

OBSERVATIONS ON THE DIVISION OF SPIROCHAETES.

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2 Text-figures.

THE morphology of the spirochaetes has proved in recent years a fruitful source of controversy. One has only to look through some of the vast literature on the subject to be convinced that the time has not yet come for drawing final conclusions, so varied and so contradictory are the observations by different well-accredited authors.

Concerning even such an elementary point as the mode of division, opinion is far from unanimous. In the well-worn dispute—are the spirochaetes protozoa or bacteria?—the supporters of the former view have almost all maintained that the division is longitudinal, while their opponents have as strongly insisted that it is transverse. One may be inclined to doubt whether the mere direction of division is really a point of very great value in such a discussion: as Schellack (1907) has recently pointed out, bacteria never divide by simple constriction as in all hitherto described cases of transverse division in spirochaetes¹. Furthermore, it may be well to remember that transverse division is not the peculiar property of the bacteria but occurs among certain groups of protozoa also.

But apart altogether from systematic considerations, it is of interest to determine the mode of division in this group of organisms.

It was suggested to me that it would be useful to compile comparative summaries of the opinions of various observers on certain

¹ Swellengrebel (1907) described the formation of a sort of cell-wall between the dividing halves of *S. balbianii* just as in a bacterium—his observation has so far received no confirmation.

Division in Spirochaetes

Comparative summary of evidence for longitudinal and transverse division in spirochaetes¹.

Spirochaeta	Observers of longitudinal division	Nature of observations	Observers of transverse division	Nature of observations	
<i>S. anodonta</i> , ... Keysseritz	*Pantham *Keysseritz	Longitudinal division seen <i>in vivo</i> . Observed <i>in vivo</i> . Longitudinal split divides organism into approximately equal halves, remaining at first attached throughout length by ectoplasm. Split proceeds from one end to the other as the uniting ectoplasm disappears. Separating individuals move independently. Final act of separation takes some time.	Schellack	Transverse division described and figured from stained preparations. Periplast becomes thinner at a middle point in the body—then disappears there, and spirochaete divides abruptly into two halves. There is no stage with long drawn-out protoplasmic connection, and young individuals after separation are correspondingly blunt at one end. In this respect division differs from that in blood spirochaetes. ²	
<i>S. balanitidis</i> ... Prowazek	*Hoffmann and Prowazek	Doubling of the "Periplastanhang," followed by a Y-stage, observed <i>in vivo</i> .	Schuberg	Records transverse division. Measurements of breadth are against possibility of longitudinal division.	
<i>S. halbianii</i> , ... Certes	Certes	Normal method of division.	Borrel and Cernovodann Certes Pantham	Transverse division described. Transverse division also occurs. Transverse division also occurs, but not so commonly as longitudinal. 1. Both long and short forms seen. 2. In stained preparations membrane occasionally discontinuous in centre. 3. Living specimens sometimes seen vibrating about a point possibly not central.	
	*Pantham	Usual method of multiplication. Splitting of basal granule then of undulating membrane, finally of body. Usually the two halves separate by wriggling till 180° apart, but may remain at 90°-40° apart for a long time, executing very rapid movements. On two occasions forms watched <i>in vivo</i> for an hour: they died before division was complete.	Lustrac	Longitudinal division described and figured. Lustrac	Transverse division suspected.

¹ Asterisks are placed before the names of such authors as state that they made observations on the living organisms.

² Schellack (1909) also describes and figures similar transverse division in no less than eleven new species of spirochaetes from molluscs—*S. ostrae*, *S. chamae*, *S. spiculifera*, *S. modiolae*, *S. limae*, *S. cardii-papillae*, *S. tayetos*, *S. acuminata*, *S. acuminata*, *S. sanguinea*, *S. gastrochaenae*, *S. pusilla*. The conclusions were drawn from stained specimens.

