**Reinhard Hoeppli (1893-1973): The life and curious afterlife of a distinguished parasitologist**

**N.J. Morley**

School of Biological Sciences, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX, UK

Email: n.morley@rhul.ac.uk

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**Abstract**

Reinhard Hoeepli was a Swiss-German physician with a distinguished career as a researcher and historian of medical parasitology. He spent the majority of his career at the Peking Union Medical College in Beijing, China, where he undertook research on host responses to parasitic infections, in particular describing the ‘Splendore-Hoeppli phenomenon’, between 1929 and 1952. During the Second World War he acted as the Swiss honorary Consul in Japanese-occupied Beijing. After leaving China following the militarization of the College in the wake of the Korean War he subsequently worked in Singapore and Liberia before retiring to Switzerland.

Hoeppli is most widely known for his association with Sir Edmund Backhouse, a controversial and enigmatic Chinese scholar, who was his war-time patient towards the end of his life. With Hoeppli’s encouragement Backhouse wrote two scandalous and unpublishable memoirs which remained in Hoeppli’s safe-keeping until his own death in 1973. However, the revelations by the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1976 that Backhouse was a fraudster and fantasist has had a detrimental effect on Hoeppli’s posthumous reputation that has overshadowed his many lifetime achievements. Alongside a biography of his life an examination of the controversies of the Backhouse revelations on Hoeppli’s repute is presented.

In the autumn of 1976 the British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper published a revealing biography of the enigmatic Chinese scholar Sir Edmund Backhouse.1 Backhouse had been born in England in 1873 to a wealthy aristocratic family, but had spent most of his adult life in China where he had nurtured a respected reputation as a sinologist and linguist before his death in 1944.

In 1973 Trevor-Roper had received two unpublished memoirs by Backhouse in order to determine their suitability for preservation in the Bodleian library of Oxford University. Since Backhouse’s death, the memoirs had been in the care of Reinhard Hoeppli, a recently-deceased Swiss parasitologist. At Hoeppli’s urging Backhouse had transcribed his memoirs whilst both were living in Japanese-occupied Beijing during the Second World War. The memoirs had been passed to Trevor-Roper by Hoeppli’s literary executor, yet he concluded they were historically worthless and in the course of his investigations discovered that Backhouse was a fraud and fantasist. Trevor-Roper was also particularly contemptuous of Hoeppli. In an entire chapter devoted to the doctor he undertook a devastating appraisal, accusing him of being naïve and uncritical.

Although the Backhouse memoirs have recently benefited from more balanced reappraisals Hoeppli’s reputation is yet to emerge from under the shadow of Trevor-Roper’s damning criticism and his scientific and other achievements are largely unknown. He remains a much maligned and misunderstood figure hovering in the background of the Backhouse controversy and the continued interest it generates, even appearing as a central character in a novel inspired by these events.2

Nevertheless, there was much more to Hoeppli than Trevor-Roper’s scathing character-assassination would suggest. He was a well-respected clinical parasitologist and diplomat as well as a cultured individual, gourmet, and connoisseur of Chinese art. He received numerous international awards including the Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur and Order of the British Empire (OBE) from the French and British governments for his wartime service3, whilst his extensive collections of Chinese porcelain and jade sculptures would ultimately be gifted to the Swiss nation.4 He also wrote extensively, particularly on clinical parasitology and its historical development in the Far East and Africa (see online supplementary files for a full bibliography). Such achievements indicate his life and literary afterlife are worthy of reappraisal.

**Early life**

Jakob Christian Reinhard Hoeppli (or Höppli) was born on May 28th 1893 in Wiesbaden, Germany, of joint German-Swiss nationality.3 His Swiss grandfather, Johan Jakob Höppli, had trained as a sculptor and producer of ceramics before settling in Wiesbaden in order to build up a business of designing and manufacturing ornamental pieces for building facades in the city. The business was continued by the family well into the 20th century5, although Reinhard Hoeppli appears to have shown no interest in entering the trade.

