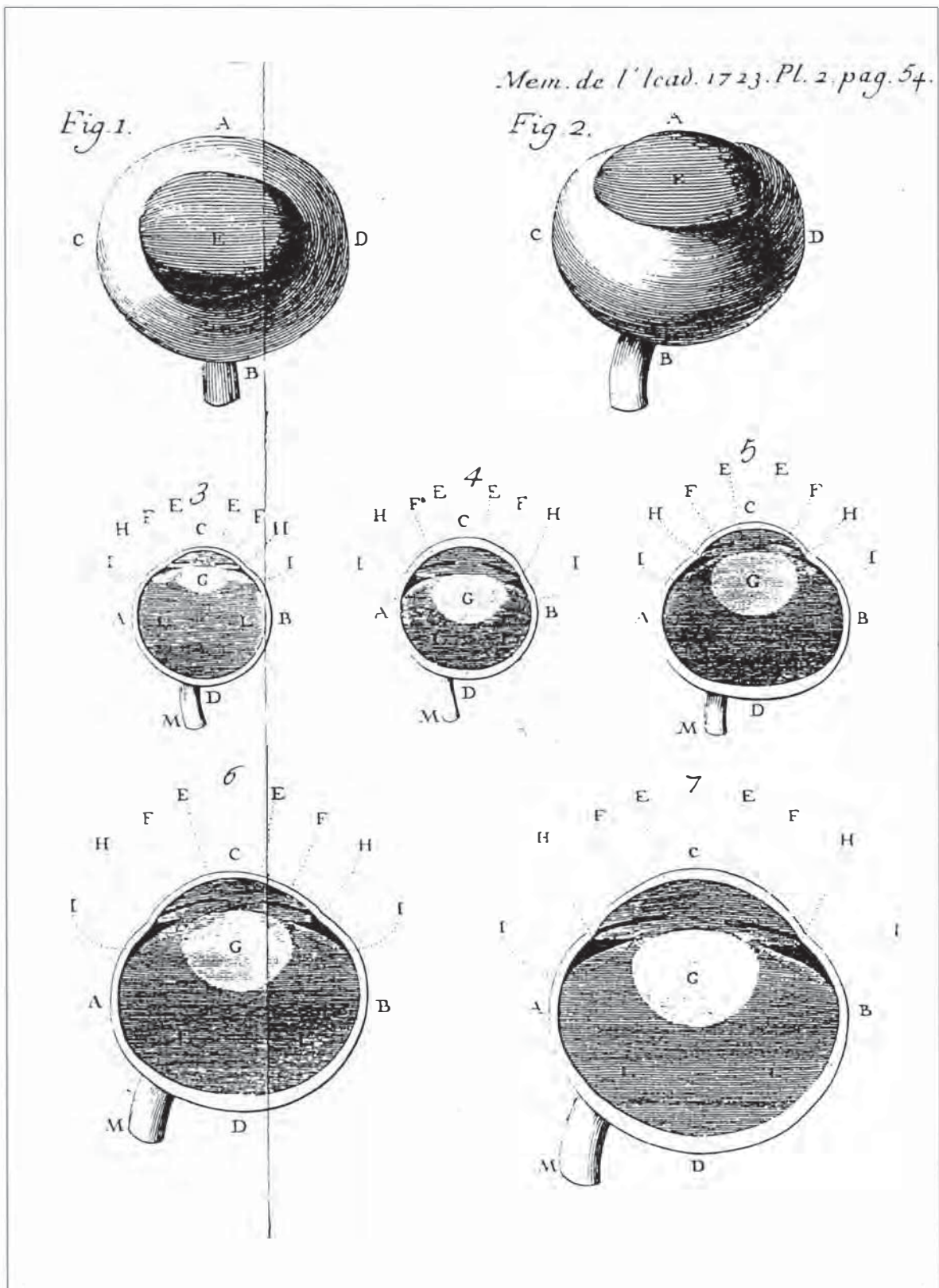


Figure 6 - 11

François Pourfour du Petit: "Mémoire sur les Yeux Gelés dans lequel on Determine la Grandeur des Chambres qui renferment l'Humour Aqueuse" (Memoir on Frozen Eyes in which one Determines the Size of the Chambers which contain Aqueous Humor).

In this planche, Petit presents the observations on frozen eyes of various animals: oxen (fig. 1 & 2), human (fig. 3), dog (fig. 4), sheep (fig. 5), oxen (fig. 6) and horse (fig. 7).

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1723, plate 2, p. 54)

« Je remarquerai encore une chose particulière, & que l'on ne peut bien voir que dans les yeux gelés, c'est que l'uvée dans l'homme fait une surface plane, [...]. Mais dans les animaux à quatre pieds cette surface est convexe à sa partie antérieure & cette convexité est d'autant plus grande, que les yeux sont plus gros. » (16)

The measurements made by *Petit* on frozen ocular globes are remarkably precise and are illustrated by diagrams of eyes reproduced to scale.

Fontenelle emphasizes, in the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1723*, the crucial point of this lecture that contradicts the traditional concepts and shows that:

"The posterior chamber [...] can only be very narrow, and as a result of this the thesis of Mr. Brisseau, who introduced this whole idea, must be upheld with all its implications."

« La chambre postérieure [...] ne peut être que très étroite, & par conséquent le raisonnement de M. Brisseau, qui a donné lieu à tout ceci, doit subsister dans toute sa force. » (17)

Petit indicates however, that this demonstration is based on measurement of ocular liquid volumes and that verifications are necessary, taking account of the risk of error related to the dilatation of frozen ocular structures. (18)

2.3 - PETIT'S LECTURES ON THE CATARACT OPERATION

2.3.1 – FIRST DISSERTATION ON THE CATARACT OPERATION (1725) (Figure 6 – 12 & 6 – 13)

For *Petit* the studies on frozen eyes were only a means to quantify the ocular size and study ocular topography, with a view to the logical execution of the operation of couching the crystalline lens. In 1725, he presented his conclusions in the form of a « *Dissertation sur l'Opération de la Cataracte* » (*Dissertation on the Cataract Operation*). He described in this, that the downward depression of the crystalline lens by couching depended equally on inclination of the needle and on the motion given to that needle. *Petit* illustrated his arguments by remarkable scale drawings of mathematical precision. In one of these diagrams, even the double layer of the suspensory ligament of the crystalline lens is shown; marking the borders of the 'canal godronné' renamed in our time *Petit's*

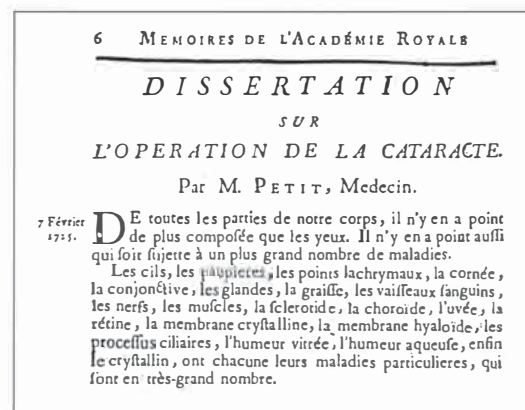


Figure 6 - 12

François Pourfour du Petit: " *Dissertation sur l'Opération de la Cataracte* " (*Dissertation on the Cataract Operation*).

In this presentation, *Petit* described that the downward depression of the crystalline lens by couching depended on inclination of the needle and on the motion given to that needle. *Petit* illustrated his arguments by remarkable scale drawings of mathematical precision. (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1725, p. 6 extract)

16. *Petit* 1723, p. 44.

17. *Fontenelle* 1723, p. 26.