<i>S. bahamensis</i> , Certo tes (<i>continued</i>)	*Perrin	...	Normal method of multiplication. Division of membrane; then longitudinal split resulting in compass-forms, making angle of 180°; final separation preceded by constriction first of periplast, then of contained plasma—separating individuals finally connected by strand of periplast only. Longitudinal splitting does not take long—this stage seldom seen: final separation takes longer—an individual at this stage watched for 40 mins., when it died.	Laveran Meissil	In stained preparations individuals showing great inequality in length—others in which the “graine” was discontinuous in the middle of body, others in which body was drawn out thin in this region, and (<i>in vivo</i>) some united two and two by a fine thread.
<i>S. anodontae</i> , Cohn	...	...	As in <i>S. anodontae</i> (<i>vide supra</i>). Final stages seen <i>in vivo</i> .	Schellack	...
<i>S. gigantea</i>	Swellengrebel...	...	Transverse division with a cell-wall as in <i>Spirillum gigantea</i> . Occasionally individuals seen constricted in the middle: author is doubtful whether these are dividing forms. Apparent longitudinal division simply parallel juxtaposition of two individuals; it may also be stimulated by organisms bending on itself at a middle point.	Swellengrebel...	First sign of division is the formation in middle of cell of an abrupt curve, resembling a rupture. At this spot the cell begins to thin, and becomes paler: after formation of the two daughter-cells, the connecting filament is drawn out still finer, and finally breaks.
<i>S. culicis</i> , Jaffé	Jaffé	...	...	Mühlens and Hartmann. Zettnow	...
<i>S. dentatum</i> , Koch	Mühlens and Hartmann	Observed in stained specimens	In stained specimens, possibly transverse division.	Breinl	This the more usual mode of division. Parasites increase in length, become thinner in middle, and thinner part elongates till daughter halves separate.
<i>S. dutoni</i> , Breinl	Breinl	...	Occasionally met with, especially at stage of infection when parasites are disappearing from peripheral circulation. Scantiness of dividing forms suggests that process of division is rapid.		

*Division in Spirochaetes**Comparative summary of evidence for longitudinal and transverse division in spirochaetes (continued).*

Spirochaeta <i>S. duttoni</i> , Breinl (continued)	Observers of longi- tudinal division Carter	Nature of observations <i>Y</i> -forms seen in stained specimens: ap- parent equal division of chromatin granules.	Observers of trans- verse division Czaplewski	Nature of observations Records transverse division.
<i>Dutton & Todd</i>	Stained specimens. Longitudinal division less frequent than transverse. Occurs generally towards end of attack, when parasites are disappearing from blood. Before division spirochaete increases in width, then a longitudinal split begins at one end, so that <i>Y</i> -forms are produced. <i>Y</i> -forms numerous in juice from splenic puncture at close of a fatal attack.	Dutton & Todd	Stained preparations. Perhaps most usual method of multiplication. Parasite increases in length, becomes thinner about middle, then is drawn out at this point till halves separate.	
<i>Mayer</i>	Apparent longitudinal division forms in stained preparations: especially abundant in smears from lungs.	Koch	... there is anything that can be interpreted as division, it is transverse.	
		Leraditi	1. Spirochaetes frequently seen joined end to end in pairs by fine filament, which breaks at final separation. 2. Extraordinary inequality in length of individuals in same film.	
		*Schellack	As in <i>S. recurrentis</i> (<i>vide infra</i>). *Zeitnow	
		Martin	Some spirochaetes in stained preparations seen to have a paler and thinner portion in the middle.	...
<i>S. equi</i> , Novy and Knap	...	...	...	...
<i>S. hartmanni</i> , Gonder	Gonder	Observed in stained specimens.	...	...