After schooling in Wiesbaden he was successfully admitted to study medicine at Heidelberg University in 1911 taking his preliminary medical examination in July 1913. He continued his studies at Kiel University where he also served as a volunteer in the German Imperial Navy’s First Sea Battalion also based at Kiel. When the First World War broke out he suspended his medical education and served as a field surgeon and field auxiliary physician in the Imperial Navy from August 1914 to the end of December 1918. From October 1917, being based once again at Kiel, he was able to acquire the three remaining semesters of medical training he needed to become a fully qualified doctor in 1919.6

**Tropical diseases in Hamburg**

Upon graduation he was initially employed as an assistant in the Institute of Pathology at Kiel University before joining in 1921 the Institut für Schiffs- und Tropenkrankheiten (Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases) in Hamburg as an assistant to Fredrich Fülleborn, the head of the helminthology department.7 The Institute was a centre for research and teaching in tropical medicine which had acquired a global reputation for its studies of infectious diseases, mainly funded by the German Army or Colonial Office.8

Fülleborn was one of the main architects of the Institute’s new direction following Germany’s defeat in the First World War. The Institute faced a severe crisis in the years after 1918, with substantial financial problems and the loss of all German colonies, its existence was widely questioned with only the quality of its research saving it. For Germany’s Weimar government, regaining some degree of influence in world affairs was a priority, and tropical medicine was seen as one way to achieve this. Fülleborn and his colleagues saw their work as ‘intellectual propaganda’ and used it to break the scientific isolation imposed on Germany after the war. With government assistance many of the Institute’s members were sent abroad to other establishments as effective carriers and promoters of German culture and scientific expertise.8, 9

Nevertheless, much of Hoeppli’s initial work at the Institute was associated with the clinical pathology of parasitic infections particular helminths. He also devoted considerable time to his further education, studying two years of natural science at the University of Hamburg where he was awarded a Doctorate of Science.

In 1923 Hoeppli became part of the Institute’s international activities. Working his passage as a ship’s doctor he travelled to Sri Lanka, the Philippines, China, and Japan in order to strengthen relations with similar organizations, clinics, and universities.9 Upon his return to Germany, Hoeppli harboured a growing fascination with the China he’d witnessed, particularly the history and art of the Middle Kingdom, and he began to study the Chinese language.7 However, Hoeppli was soon sent abroad again. Fülleborn had maintained close ties with many American colleagues since the end of the First World War, particularly William Henry Welch, founding director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research who had a high regard for Germany and its medical research, having spent part of his early career at several German laboratories.8 Fülleborn’s careful nurturing of the links between the two countries bore fruit when Welch arranged for Hoeppli to receive a one year fellowship from the Rockerfeller Foundation for zoological studies in the USA during 1925.8

Once back at the Institute in Germany Hoeppli returned to studying the clinical pathology of parasitic infections. However, within a year he had a leave of absence request granted in order to pursue an opportunity to return to China by studying and teaching at the University of Amoy between 1927 and 1928.9, 10 Although he returned to Germany in early 1928 his brief period of study in China had attracted some attention. In the summer of 1927 he had come into contact with Ernest Carroll Faust, an American parasitologist based at the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC), whilst the latter was undertaking fieldwork in Fujian. The meeting was fortuitous as Faust had recently resigned his position under pressure from his departmental head who was keen to appoint someone with a clinical rather than zoological background in parasitology.10 Before returning to the USA Faust recommended Hoeppli as his most able replacement for the parasitology position at PUMC.

The PUMC was a prestigious medical school established by the American Rockefeller Foundation to promote a programme of western medicine in China.11 After careful consideration, the PUMC approved Faust’s recommendation and commenced negotiations with Hoeppli. It took a year of persistence and the offer of a competitive job package before Hoeppli agreed to serve as professor of parasitology from December 1929. The Hamburg Institute may have been hopeful he would return as they again granted him a renewed leave of absence for two years9, even though his contract with PUMC was for an initial four-year term. At PUMC Hoeppli would be a full Professor with complete control of the parasitology division, light teaching commitments, and a guarantee of sufficient funding and support for the division’s development.10 Hoeppli would never return to Hamburg, and in August 1931 he applied for dismissal from the Hamburg Civil Service and his connection with the Institute. Nevertheless, the following year he was awarded the honorary ‘aussordentlicher’, extraordinary professor, degree from the University of Hamburg, largely on the recommendation of Fülleborn, in recognition of his contribution to parasitology.9, 11