18. Many years earlier, the French Academy of Science had long debated the causes of expansion of frozen water. It had produced rules, a "Système général de la gelée" (general system of freezing), which explained the augmentation of the volume by the fact that the air dissolved in the water was reunited by the effect of the cold in large spheres, which therefore expanded.

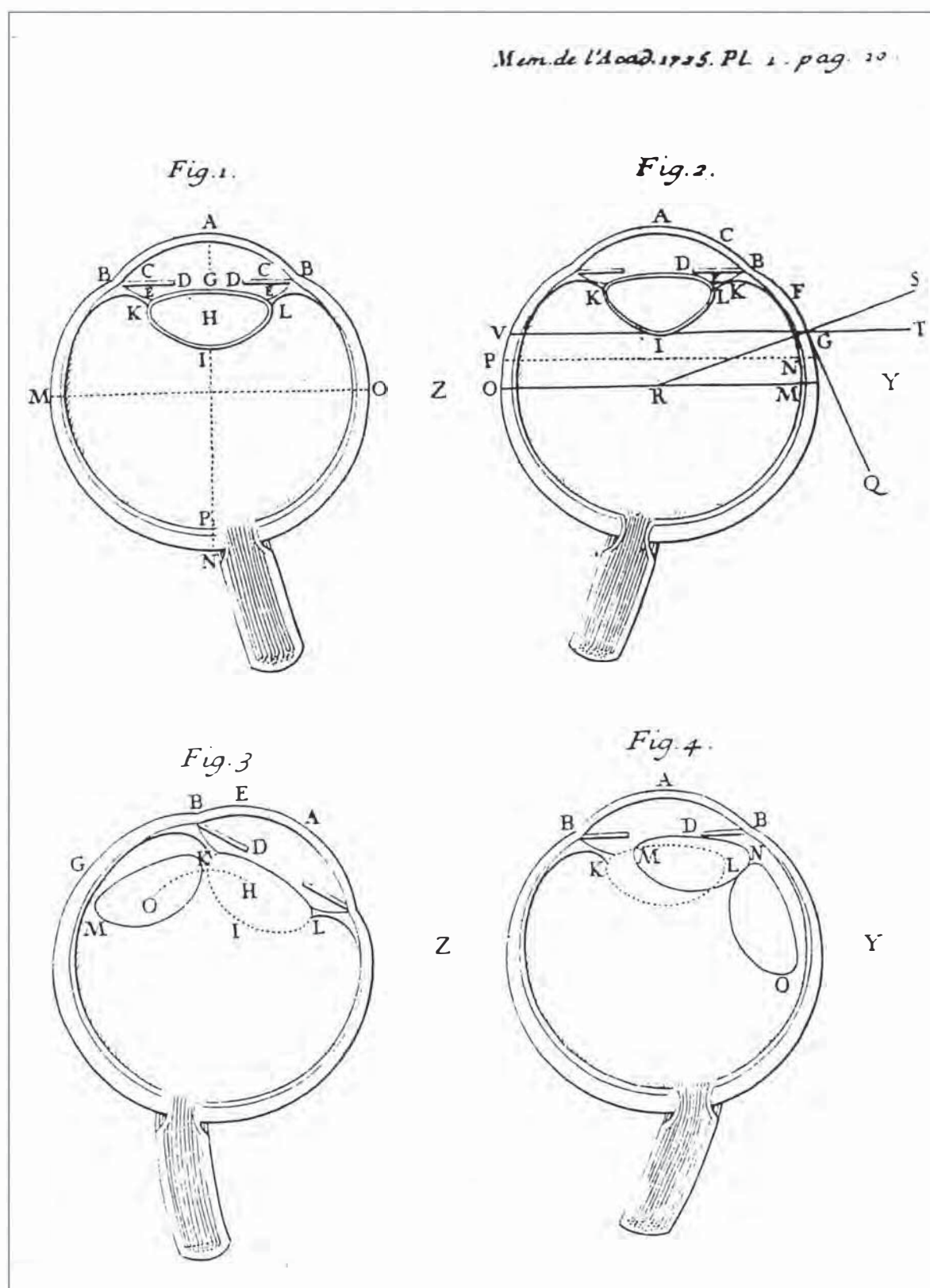


Figure 6 - 13

François Pourfour du Petit: "Dissertation sur l'Opération de la Cataracte" (Dissertation on the Cataract Operation).

Drawings on plate 1 of Petit's presentation, showing the mechanism of the depression of the crystalline lens by couching the cataract.

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1725, plate 1, p. 20).

Canal, which he described in 1726. The editorialist gives his approval in the historical study and places the work in the context of the studies that the Academy of Sciences had been conducting since 1706 on the nature of cataract. (19)

2.3.2 - DESCRIPTION OF THE "CANAL GODRONNÉE"

(Figure 6 –14)

In the following year, *Petit* presented a memoir before the Royal Academy « *Sur plusieurs Découvertes faites dans les Yeux de l'Homme, des Animaux à quatre Pieds, des Oiseaux et des Poissons* » (*On several Discoveries made in the Eyes of Human, Quadrupeds, Birds and Fishes*). In this memoir, he included original and unedited measurements of the ciliary nerve, convexity of animal eyes, oval contour of the cornea, presence of vessels and other signs at the limbus, variations with age of the color of the choroid, the possibility of detachment of the retina, with folding and undulation of the retina in eyes that are no longer fresh, and age modifications of the crystalline lens in respect of consistency, coloration and transparency. (20)

However, the most important to be remembered is the discovery of the «*canal godronné*», the fluted canal:

"I have discovered a little canal around the crystalline lens, and I am naming it 'the fluted circular canal'. You can only see it when you inflate the canal with air, and, when it has been filled with air, folds appear like the ornamentation you see on silverware, that are referred to as fluted dishes; it is formed by a doubling-up of the hyaloid membrane which is bridled from one space to the next in more or less equal steps by little canals which cross it and which do not extend as far as the membrane which is very flexible, which causes it to become fluted. If you take the crystalline lens out of its setting, without damaging the membrane which forms the canal, you will inflate it with air in vain: it will no longer form fluted folds, or only to a very slight extent."

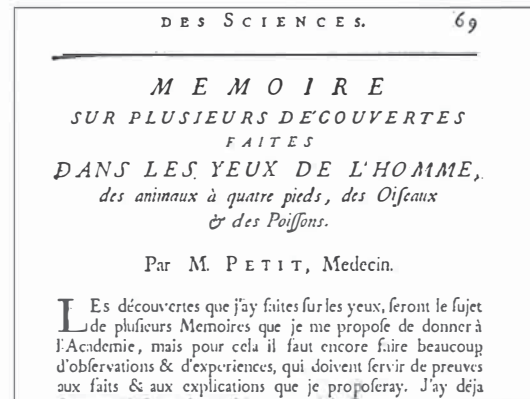


Figure 6 - 14

François Pourfour du Petit : " *Sur plusieurs Découvertes faites dans les Yeux de l'Homme, des Animaux à quatre Pieds, des Oiseaux et des Poissons* " (*On several Discoveries made in the Eyes of Human, Quadrupeds, Birds and Fishes*).

In this memoir, *Petit* included original and unedited measurements of the ciliary nerve, convexity of animal eyes, oval contour of the cornea, presence of vessels and other signs at the limbus, variations with age of the color of the choroid, the possibility of detachment of the retina, with folding and undulation of the retina in eyes that are no longer fresh, and age modifications of the crystalline lens in respect of consistency, coloration and transparency and the discovery of the "canal godronné", the fluted canal.

(Mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences pour l'Année 1726, p. 69)

19. Presentation on the 7th February 1725.

20. Presentation of the 14th December 1726. The "canal godronné" was designated by Zinn (*Anat. Ocul. Hum. IV, 3, 1755*) as "Canal of Petit, canalis Petiti or canalis Petitanus", which term is still in use today. Air injected into this virtual space between the zonule and the vitreous produced a series of interconnected bullae: from its similarity to a species of silverware ornamented after this fashion (*vaisselle godronnée*) *Petit* named it the "canal godronné" (*Duke-Elder 1961, II, p. 217*)

« J'ai découvert un petit canal autour du cristallin, je l'appelle canal circulaire godronné. On ne peut le voir qu'en le soufflant, et lorsqu'il est rempli d'air il s'y fait des plis semblables aux ornements que l'on fait sur des pièces d'argenterie, que l'on nomme pour cela vaisselle godronnée: il est formé par la duplicature de la membrane hyaloïde, qui est bridée d'espace en espace à peu près égaux par de petits canaux qui le traversent, qui n'ont pas la même extension que la membrane qui est très flexible, ce qui la fait godronner. Si l'on ôte le cristallin de son chaton sans endommager la membrane qui fait le canal, on aura beau le souffler il ne s'y formera plus de plis godronnés, ou très peu. » (21)

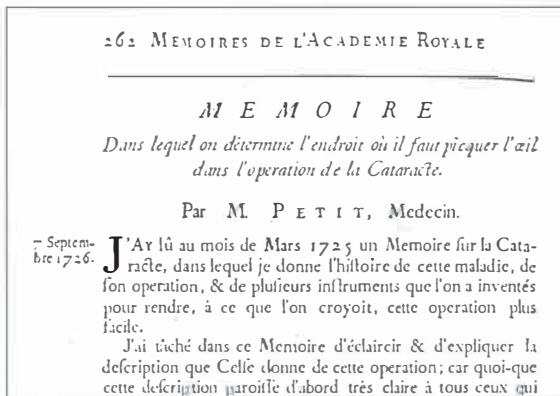


Figure 6 - 15

François Pourfour du Petit : "Mémoire dans lequel on Détermine l'Endroit où il faut piquer l'Oeil dans l'Opération de la Cataracte" (Memoir in which the Site is Determined at which one must enter the Eye with a Needle in the Cataract Operation).

In this presentation, Petit indicates the location for the introduction of the needle in couching the cataract, the tissues crossed and the respective risks of these maneuvers, in particular the risks of a hemorrhage by violation of the ciliary body or choroid, or by injury to the ciliary nerve, thus provoking nausea and vomiting. (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1726, p. 262 extract)

2.3.3 - Second Dissertation on the Cataract Operation (1726) (Figures 6 – 15 & 6 – 16)

The same year, *Petit* completed his observations with a "Mémoire dans lequel on Détermine l'Endroit où il faut piquer l'Oeil dans l'Opération de la Cataracte" (Memoir in which the Site is Determined at which one must enter the Eye with a Needle in the Cataract Operation) with the aim of indicating the location for the introduction of the needle in couching the cataract, the tissues crossed and the respective risks of these maneuvers, in particular the risks of a hemorrhage by violation of the ciliary body or choroid, or by injury to the ciliary nerve, thus provoking nausea and vomiting. (22)

With nine diagrams of horizontal sections of the eye to illustrate it, *Petit* described the best suited procedure to place, push, direct and move the needle in order to incise the globe, open the capsule of the crystalline lens and force the latter into an area where there is no risk of it injuring the retina or rising up again.

2.3.4 – DEMONSTRATION OF THE PLANARITY OF THE HUMAN IRIS

It is in this context that we find the dissertation to "Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane dans l'Homme " (Demonstration that the Uvea is Plane in Human), which was presented at the beginning of this chapter, in which *Petit* used the neutralization of the corneal diopter by means of immersion of the eye in a box of water, in order to restore normal proportions to the anterior segment component, and to demonstrate the flatness of the iris.

After the criticisms directed towards the freezing technique, which he had used before, *Petit* carried out a new series of experiments in order to demonstrate that the iris is flat in humans. This led him to utilize the corneal neutralization procedure by means of the box for ocular immersion. Using this indisputable demonstration of the flat nature of the iris, *Petit* removed once and for all the conviction previously held by the members of the Academy.

21. *Petit* 1727, p. 80.

22. Presentation on the 7th September 1726. For the procedure for the operation for cataract, see plate 15, p. 272 of the *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1726* (Figure 6 - 16).

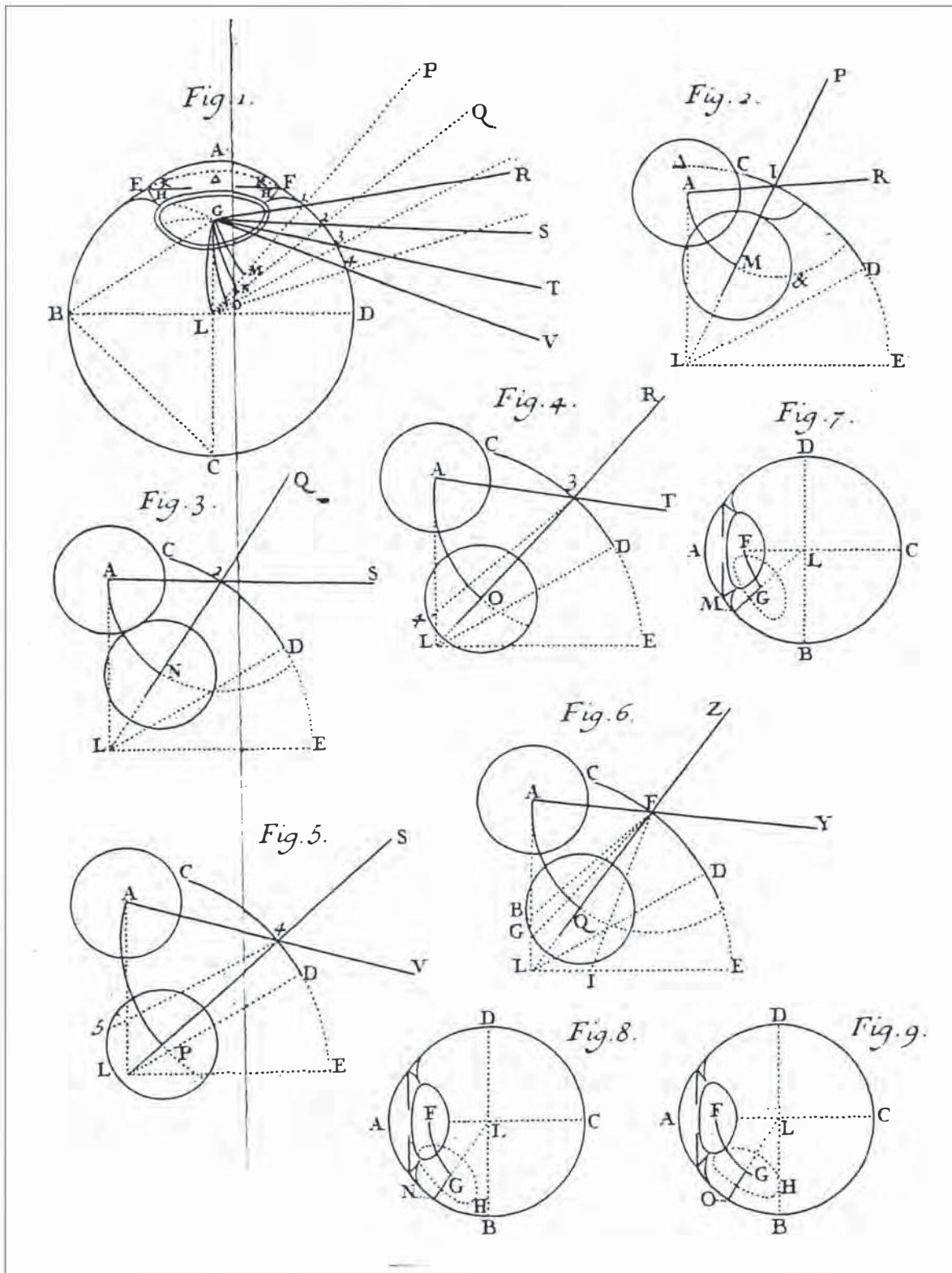


Figure 6 - 16

François Pourfour du Petit : "Mémoire dans lequel on Détermine l'Endroit où il faut piquer l'Oeil dans l'Opération de la Cataracte" (Memoir in which the Site is Determined at which one must enter the Eye with a Needle in the Cataract Operation)

