

Johannes Peter Müller Biography

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Biography

The German medical scientist Johannes Peter Müller (1801-1858) made important contributions to several branches of medicine, including anatomy, physiology, embryology, and pathology.

Johannes Müller the son of a shoemaker, was born in Coblenz, Rhineland-Palatinate, on July 14, 1801. He went to school in Coblenz before studying medicine at the University of Bonn from 1819 until 1822. At Bonn he was influenced by *Naturphilosophie*, including the belief that the smallest part of nature reflected grand themes running through the whole of creation. After taking his degree at Bonn, he spent 18 months in Berlin studying for the state medical examination. Although he never gave up his belief in a purposeful universe and the large generalizations of *Naturphilosophie*, he increasingly taught that experimental research was the way forward in medicine.

From 1824 until 1833 Müller taught medicine at Bonn, reaching the rank of professor in 1830. There his main achievements were in embryology and physiology. In 1825 he discovered the duct named after him and went on to make a pioneer study of the development of the genital glands in the embryo. He put forward a theory of color vision based on the study of a variety of animals and also investigated the way in which different nerves functioned.

In 1833 Müller became professor of anatomy and physiology and director of the Museum of Comparative Anatomy at the University of Berlin. He built up a famous school, and his students dominated German medical science in the second half of the 19th century. In 1833 Müller published the first part of his *Manual of Human Physiology*. It became the leading textbook on its subject and was revised and republished many times. At Berlin he continued his research on nerve physiology but also undertook extensive investigations in comparative anatomy, writing large works on fishes and echinoderms. He was one of the first to make extensive use of the microscope in pathology, and in 1838 he published a volume on the pathology of tumors. In 1834 he had founded the journal known as *Müller's Archiv*.

Müller was rector of the University of Berlin during the revolutionary year of 1848, and the strain caused by the political upheavals impaired his health. In 1855 he was rescued from a sinking ship on a return voyage from Norway. He died in Berlin on March 28, 1858, without ever fully recovering from the shock of these two events.