**Life in China**

Unlike Faust, who had focused his research at PUMC on the biology of parasites, Hoeppli was more interested in the reactions of the host to infection. In particular, his description of a localized immunological response associated with schistosome eggs embedded in the tissue of the rabbit host had the notable result of being named after him. The Splendore-Hoeppli phenomenon, is a host immune reaction characterised by the presence of radiating star-like asteroid or club-shaped eosinophilic material around or adjacent to infectious or non-infectious agents and is a tell-tale sign of a wide spectrum of infectious and reactive conditions. Hoeppli’s description was the first in the English language associated with parasite worms and was subsequently found to be similar to a reaction elicited by the fungus *Sporothrix schenckii* during sporotrichosis described by Splendore in 1908.12

During the early 1930’s Hoeppli began to explore a fresh avenue of research that would eventually produce his most enduring legacy to parasitology. Like all scientific researchers Hoeppli needed to be well-read in the relevant literature, both present and past. However, he broadened his reading matter much farther into the historical record of parasitology than was necessary. Initially drawn to the curious and erroneous ideas regarding parasites found in the past he gradually gained a far greater insight into the development of parasitology over time. This work would gradually begin to focus on the historical development of parasitology in China, a field largely unexplored at that time. Hoeppli was in a unique position due to his ready access to the large collection of old Chinese medical books in the PUMC library and willing Chinese colleagues who could help put the historical work within an appropriate critical context and ensure the accuracy of translations. He was able to produce clear evaluations of the relevance of this work compared to advances achieved in Europe over the same historical time frame. Such studies would be a continuous, although intermittent, aspect of his written output throughout his time at PUMC.

Hoeppli does not appear to have socialized much with most members of the foreign legation in Beijing13, who had a frivolous reputation and thirst for gossip.14 Nevertheless, he appears to have been on more friendly terms with his Chinese colleagues at PUMC as well as the many intellectuals, missionaries and diplomats that were drawn to Beijing in the 1930s.14, 15 In particular, he became friendly with Hedda Hammer, a professional photographer, and her future husband Alistair Morrison, an employee of the British Embassy16, a friendship which would endure until Hoeppli’s death.

In 1937 Hoeppli renounced his German citizenship, choosing from that time onwards to be only a Swiss national.3, 9 He claimed this right by descent through his Swiss grandfather, although the reasons for taking this step and when he became aware of his Swiss heritage are not known. Certainly, he would later claim that his service in the German Navy during the First World War could have been avoided if he’d been aware of his dual citizenship status at that time.17 Concurrent with this change in citizenship Hoeppli also severed his remaining academic ties with Germany and resigned his honorary position of *aussordentlicher* with the University of Hamburg.9

**Second World War**

During the 1930’s China suffered from extensive political instability compounded by a Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Japan adopted an aggressive campaign of conquest annexing large areas of northern China and creating a puppet regime to manage its occupied territories including Beijing. Life under military occupation was not easy with censorship and surveillance ever-present, yet the staff of PUMC strived to continue as normally as possible. However, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the subsequent declaration of war against the USA the occupying military forces decided to shut down the PUMC in January 1942, imprison enemy aliens and put all remaining staff out of work.18

With the closure of the PUMC Hoeppli’s future was uncertain. Unlike most of the westerners in the Legation quarter, who were strictly monitored with their assets seized and bank accounts frozen14, as a Swiss citizen, he was considered a neutral and therefore not subjected to the same restrictions. Nevertheless, the interests of American and British citizens needed representation and Hoeppli, in order to be of service to his friends within these communities, reluctantly agreed to act as the Swiss Honorary Consul in Beijing.3, 11, 17 He represented American, British, and Dutch interests and opened an office in the WagonsLit Hotel in January 1942 where he was assisted in their care and welfare by Mary Ferguson, formerly the registrar at the PUMC, and Phillipe deVargas, a Swiss Professor of history at Yenching University.13, 19 More used to dealing with academics and students, it took an effort to adapt to the requirements of the diverse and sometimes eccentric individuals that made up the foreign legation.13, 20 Nevertheless, although he may never have been wholly comfortable in the job he performed it conscientiously and ably.