The nine diagrams of this plate illustrates the best suited procedure to place, push, direct and move the needle in order to incise the globe, open the capsule of the crystalline lens and force the latter into an area where there is no risk of it injuring the retina or rising up again.

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1726, plate 15, p. 272)

This study is thus the conclusion and the crowning of six years of deep reflections, based on unedited experimental research.

2.3.5 – OPHTHALMOMETRIC MEASUREMENTS (1728)

(Figures 6 – 17 & 6 – 18)

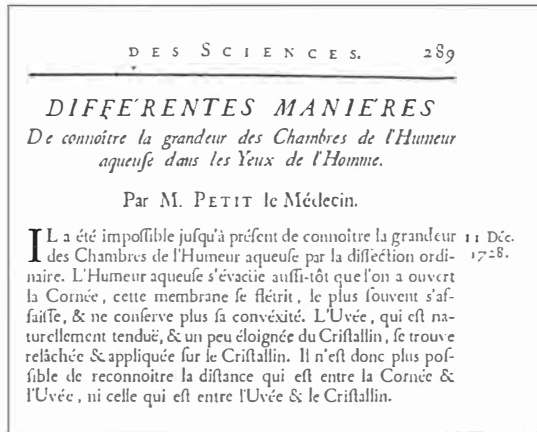


Figure 6 - 18

François Pourfour du Petit: " *Différentes Manières de Connaître la Grandeur des Chambres de l'Humeur Aqueuse dans les Yeux de l'Homme* " (*Various Methods of Measuring the Size of the Chambers of Aqueous Humor in Human Eyes*). (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 289)

The demonstration of the flatness of the iris was only, however, a preliminary step taken in attempts to measure the anterior and posterior chambers of the eye, which subject he presented in the same year to the French Academy of Sciences: « *Différentes Manières de Connaître la Grandeur des Chambres de l'Humeur Aqueuse dans les Yeux de l'Homme* » (*Various Methods of Measuring the Size of the Chambers of Aqueous Humor in Human Eyes*). *Petit* depended on the premise that it is impossible to know the size and the volume of the anterior and posterior chambers of the eye without letting the aqueous humor run out, which hinders the measurement, and that the freezing process "introduces variable changes according to the vehemence of the freezing". All that remains is direct measurement and the geometric calculation of the volume of the chambers. As measurement made with a compass is haphazard, *Petit* invented a fixed thickness comparator with a high precision

vernier. He described the details of his measuring device with a prototype that he named an "ophthalmometer".

He measured the external dimensions on fresh human eyes, from which the fat and the extrinsic muscles had been removed. In the first series, he removed the cornea in order to measure its thickness as well as that of the remaining segment. In the second series, he opened the eye in a plane posterior to the crystalline lens and measured the dimensions of it. *Petit* made use of calipers as well as other ingenious accessories. He made measurements on more than a hundred eyes, and the values and mean values are of great precision (23). Of note is *Petit's* description of the existence of peripheral flattening of the cornea:

"I have sometimes noted that the cornea was not, in all its extent, circular, but was somewhat flattened in its circumference."

« J'ai quelquefois remarqué que la cornée n'était pas, dans toute son étendue, d'une figure circulaire, mais un peu aplatie dans sa circonférence. » (24)

23. Amongst others, a corneal diameter between 11.5 and 12 mm and a corneal radius of curvature of 7.40 to 8.50 mm.

24. *Petit* 1728, p. 296. The asphericity of the cornea will be discovered two centuries later, because of its role in the adaptation to and the tolerance of contact lenses.

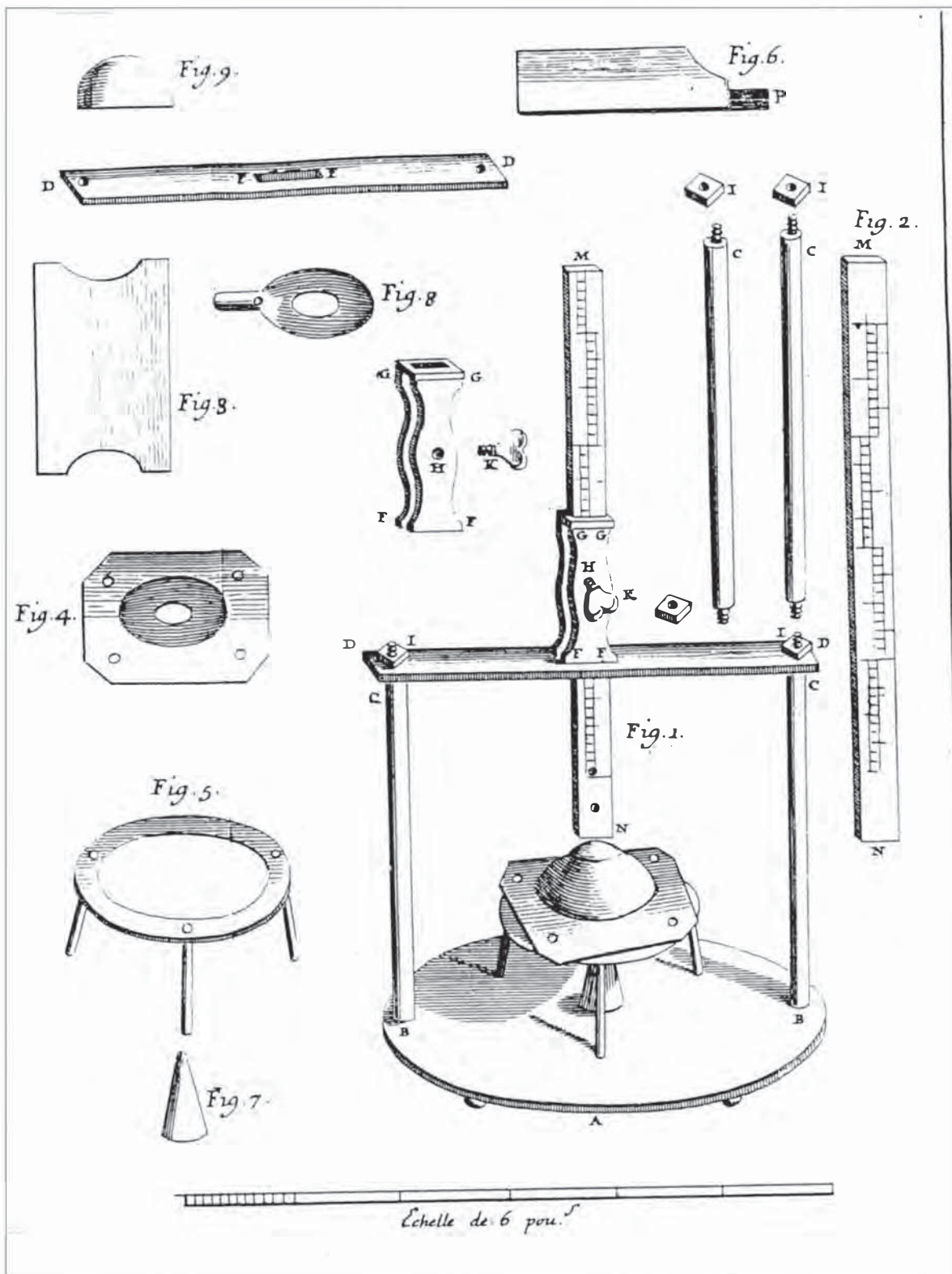


Figure 6 - 17

The "ophthalmometer" of François Pourfour du Petit and its accessories.

