

ROBERT WENNIG

Laboratoire national de santé, Luxembourg

Mateo JB Orfila (1787-1853) as author of the first textbook on forensic toxicology “*Traité des Poisons*” in 1814 was not only the founder of modern toxicology, but also a great innovator in French Medicine as professor at Paris Medical School and Dean of this prestigious institution. Orfila was appointed expert of the Public Prosecutor during the Lafarge court case in 1839-1840. Marie Lafarge was charged for having poisoned her husband with arsenic. For the first time Orfila applied Marsh's method for arsenic detection in human viscera, leading to the conviction of Marie Lafarge, in spite of the challenging of Orfila's results by the famous chemist Raspail..

One of Orfila's students Jean-Servais Stas (1813-1891), another pioneer of toxicology was professor of Chemistry at the Belgian Royal Military Academy in Brussels and occupied also many other professional positions during his lifetime. In 1851 Stas was appointed the public prosecutor's expert in the Bocarmé case in Belgium. Bocarmé was charged for poisoning his brother-in-law Gustave Fougnyes with nicotine at Bitremont Castle. During this case Stas developed an analytical procedure to isolate nicotine from human organs. This procedure was expanded later by other researchers for the detection of other alkaloids and drugs in body tissues. This method is even used today with some modifications and known as Stas-Otto-Ogier procedure in analytical toxicology.

Stas' work allowed the conviction of the poisoner. During court sessions a dispute between Orfila and Stas started about the principle of detecting organic substances in human viscera. After the court sessions Orfila claimed the priority of the experimental work on nicotine isolation. Stas using better arguments convinced the scientific community of the contrary.

Orfila is buried at Montparnasse cemetery in Paris and Stas is buried in Leuven, where their funeral monuments can be still visited today.

KEYWORDS: *Orfila, Stas, Forensic toxicology*

Corresponding author: robert.wennig@uni.lu