The difficult conditions brought out both the best and worst in many of the westerners trapped in the city.14, 20 For the Englishman Sir Edmund Backhouse, one of Peking’s most enigmatic and long-established foreign residents, the Japanese occupancy had completely upturned his life. His contemporaries considered him an eccentric, soft-spoken individual who could also be a charming and engaging conversationalist21, but over time he had become increasingly reclusive, going to great lengths to avoid any westerners.14 Having refused the opportunity to be repatriated and being considered too old to be interned by the Japanese he now lived a simple, almost destitute, life in the British legation. Under the communal conditions he became more gregarious, entertaining his fellow detainees with fabulous stories of his life and friendship with the Chinese Imperial family.14 As one of the westerners under his care Hoeppli came into regular, eventually daily, contact with Backhouse, whose outrageous stories helped lift his spirits during these difficult times and he eventually became his personal physician as the Englishman’s health began to decline.

Hoeppli recognized that Backhouse’s bizarre and scandalous recollections, regardless of their truthfulness, were of an extraordinary kind that were worth preserving. He suggested that the most interesting of the stories be written down and sold to him, as would a professional writer, thereby saving them and also giving a respectable pretext to provide Backhouse with much needed additional funds from his own private means.22 Backhouse enthusiastically agreed and completed two manuscript *Décadence Mandchoue* and *The Dead Past* between December 1942 and June 1943 detailing in an outrageous manner his life in China and early upbringing in England. Soon after, his health began to fail and he eventually died in January 1944. Although Hoeppli considered the content of Backhouse’s hand-written manuscripts to be unpublishable, whenever he could spare the time he began the slow process of typing up and editing the works which was completed by early 1946 when he wrote his own postscript explaining the context of the manuscripts’ creation and his own thoughts regarding the nature of Backhouse’s character and the authenticity and reliability of the works which the Englishman had presented as facts.

**Post-war China**

The cessation of hostilities may have brought to an end the Japanese occupation of Beijing but there would be no rapid return to normality. Finally released from the burden of his diplomatic duties in the spring of 1946 Hoeppli could look forward to picking up his work at the PUMC. However, living conditions in the city were still poor with severe shortages and the country itself ravaged by civil war. In order to tackle this problem Truman, the American President, had organised a commission to mediate peace and seek a united government for China. The PUMC was chosen as the headquarters for the commission, delaying its plans to reopen. It would be over a year before the commission abandoned the peace mission unresolved and vacated its occupancy of the college.18 When the PUMC eventually reopened its doors to students Hoeppli was one of only three foreign members of the teaching staff remaining15, and there would now be only limited opportunities for research. During this period he also returned to diplomatic service as advisor on cultural matters to the Swiss legation.

In 1949 Beijing was occupied by the Communist forces who proclaimed the People’s Republic of China, bringing an end to the years of civil war. At first little changed at PUMC, however in 1951 the college was nationalized. The changed political conditions and the promotion of an anti-American rhetoric meant Hoeppli’s position as one of the last remaining non-Chinese staff was increasingly precarious. The college’s role as a prominent establishment for the training of elite physician-researchers was an obvious mismatch with the new regimes popularist approach to health.23 Although, there were no substantial changes during the first year of nationalization, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1952 saw anti-American sentiment on the rise and the People’s Liberation Army took control of the college, militarizing both administration and teaching programmes whilst closing the school to undergraduate and medical students in favour of graduate-level courses for army medical officers.23 Under these circumstances Hoeppli’s position was untenable and in August 1952 he left China for good, taking up a three-year appointment as a visiting professor of parasitology at the University of Malaya in Singapore.