François Pourfour du Petit: "Différentes Manières de Connaître la Grandeur des Chambers de l'Humeur Aqueuse dans les Yeux de l'Homme" (Various Methods of Measuring the Size of the Chambers of Aqueous Humor in Human Eyes).

(Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, Plate 9, p. 224)

In conclusion, *Petit* calculated the volume contained by the measured components and determined from that, the volume of the aqueous humor in the anterior and posterior chambers of the eye, resulting in complex geometric considerations that will inform *Fontenelle*, the editorial writer, that:

"Petit found himself in a situation of presenting another memoir on the two chambers of the eye, which are the two spaces of which it is absolutely necessary to know the extent to the greatest accuracy for the cataract operation, not the cataract operation which is commonly practiced, but the kind of operation that should be. We shall see that this precision led him to the practice of geometry."

« Petit s'est trouvé en état de donner un autre mémoire sur les deux chambres de l'œil, qui sont les deux espaces dont il est absolument nécessaire de connaître l'étendue avec la dernière exactitude pour l'opération de la cataracte, non pas telle qu'elle se pratique communément, mais telle qu'elle doit être. On verra que cette exactitude l'a conduit jusqu'à la géométrie ». (25)

In order to show how well founded these arguments were, he repeated a public demonstration on an eye affected by cataract, proving to those who remained incredulous that this pathological condition was definitely due to opacification of the crystalline lens. (26)

2.3.6 – FINAL SYNTHESIS (1730)

In order to complete these studies for the Academy of Sciences, it remained for him to carry out studies of comparative anatomy and to resolve the controversy on the existence of a crystalline lens capsule. In January 1730, *Petit* presented the memoir *« Sur le Cristallin de l'Oeil de l'Homme, des Animaux à quatre Pieds, des Oiseaux et des Poissons »* (*On the Crystalline Lens of the Eye of Humans, of Quadrupeds, Birds and Fishes*) and in August of the same year that *« Sur la Capsule du Cristallin »* (*On the Capsule of the Crystalline Lens*).

Many anatomists of this era had denied the existence of the capsule of the crystalline lens, but *Petit* demonstrated its presence, showing that it is not stuck onto the crystalline lens, that it is thinner on the back than the front and that it is avascular. From that, he drew the conclusion that the downward displacement of the crystalline lens in couching a cataract would be facilitated by an incision in the posterior capsule. *Petit* subsequently strove vigorously to defend the truth against those who persisted in holding to the ancient theories of cataract in spite of contrary evidence by publishing several 'letters'. (27)

25. *Fontenelle* 1728, p. 19.

26. In December 1728, the Academy had invited the principal opponents of the new truth to this demonstration. Of these, the Parisian surgeon, Philippe Hecquet, who defended the opinion that the crystalline lens was situated in the center of the eye and that the cataract was a skin. He did not follow up on the invitation.

27. These are the following letters:

A letter of the 29th February 1729: "Lettre de M. Petit dans laquelle il démontre que le cristallin est fort près de l'uvée, et rapporte de nouvelles preuves qui concernent l'opération de la cataracte". (Letter of Mr. Petit in which he demonstrates that the crystalline lens is very near to the uvea, and reports new pieces of evidence concerning the operation for cataract).

A letter of 1732: "Lettre de M. Petit, contenant des réflexions sur les découvertes faites sur les yeux". (Letter of Mr. Petit, containing some reflections on the discoveries made in connection with the eyes).

A letter of 1732: "Lettre de M. Petit [...] contenant des réflexions sur ce que M Hecquet Docteur Regent de la faculté de Médecine a fait imprimer touchant les maladies des yeux, dans son traité sur les amers et dans celui de la digestion". (Letter of Mr. Petit [...] containing some reflections on what Mr Hecquet, Docteur and Regent of the Faculty of Medicine has had printed concerning the diseases of the eyes, in his treatise on bitters and in that on digestion).

3 – FRANÇOIS POURFOUR DU PETIT, CORNEAL DIOPTRIC POWER NEUTRALIZATION AND CONTACT LENSES

Historians of the neutralization of corneal dioptric power, contact lenses and contact systems could not possibly ignore the experiment of neutralization of the corneal diopter described by *Petit*. To construct a box with parallel glass sides, fill it up with water, immerse into it an ocular globe freshly enucleated to neutralize the plano-convex diameter formed by cornea and aqueous humor of the anterior chamber in order to observe the natural flatness of iris and pupil, represents an innovation for which we must recognize *Petit*'s priority.

Certainly, the relationship between *Petit*'s water-box, primarily, and contact lenses secondarily, is limited to the utilization of the neutralization effect on corneal dioptric power by a liquid and the replacement of that dioptric power thus neutralized by another transparent surface of different dioptric power, plano in this instance. The achievement of corneal neutralization by *Petit* is nevertheless positioned historically in the continuity of the rather dubious hypotheses attributed to *Leonardo da Vinci* and to *Descartes* and those proven hypotheses of *Méry* on the eyes of a cat submerged in water and the explanation of them given by *La Hire*.

Is it not curious that, in his memoirs, *Petit* did not make the connection between his experiment and those of neutralization of the corneal dioptric power of the submerged cat of *Méry* nor of *La Hire*'s explanation, presented to the same Academy several years earlier? We can also regret that *Petit* did not take the additional and complimentary step of linking his transparent box for neutralization to the eye of a living person, as *Czermak* achieved in 1851, one hundred and twenty three years later. (28)

François Pourfour du Petit has the merit of having:

- recognized that in crossing the cornea, the rays of light undergo refraction, that is at the origin of the enlargement of the virtual image of the iris and the pupil,
- recognized that, by the elimination of corneal refraction, the image of iris and pupil is of actual size and topography,
- was the first person that carried out knowingly the neutralization of the corneal dioptric power of a human eye,
- substituted knowingly a plano surface for the convex optical surface of the human cornea,
- carried out the same experiments on the eyes of animals,
- constructed an artificial eye in order to reproduce the effect of neutralization on corneal dioptric power and to provide a scientific interpretation of that,
- measured accurately the diameter and the radius of curvature of the cornea and described its peripheral flattening.

Petit is furthermore a famous anatomist with a good reputation who has been recognized for his discovery of the “*canal godronné de Petit*” (the so called ‘*canal of Petit*’), a virtual space between the zonule and the anterior vitreous, and for having carried out the first accurate measurements of the anterior segment of the human ocular globe.

However, *Petit* did not carry out, either neutralization of corneal dioptric power in a **living** eye, or replace neutralized corneal dioptric power by a glass lens with an optical effect.