<i>S. marchouzi,</i> Nuttall (= <i>golininarum</i> , Blanchard)	*Prowazek ...	1. Earliest stages difficult to make out. Dividing spirochaetes detected by their spasmodic movements. Before division the spirochete increases in length and breadth. Division begins at one end; the split proceeds rather slowly through the length of the individual: the whole process once observed for a considerable time <i>in vivo</i> . 2. More common to see two spirochaetes still hanging together by a thin proto- plasmic bridge—these are individuals in last stage of longitudinal division. 3. Presence of an undulating membrane and movements pointing to polarity in the cell, preclude possibility of simple transverse division.	Borrel ...	A constriction marks beginning of division: this is drawn out into a fine faintly-staining protoplastic thread, uniting the two young individuals.
<i>S. ovina,</i> Blan- chard	Martoglio Carpino ...	A Y-form figured from a stained prepara- tion.	Martoglio and Carpino ...	Observed in stained specimens.
<i>S. pallida</i> , Schau- dinn	*Eitner ...	Forms seen <i>in vivo</i> that might be inter- preted as longitudinal division.	*Eitner ...	Form seen <i>in vivo</i> that might be interpreted as transverse division.
Gonder	...	Observed in stained specimens.	Prowazek ...	Dividing forms found in all preparations.
Krystallowicz and Siedlecki	...	Observed in stained specimens.	*Schaudinn ...	Doubling of flagellum followed by rapid longi- tudinal splitting requiring only a few seconds. Process followed through <i>in vivo</i> in three cases. During division spirochaete becomes irregular in its curve—normal form recover- ed only when division is almost complete, and daughter spirochaetes are hanging to- gether by their posterior ends. Dividing forms fairly numerous in stained prepara- tions.

*Division in Spirochaetes**Comparative summary of evidence for longitudinal and transverse division in spirochaetes (continued).*

Spirochaetes	Observers of longitudinal division	Nature of observations	Observers of transverse division	Nature of observations
<i>S. galilida</i> , Schaudinn (continued)	...	...	*Siebert	Dividing spirochaetes observed <i>in vivo</i> showed relatively rapid splitting to form Y-stage; then remained in this condition for some time. Marked tendency for rigid spiral form to be lost, curves becoming irregular till division complete, while wave-like movements over body are substituted for normal rotation round long axis.
<i>S. perennans</i> , Gaskelliani	Borne Prowazek	Described and figured. Numerous very distinct longitudinal divisions seen.	...	...
<i>S. primae</i> , Gonder	Gonder	Longitudinal splitting very rapid. Begins with division of blepharoplast at anterior end. Equal division of chromatin to the two daughter cells.	Schellack	Transverse division as in <i>S. anodontae</i> — <i>vide supra</i> —studied on stained material.
<i>S. plicatilis</i> , Ehrenberg.	Schellack	Statement that the spirochaete divides longitudinally.	Zopf Lapitschinsky...	Spirochaete breaks up into fragments. <i>in vivo</i> .
<i>S. recurrentis</i> , Lebert (=obermeieri, Cohn)	...	...	Anastasiades ... Frankel and Pfeiffer Norris, Pappenheimer, and Flournoy ... *Noyv and Knapp	Observed in stained preparations. Shown in figures of stained preparations. Observations agree with those of Noyv and Knapp.
				1. In stained preparations long spirochaetes frequently show pale transverse band in middle—suggestive of cell wall. 2. Longitudinal division looked for daily both in living and in stained spirochaetes, but never seen. 3. <i>In vivo</i> long spirochaetes frequently seen to separate in two halves transversely. (This might be result of agglutination.) 4. In earliest stages of infection—before agglutination—long forms predominate. If division were longitudinal, short thick forms might be expected at this stage.

<i>S. schaudini</i> , Prowazek (spi- rochaete of <i>U-</i> <i>ticus tropicum</i>)	*Prowazek	... ... ... ...	Observed repeatedly. Entire process of longitudinal splitting followed <i>in vivo</i> . During division, spirochaete becomes less active and moves spasmodically.	Nicolle & Comte	The daughter-cells remain for some time connected by their ends.
<i>S. vespertilionis</i> , Novy and Knapp	*Gonder	... ... ... ...	Occurs both in blood of bat and in food-canal of tick. 1. Difficult to follow <i>in vivo</i> . A division already in Y-stage followed once for a short time. In stained preparations several division forms found. Longitudinal split begins at one end and spreads gradually to the other. 2. Not infrequently individuals seen hanging together by their ends—probably final stage of longitudinal division, but interpreted as transverse division by Nicolle and Comte. 3. Agglomeration never seen, and very rare to see spirochaetes twisted together.	Mühlens	... " Apparently transverse."
<i>S. vincenti</i>	...	...	...	...	...

questions connected with the morphology of spirochaetes. The literature is so extensive, and the observations so scattered, that a résumé of this sort may make it easier to weigh the pros and cons. The preceding table deals thus with the evidence for longitudinal and transverse division in spirochaetes. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, but it includes the chief statements of the best-known authorities.