**Singapore**

In Singapore he intended to continue his work on the pathology of parasitic infections, particularly bites caused by arthropods. He also informed the local press of his intention to publish a book on “historical studies on parasitology in old-style Chinese and western medicine”.24 Nevertheless, within a year he had taken on another diplomatic post for the Swiss government, being appointed as Consul of Switzerland at Singapore for the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei.25 The circumstances leading to this appointment are not known but he held the position concurrently with his visiting professorship.

In addition to the experimental research Hoeppli was also able during this time to broaden his historical interests of the understanding of parasites by ‘old-style practitioners’ and indigenous tribes of the region. He travelled extensively through Borneo, Malaysia, and the South Pacific islands collecting folklore views on parasitic infections and comparing them with historical Chinese and European literature.

In 1959 Hoeppli’s book on the early history and folklore of parasitology was published26 to wide acclaim within academic circles27, 28 cementing his reputation as an expert in this specialized field. Laid out as a series of loosely connected essays, it meticulously evaluated parasitology from ancient times to the early 19th century including such diverse topics as lunar beliefs, spontaneous generation, and imaginary parasites. It presented a wealth of material in its original form, frequently accompanied by Hoeppli’s own comments and importantly was considered by Joseph Needham, the leading historian of Chinese scientific achievements, to be the first book within the history of science to treat medieval Chinese, Indian, and Arabic contributions on the same terms as those of Western antiquity and the Middle ages.28

**Liberia**

In 1959 a new opportunity arose when Hoeppli was appointed as research-director at the Liberian Institute for Tropical Medicine. Already 67, he was at an age when many would have been considering a quiet retirement. Nevertheless, he took on the post with some enthusiasm, eventually having his two-year contract extended for a further two years.29 Set-up in the West African state of Liberia shortly after the end of the Second World War, the Liberian Institute for Tropical Medicine was administered by the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine. The high prevalence of tropical diseases made Liberia a logical choice for an American-led research centre. Within the USA an expanding biomedical research programme, alongside the increased awareness of the diverse tropical diseases harboured by soldiers returning from fronts in Asia and Africa resulted in renewed focus on malaria and other infectious conditions of the tropics in the immediate post-war period.30

The Institute had no mandate to perform educational or public health services for the hosting country but instead was a free-floating centre for basic disease research undertaken at the instigation of academic centres in America and Europe. The Institute’s staff was typically small but working conditions were demanding. Although facilities were both modern and extensive30, the climate was debilitating with high levels of annual rainfall and relative humidity.31 Many of the western researchers felt isolated, despite good pay and stimulating work, and were often glad to leave at the end of their two- to four-year contracts.31 In addition to the administration of the Institute and the welfare of the staff, Hoeppli was also expected to develop his own programme of research. He studied skin changes caused by nematode larvae that induce Onchocerciasis and began another large historical project focusing on early documentation of parasitic infections in tropical Africa and the slave trade.

**Retirement**

Upon retirement in 1965, Hoeppli settled in Basel, Switzerland where at the city’s Swiss Tropical Institute he was granted an honorary research position through the courtesy of its Director and founder, Rudolph Geigy. Here, Hoeppli was able to complete his second book on the history of parasitology.32 Considered a remarkable achievement, it demonstrated the historical record of human parasites in Africa and how the transport of millions of slaves across the Atlantic introduced many of them to the New World. Although by necessity speculative in parts, the book was regarded as a valuable work of reference for parasitologists, historians, and social anthropologists and a fitting final tribute to Hoeppli’s dedication and flair for such specialized form of research.33, 34

During his remaining years, Hoeppli continued to write further articles on historical aspects of parasitology. However, as he became increasingly aware of his own mortality his thoughts turned once more to the unpublished Backhouse memoirs still in his possession. Although the intervening years had not lessened their scandalous nature, and in Hoeppli’s opinion still remained unpublishable in their entirety, after careful rereading of the material he became convinced that a single chapter, documenting the supposed circumstances surrounding the death of the Empress Dowager Tz’u-his, was suitable for publication. In 1972 he prepared this chapter, alongside his original ‘postscript’ for publication submitting it to the Swiss journal *Asiatische Studien* in the autumn of that year.22 This would be his final publication as a few months later in February 1973 he died following a short illness.