4 - SHORT HISTORY OF CITATIONS

The neutralization of corneal dioptric power by *François Pourfour du Petit* is commonly not mentioned by the writer of historical introductions to treatises on contact lenses. For these authors, the question of solving the problem of neutralization was initiated by *Leonardo da Vinci* and *Descartes* and then was neglected for nearly two centuries until the publication of *Herschel*. The origin of this lack of knowledge stems probably from the absence of English translations of the works of *François Pourfour du Petit* and of the *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*. (29)

Certain contemporary English-speaking authors, such as *Levene* and *Duke-Elder* recognized the merits of *Petit* for his anatomical studies, measurements on frozen eyes, discovery of '*Petit's canal*' and the use of an so-called 'ophthalmometer' as a thickness comparator. However, these same authors appear to be or to have been unaware of his studies on the true flatness of the iris with the corneal neutralization box, although these were published in the same transactions as those studies they quoted. (30)

Petit's Box as Precursor of Czermak's Orthoscope

Nevertheless, after 1852, *Coccius* had drawn attention to the corneal neutralization box of *Petit*, as precursor to the orthoscopes of *Czermak* and *Hasner*. These authors had neutralized the corneal refractive power in a living human eye on this occasion by an identical method in a box with plane glass walls. *Coccius* indicates "*the imaginary nature of iris convexity was proved by a physician named Petit, in his 1728 dissertation in the Mém. des Sc. med. p. 306 Ann 1728.*" (31)

In the following year, *Coccius* added:

"The examination under water gives precise knowledge of the iris [...], in which its correct anatomical position, morphology and size is revealed, whereas it appeared to be convex forwards under the plano-convex corneal meniscus and aqueous, which was something that Petit had already previously described."

„Durch die Untersuchung unter Wasser erhält man von der Iris eine genaue Kenntnis [...], indem die unter dem planconvexen Meniscus der Hornhaut und des Kammerwassers liegende und vorgebaucht erscheinende Iris in ihre wahre anatomische Lage, Form und Grösse erscheint, was früher schon Petit erörtert hat » (32)

Petit's Demonstrations of the Iris Flatness

In his treatise on physiological optics, *Helmholtz* also recognizes *Petit's* priority:

"The anatomists have often denied the contiguity of iris and crystalline lens together with the anterior convexity of the iris. This contact was accepted by anatomists of the older generation, until Petit, following his observations on frozen eyes, claimed the contrary and accepted the existence of a posterior chamber between iris and crystalline lens."

"Dass die Iris der Linse anliege und nach vorn gewölbt sei, ist von den Anatomen vielfach bestritten worden. Die älteren Anatomen nahmen es an, bis namentlich Petit, auf Grund seiner Untersuchungen an gefrorenen Augen, des Gegenteils behauptete und zwischen Iris und Linse die sogenannte hintere Augenkammer annahm." (33)

29. Particularly in the case of *Mandell* (1988), *Lumbroso* (1977), *Sabel* (1972) and *Baron* (1981).

30. *Duke-Elder* 1961, II, p. 220; *Levene* 1977, p. 213 and note 43, p. 222.

31. *Coccius* 1852, p. 40. The references given by this author must be rectified, it should read: "*Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, p. 206-224.*"

32. *Coccius* 1853, p. 158.

However, *Helmholtz* only cites the observations of *Petit* on frozen eyes and is unaware of the studies carried out in the water-box, although these are more accurate. In the chapter on the history of the apparent convexity but actual flatness of the iris in reality resolved by water neutralization, he cites only *Czermak*.

In 1908, *Hirschberg* does justice to *Petit* when he devotes to him a whole chapter of his *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde*, notably describing there the elimination of corneal refraction by the water-box:

"Petit conceived a new method of investigation, namely a little container with plane glass walls that he fills with water, into which he submerges a fresh human eye (or a model of such a one) thus eliminating the disturbing refraction of the cornea."

« Petit hat ein neues Untersuchungs-Verfahren erdacht: eine kleine Wanne mit ebenen Glaswänden, die er mit Wasser füllt, das frische Menschen-Auge (oder das Modell eines solchen) eintaucht, und so die störende Lichtbrechung der Hornhaut ausschaltet. » (34)

In his treatise on the anatomy of the eye, *Duke-Elder* recognizes that the flatness of the iris is visible after the elimination of the corneal refraction, but he attributes the first description of this to *Czermak*. *François Pourfour du Petit* is only commemorated there for his discovery of the '*Petit's Canal*'. (35)

Mazzolini expands on *Petit's* frozen eye studies, but does not reveal the latter study on the flatness of the iris by neutralization of corneal refraction. Thus, only *Hirschberg* recognized *Petit's* merit of having eliminated corneal refraction by submersion of the eye in a water-box. (36)

Recent authors, probably because of the absence of a model, from which they would have been able to gain inspiration and derive essential knowledge, are also reticent concerning *Petit's* corneal neutralization studies. The failure of English-speaking authors to mention *François Pourfour du Petit* could also be explained by the confusion exemplified by existing studies, which mix up and amalgamate currently the works of *François Pourfour du Petit*, surnamed "*le médecin*" (the physician), with those of his contemporary who was also a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, *Jean-Louis Petit* surnamed "*le chirurgien*" (the surgeon), and with *François Pourfour's* son, the physician, *Etienne-Pourfour du Petit*. (37)

33. *Helmholtz* 1856, p. 14.

34. *Hirschberg* 1908, § 337, p. 418.

35. *Duke-Elder* 1961, II, p. 168: "If the eye is viewed through a box with glass sides filled with water so that the corneal refraction is eliminated, it appears in its natural form and position." This author cites *Pourfour du Petit*, however, for his discovery of the "*Canal of Petit*" and does him the honor of reproducing his portrait (volume II, p. 217-218).

36. *Mazzolini* 1980. In his treatise "*The Iris in Eighteenth-Century Physiology*", this author is very brief in regard to the water box: "He invented new systems of measurement and built glass models of the eye" (p. 46). This sentence sounds the tone: "The best account of *Petit's* contribution to ophthalmology is still *Hirschberg*", which leads us to understand that *Mazzolini* had not taken personal account of the publications of *Petit*. For other passages, concerning the sympathetic iris innervations, *Mazzolini* borrows substantial chunks from the outstanding study on *Petit* by *Best* (1969).

37. Thus *Albert and Edwards* (1996) attribute to "*Jean-Louis du Petit Junior*" the studies on cataract ("also studied and theorized about the cause of cataract performing innovative surgery for the condition." p. 127). *Minchow* (1984), in addition to other errors made *Jean-Louis Petit* "succeed to the chair of *Méry* at the Academy as the expert in the area of surgery." - ("an Stelle des 1722 gestorbenen *Méry* war als Gutachter auf dem Gebiet der Chirurgie *Jean-Louis Petit* gewaehlt worden".) and confuses *Andry* and *Hecquet*: "Da legte im Jahre 1728 *Nicolas Andry* der Akademie ein Manuscript vor:" (*Nicholas Andry* presented a paper to the Academy in 1728 - p. 269). These errors and omissions are that much more to be deplored, in that the authors add their support to hypothetical priorities of corneal neutralizations by immersion, but omit to cite the corneal neutralization (the original and true one) of *François Pourfour du Petit*.