In comparing the results given above, I was struck by the fact that the conclusions were so seldom based on observations of the living organism. It is not always clear from authors' statements whether they confined their study to stained preparations, but, so far as I can gather, the *entire* process of longitudinal division has been observed *in vivo* only by Prowazek (*S. marchouxi*, spirochaete of *Ulcus tropicum*, *S. balanitidis*)¹, Schaudinn (*S. pallida*), Siebert (*S. pallida*), and Keysserlitz and Fantham (*S. anodontae*)², while Schellack (*S. recurrentis*, *S. duttoni*), Novy and Knapp (*S. recurrentis*) and Zettnow (*S. duttoni*) are the only observers of transverse division from its first indication till the separation of the daughter parasites. This seems strange, since stained preparations are, in a case like this, notoriously unreliable: and so long as these are used as sole evidence, just so long will the supporters of the view that spirochaetes are bacteria insist on regarding the Y-forms as agglutinations, and the supporters of the view that spirochaetes are protozoa will see in the so-called transverse divisions simply the final stage of longitudinal division.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE DIVISION OF *SPIROCHAETA RECURRENTIS*.

Professor Nuttall kindly suggested that I should try to make some observations on the division of *S. recurrentis* (Russian strain) *in vivo* from the blood of infected mice. At first I examined, at room temperature, very thin films of fresh infected blood, sealed with vaseline. Later on I employed a warm stage (Nuttall thermostat), with a

¹ Prowazek (1908), further states, but without particulars, that he has observed longitudinal division in all the smaller spirochaetes, with the exception of *S. dentium*, *S. vincenti*, *S. recurrentis* (European variety), spirochaetes from the intestines of the dog and the cat, spirochaetes from an abscess on the lower jaw of a chimpanzee, and *S. plicatilis*. Keysserlitz and Blanchard also express their opinion that the spirochaetes as a group are characterized by longitudinal division.

² Perrin and Fantham both observed longitudinal division in *S. balbianii* up to the final stage when, however, the individuals died before having separated.

temperature of 37° C., and I found it more convenient to use the serum only of citrated blood¹.

For the first half hour or so after being put into the warm stage, the spirochaetes were so active that it was impossible to follow any one individual. Gradually they slowed down somewhat, and it was at this stage that I made my observations. Later on, when they became still more sluggish, agglutination produced appearances often deceptively like divisions, which had to be discounted. Even when it was not a question of actual agglutination, the tendency of the spirochaetes to twist together for a short time in groups of two or three, made it very difficult to keep any one separately in view. At first also I lost many among blood-corpuscles.

I. *Longitudinal Division.* On two occasions only did I see what I felt convinced were spirochaetes in process of longitudinal division.

(1) The first was an individual that caught my attention by the character of its movement, which was slower and more spasmodic than that of the other spirochaetes in the same field. I then saw that it was apparently splitting longitudinally, and had already reached the Y-stage. The splitting portions were connected through the first two curves of their length, and then diverged at an acute angle: one individual had about seven curves free, the other was rather shorter. A certain amount of independent movement was shown in the two halves, one moving more rapidly or more slowly than the other; frequently they lay parallel, and twisted round one another, their curves coinciding or opposite. During the first fifteen minutes the spirochaete showed scarcely any appreciable forward movement, then it moved across the field, unsplit end first. Shortly before it was finally lost to sight—after having been watched for nearly 40 minutes—the split appeared to have extended over another curve. (Fig. 1 a, b, c, d.)