APPENDIX 1

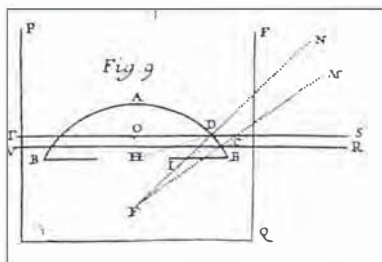
TRANSCRIPTION OF:

François Pourfour du Petit
Démontrer que l'Uvée est Plane chez l'Homme

Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, pages 206-224, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1730 (Lecture at the session of June 19th, 1728)

(Extract : pages 213- 216)

Il est vrai que lorsqu'ils examinaient les yeux d'un homme vivant ou nouvellement mort, l'uvée leur paraissait convexe ; mais un peu de physique aurait dû les faire revenir de leur erreur. Peu d'anatomistes physiiciens ignorent l'effet des réfractions, surtout dans ce dernier siècle, ils doivent penser que la cornée par sa convexité en pouvait produire d'assez fortes, ainsi ils auraient découvert que la convexité de l'uvée n'est qu'apparente, et que cette apparence est causée par la réfraction que souffrent les rayons de la lumière, en traversant la cornée et l'humeur aqueuse. Mais aucun anatomiste jusqu'à présent n'a tourné ses pensées de ce côté-là par rapport à l'uvée : une preuve que ce sont les réfractions que souffrent les rayons de lumière, qui font paraître l'uvée convexe, c'est que si l'on trouve le moyen d'empêcher les réfractions, on fait disparaître la convexité de la manière dont je l'ai fait voir à la Compagnie.



Je me sers pour cela d'une boîte carrée P, Q que j'ai fait construire exprès. Elle est formée par des verres

plans qui sont assujettis ensemble par un châssis de cuivre, et joints avec un mastic qui empêche l'eau de s'écouler. Cette boîte ainsi construite, présente de tous côtés des surfaces planes.

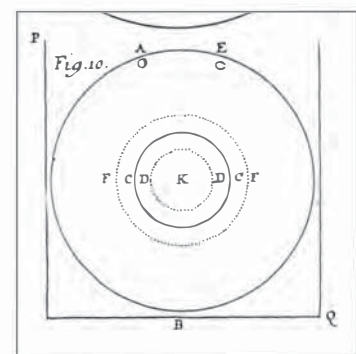
Je prends l'œil d'un homme nouvellement mort (j'en représente la cornée et l'uvée en grand B, A, B) je regarde cette cornée par des rayons RV, ST, parallèles à l'uvée B, B, je trouve cette uvée convexe, de sorte que la prunelle H me paraît être en O. (Fig. 9) L'on sait que ces rayons sont obligés de se rompre à la rencontre de la cornée aux points C, D, à cause de sa convexité, et s'approchent des perpendiculaires MF, NF. Ils tombent sur l'uvée en I, et sur la prunelle en H ; je place ensuite cet œil au fond de la boîte dont je viens de parler, je la remplis d'eau, je regarde la

cornée à travers le verre EQ, par les rayons RV, ST. Je ne vois plus ni l'iris, ni la prunelle, parce que les rayons entrent perpendiculairement dans l'eau de la boîte jusqu'à la cornée, et quoique ces rayons puissent se détourner un peu à la rencontre de la cornée aux points C et D, ils se remettent néanmoins dans la même direction en entrant dans l'humeur aqueuse, et se trouvent parallèle à l'uvée qui paraît dans son état naturel.

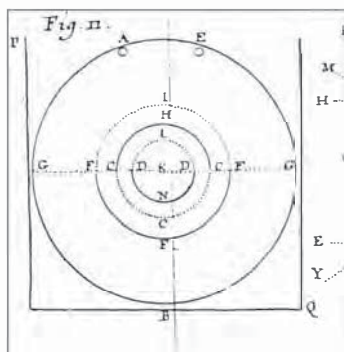
Mais pour éviter toutes les difficultés que l'on pourrait me faire, j'ai fait faire une plaque d'émail A, B, ronde, tout à fait plane, de 22 lignes de diamètre. (Fig. 10) sur laquelle j'ai fait peindre un iris à peu près semblable à celui de l'homme ; on y a représenté la prunelle K en noir, qui a 7 lignes $\frac{1}{2}$ de diamètre. J'unis cet iris à un verre de montre qui tient la place de la cornée, la convexité de ce verre fait la portion d'une sphère de 23 lignes de diamètre. Le tout représente la chambre antérieure de l'œil. On a pratiqué deux trous A, E, à la partie supérieure, pour y pouvoir introduire de l'eau par un de ces trous, et laisser sortir l'air par l'autre. Je passe un fil dans ces trous pour le suspendre avec plus de facilité.

Je plonge cet iris ou cette chambre antérieure, comme on voudra l'appeler, dans la boîte de verre où j'ai mis de l'eau ; la prunelle C, C devient plus petite d'une ligne, et semblable au cercle ponctué D, D (Fig. 10).

Je retire de l'eau cette partie antérieure de l'œil ; je remplis sa cavité d'eau par le trou A, la prunelle C, C devient plus grande d'une ligne, et semblable au cercle F, F, ponctué, et tout l'iris paraît convexe. Si je plonge dans la boîte P, Q, remplie d'eau, la prunelle F, F, devient de la grandeur naturelle, et tout l'iris reparaît plan ; mais afin de rendre ces effets bien sensibles, je ne plonge dans l'eau de la boîte que la



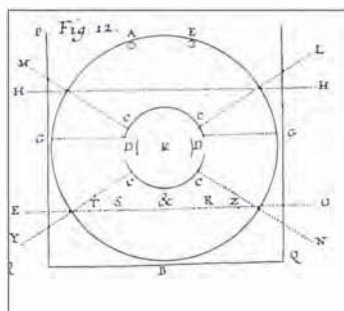
moitié de cet iris avant de le remplir d'eau ; la partie inférieure de la prunelle me paraît plus petite que la supérieure ; l'hémisphère inférieur devient semblable à D, N, D (Fig. 11) ; mais après l'avoir rempli d'eau, et que la prunelle est devenue semblable à F, F, F, j'en plonge la moitié de cet iris dans l'eau, la moitié de la prunelle paraîtra plus petite, de la grandeur de C, C, C, (Fig. 11) et plane, et l'autre moitié paraîtra convexe.



Si je ne remplis d'eau que la moitié de cette chambre antérieure jusqu'en G, G, l'hémisphère inférieur F, F, F de la prunelle me paraîtra plus grand d'une ligne que le

supérieur C, C, H, et toute la partie inférieure de l'iris fort convexe. Je plonge cette partie seule dans l'eau de la boîte, le cercle entier C, C, C, H, paraîtra régulier, parce que cette partie inférieure devient plus petite, et perd sa convexité. Je plonge cet iris entièrement dans l'eau, l'hémisphère supérieur de la prunelle me paraît plus petit que l'inférieur, et devient D, L, D.

Je le plonge jusqu'en G, G, au-dessus de l'eau qui est dans la chambre antérieure (Fig. 12) ; la partie inférieure de la prunelle, et la partie supérieure C, C, C, C, me paraissent de même grandeur qui est la naturelle ; mais ce qui se trouve plongé dans l'eau entre les deux, est plus étroit et semblable à D, D, de manière que la Prunelle paraît échancrée des deux côtés.



Je regarde la prunelle par le rayon L, C, ou M, C, le diamètre des deux hémisphères C, C, C, C, me paraît égal sans échancrure, et l'iris plan soit qu'il soit plongé

dans l'eau, ou qu'il ne le soit pas, il paraît seulement un peu tronqué à la partie inférieure selon que je le regarde plus ou moins obliquement.

Je regarde la prunelle par le rayon N, C, ou Y, C, ou B, et je découvre la quantité de convexité que la réfraction produit. elle me paraît d'une ligne $\frac{1}{2}$, ce que je ne vois pas lorsque cette chambre antérieure est pleine d'eau.

Je regarde la superficie inférieure de cet iris par la ligne O, E, elle me paraît plane en Z, un peu convexe en R, et de plus en plus convexe jusqu'en S, T.

Je la regarde par la ligne E, O, elle me paraît plane en

T, un peu convexe en S, et de plus en plus convexe jusqu'en Z.

Je trouve les mêmes apparences sur le rayon H, H, lorsque la chambre antérieure est entièrement remplie d'eau.

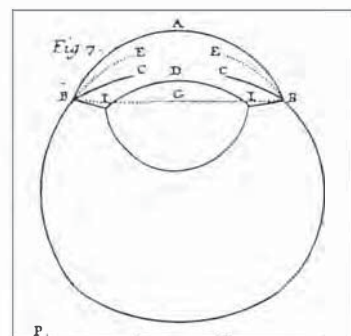
Je plonge cette chambre dans la boîte P, Q, pleine d'eau, je la regarde par des rayons perpendiculaires à l'iris, j'aperçois cet iris très avancé en devant, mais plan ; je le regarde par des rayons parallèles à sa surface ; je trouve l'iris tout à fait plan, et même en le regardant par des lignes obliques.

Toutes les diverses apparences que je viens de trouver à cet iris dans l'eau et hors de l'eau, je les trouve à l'iris de l'œil de l'homme nouvellement mort, excepté que je ne puis l'examiner vide d'humeur aqueuse, comme j'ai examiné l'iris artificiel vide d'eau.

En regardant l'œil de l'homme par des rayons perpendiculaires à l'iris ; je trouve cet iris un peu convexe ; mais il paraît plus convexe en le regardant par des lignes obliques, et parallèles de la même manière que j'ai regardé l'iris artificiel.

Je plonge cet œil dans l'eau, je regarde la cornée par des lignes perpendiculaires à l'iris ; je trouve cet iris un peu convexe, la prunelle paraît plus petite, et telle qu'elle est naturellement dans cet œil ; mais en le regardant par des lignes parallèles, comme je l'ai dit ci-dessus, j'en trouve la superficie plane. Il n'en est pas de même lorsque je fais ces expériences avec un œil de bœuf ou de mouton tout frais tué. (Fig. 7) L'uvée B, C, C, B, est véritablement convexe, je la regarde de toutes les manières, je lui trouve une grande convexité, telle qu'on la voit dans l'uvée ponctuée B E, E B, elle paraît à moins d'une ligne de la cornée.

Je plonge cet œil dans la boîte pleine d'eau ; j'examine la cornée par des lignes parallèles à la corde B, G, B, j'aperçois un grand espace dans la chambre antérieure, il est de



deux lignes d'épaisseur ou environ ; l'uvée me paraît convexe C, C, telle qu'on la voit en B, C, C, B : cette convexité fait la portion d'un cercle de 22 lignes de diamètre ou environ dans le bœuf.

APPENDIX 2

TRANSCRIPTION OF :

Fontenelle Sur la Structure des Yeux

Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences pour l'Année 1728, pages 17-19, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1730

La question de la nature des cataractes, et plus particulièrement ensuite l'opération pour les abattre, que M. Petit le Médecin a porté à une précision, dont elle avait toujours été fort éloignée, l'ont jeté dans des détails sur la structure des yeux, dont les anatomistes se n'étaient guère mis en peine, soit parce qu'ils n'avaient pas besoin de les connaître, soit parce qu'ils en sentaient la difficulté. Telle est la figure de l'uvée, que les plus habiles, excepté Vésale, ont crue convexe avec Galien. Elle le paraît toujours dans l'homme vivant dont on regarde l'œil, et souvent dans l'œil mort selon qu'il est conditionné, et elle l'est réellement dans quelques animaux, comme le bœuf. Cependant M. Petit soutient qu'elle est plane dans l'homme.

D'abord il fait voir que quoique plane, elle sera vue convexe, à cause des réfractions que souffrent les rayons visuels en passant au travers de la cornée et de l'humeur aqueuse. Il a construit une petite machine qui représente toute la disposition de la partie antérieure de l'œil, et selon qu'elle est pleine d'eau ou vide, on y voit qu'une même surface plane, qui tient la place de l'uvée, paraît ou convexe, ou plane, comme elle l'est. C'est donc l'eau ou l'humeur aqueuse qui fait l'effet dont il s'agit.

Ceux qui tiennent pour la convexité de l'uvée, prétendent qu'elle vient de ce que cette membrane s'applique sur le cristallin, dont elle prend la figure en glissant dessus. M. Petit a fait une expérience incompatible avec cette opinion ; il a passé une aiguille très fine dans un œil nouvellement mort entre l'uvée et le cristallin sans blesser ni l'un ni l'autre. Il est vrai que cette expérience est très difficile, qu'elle demande beaucoup d'adresse, et ne réussit pas toujours. L'espace entre l'uvée et le cristallin est si petit, qu'à peine une aiguille peut être assez fine pour y passer sans les toucher, et d'ailleurs il est certain qu'en plusieurs sujets le sommet de la convexité de la prunelle, qui est aussi celui de l'uvée, auquel cas il n'est pas possible que l'aiguille ne rencontre et n'endommage le cristallin.

Dans toutes les expériences ou observations qui appartiennent à cette matière, il faut faire beaucoup d'attention à l'état de l'œil. Comme il s'agit d'examiner avec une grande précision la position des

parties entre elles et la capacité des espaces, le tout étant toujours fort petit, l'œil mort diffère beaucoup du vivant à ces égards. L'œil mort qu'on a dépouillé de ses muscles qui le tenaient dans une certaine compression, change de figure, s'arrondit, et par là changent aussi les position de quelques parties entre elles, et les capacités de quelques espaces. Les liqueurs que contenait l'œil, s'évaporent, et ne sont plus remplacées par celles qu'aurait fournies la circulation du sang pendant la vie ; l'œil n'est plus tendu, et il se flétrit assez vite. Des deux humeurs, l'aqueuse et la vitrée, l'aqueuse est celle qui s'évapore le plus promptement, parce qu'étant assez déliées, et n'ayant à traverser que la cornée toujours exposée à l'air, elle peut s'échapper sans peine, lors même que l'œil est encore dans l'orbite, dans sa place naturelle, au lieu que l'humeur vitrée plus épaisse et plus glaireuse, a la sclérotique à traverser, membrane beaucoup plus épaisse que la cornée, et qu'elle ne peut guère traverser que quand l'œil est détaché de son orbite, et dépouillée de ses muscles. La sclérotique, qui pendant la vie était bandée par la plénitude de l'œil, se débande, se resserre et comprime en même temps quelques parties qu'elle ne comprimait pas auparavant. Si pour tenir l'œil plus tendu et dans un état plus approchant du naturel, on l'a mis tremper quelque temps dans l'eau, comme il s'était déjà évaporé plus d'humeur aqueuse que de vitré, l'eau qui s'insinue dans le vitré, pousse le cristallin trop en avant, parce qu'elle trouve moins de résistance de ce côté là, où l'évaporation de l'humeur aqueuse laisse du vide. Nous ne rapporterons pas un plus grand nombre d'exemples des attentions délicates, auxquelles M. Petit a été nécessairement engagé par son sujet.

Enfin il s'est trouvé en état de donner un autre Mémoire sur les deux chambres de l'œil, qui sont les deux espaces dont il est absolument nécessaire de connaître l'étendue avec la dernière exactitude pour l'opération de la cataracte, non pas telle qu'elle se pratique communément, mais telle qu'elle doit être. On verra que cette exactitude l'a conduit jusqu'à la géométrie.