(2) An individual, apparently in an advanced Y-stage of longitudinal division, was kept in sight for seven minutes. The two halves

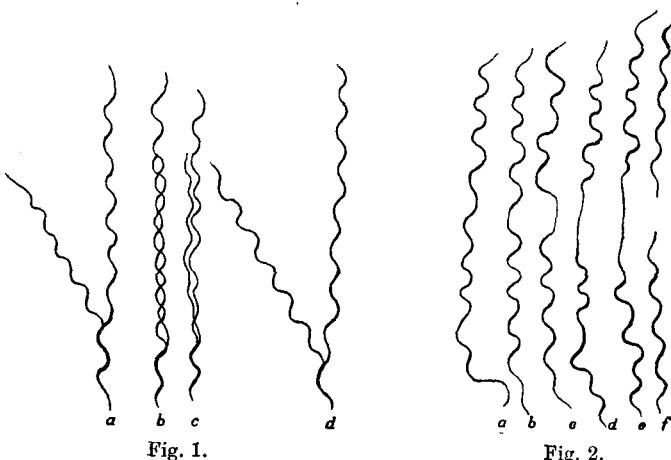
¹ A simple method of obtaining small quantities of serum full of spirochaetes but almost free of blood corpuscles, is the following:—Draw up into a fine pipette, *with an opening narrower than the general lumen of the tube*, a few drops of citrated blood. Lay the pipette horizontal for a short time; the blood corpuscles will settle in a layer in the under half of the lumen of the tube below the level of the opening, while numerous spirochaetes remain in the clear serum above. Then, still keeping the pipette nearly horizontal, blow out a minute drop of the serum on to a slide. This method has the advantage of avoiding possible injury to the organisms through centrifugalizing, and makes it easy to employ very small quantities of blood at a time.

were in this case approximately equal, and the movement, though rather spasmodic, was more rapid than in (1).

II. *Transverse Division.* I was struck by the fact that in most spirochaetes that had attained considerable length—9 to 14 curves—there appeared a weak point, about half-way along the organism, at which bending occurred, as the arm bends at the elbow-joint. In some cases there seemed to be a distinct constriction at this point.

On eleven occasions I saw what I should interpret as transverse division.

1. An individual with a thin drawn-out portion in the middle was seen to separate into two at that point.



2. Two short spirochaetes joined only by a fine protoplasmic bridge were watched for some time, during which the connection thinned out till they separated. This appearance has been aptly likened by Schilling to the drawing out of a glass tube in a flame.

3. A long individual, with approximately 14 curves, showed a thin zone half-way along its length. It was watched for 20 minutes. During this time the thin portion became more and more drawn out and the two halves separated, after spasmodic and "purposeful" wrenching movements.

4. Two short individuals—one rather longer than the other—connected by a fine strand, separated after having been watched for several minutes.

5. A long individual (about 12—14 curves), with a thinner median portion was watched for 20 minutes. Its movements were agitated and

jerky, but it did not change its position much. The thin portion became finer and finer, till its presence could scarcely be suspected, but for the simultaneous tugging movements of the separating halves. Finally the connecting thread broke, and the daughter-spirochaetes departed in different directions.

6. A long spirochaete was seen, in which the two halves were separated by a finely drawn out middle portion.

7. A spirochaete with a thinner median portion was observed for 20 minutes. During that time the middle portion became longer and finer till scarcely visible. Death occurred before complete separation took place.

8. A long spirochaete was noticed that showed very marked bending at a slightly narrower portion half-way along its body. This portion was watched thinning out till the connection between the daughter halves became scarcely perceptible: they died after 20 minutes, and before they had completely separated.

9. A long spirochaete with a weak central point was followed for about 10 minutes, during which time the median portion had thinned out considerably.

10. A long spirochaete—about 14 curves—was followed for 30 minutes. During that time the rather narrower median portion became still thinner, till the two halves were widely separated, though still attached by a fine protoplasmic bridge. At this point the spirochaete became gradually immobile and died.

11. A long individual was kept in sight for about 25 minutes. Shortly after the beginning of the observation, a median thin portion became visible: division at this point went forward rather rapidly and the two halves separated. (Fig. 2 *a, b, c, d, e, f*.)

CONCLUSIONS.

In two cases apparent longitudinal division was seen in *Spirochaeta recurrentis*: in eleven cases the division was apparently transverse. It is not possible to say with absolute certainty, except in one instance, that these transverse divisions were not the final act in a longitudinal division. I am nevertheless inclined to think that both forms of division may take place, transverse being the more common. Breinl, and Dutton and Todd have expressed the same opinion with regard to *S. duttoni*, and Fantham also states that in *S. balbianii* both modes of division occur.

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