**A curious afterlife**

After Hoeppli’s death he was honoured with respectful and affectionate obituaries in the German scientific literature.3, 7 That he would gradually fade from the collective memory of the parasitological community would not be an unexpected fate. However, his association with the Backhouse memoirs was about to thrust his name posthumously into the limelight of a completely different academic field which would have a long-lasting effect on his reputation.

As his literary executor the recently retired Geigy took possession of the Backhouse memoirs, but rather than follow Hoeppli’s instructions of depositing copies in various academic libraries he chose to initially retain the memoirs and enlist the assistance of two Swiss Professors of history and English respectively to evaluate their literary and historical value. According to the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper1 both Professors “expressed lyrical admiration for the work and neither questioned its basic truth”. Geigy, having now been reassured of the memoirs value, offered them to Trevor-Roper for a final evaluation before being conveyed to the Bodleian and other university libraries according to Hoeppli’s wishes.

However, Trevor-Roper’s own investigations of Backhouse revealed him to be a forger, charlatan, and fantasist with the memoirs themselves having no historical value. He subsequently wrote a biography of Backhouse, presented as a dramatic journalistic investigation as the best means of publishing these revelations. Trevor-Roper was one of the most gifted scholars of his generation who had a lucid acerbic prose style which he used to devastating effect.35 In his gleeful zeal to dismantle Backhouse’s reputation and legacy Trevor-Roper was highly disparaging of Hoeppli. He accused him of being naïve, uncritical, and mesmerised by Backhouse. Yet Trevor-Roper still considered Hoeppli a sufficiently reliable source to use much material from his postscript when describing Backhouse’s later life, as well as the revelation that the memoirs have an undeniable parallel with a novel, *René Leys*, by Victor Segalen.21 Although Trevor-Roper wrote an entire chapter on Hoeppli, much of his character descriptions were suppositions, going so far as to describe his encounter with Backhouse as an “extraordinary world…. quite different from anything hitherto experienced by the good doctor”.1 A rather patronising assessment not seemingly based on any known facts of Hoeppli’s life.

Although Trevor-Roper would later claim that he had “conversed and corresponded with friends and colleagues” of Hoeppli36, there is little to support that assertion from his book. With the exception of a single unattributed and derogatory quote the rest of the limited biographical material is taken directly from the brief information provided by Hoeppli himself in his postscript22, 37. If Trevor-Roper was in possession of any additional material he chose not to use it, and does not appear to have consulted the two published obituaries3, 7. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest Trevor-Roper did any serious additional background research on Hoeppli, but simply cherry-picked gossip that supported his own agenda. In the absence of more balanced material Trevor-Roper’s assessment of Hoeppli is deeply flawed and at times confused. Despite Hoeppli stating clearly that he considered the memoirs unpublishable due to their offensive nature22, 37, Trevor-Roper repeatedly accuses him of the opposite, apparently transposing the opinions of the two Swiss professors engaged by Geigy to assess the memoirs onto Hoeppli. Similarly his claim that Hoeppli’s publication of the single least offensive chapter written by Backhouse22, was withdrawn after his personal intervention1, proved completely untrue as pointed out by Morrison17.

From Trevor-Roper’s damning assessment one is left with the impression that Hoeppli was naïve and uncritical. Yet Trevor-Roper’s prosecuting judgement did not go unchallenged. Within a few weeks of the book’s publication Richard Ellmann, a Professor of English literature and noted biographer at New College, Oxford, wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement* an article entitled ‘In defence of Dr Hoeppli’.38 Ellmann had also been able to consult the Backhouse material, but his interpretation of Hoeppli differed markedly from Trevor-Roper’s. Ellmann considered that Hoeppli was not taken in by Backhouse, had every doubt of the memoir whilst presenting numerous leads for others to follow up. For Ellmann the postscript displays two highly sophisticated men playing a complicated game of move and counter-move which Hoeppli, through politeness and a genuine fondness for Backhouse, was reluctant to win.38 Trevor-Roper’s reply was dismissive, pouring scorn on Ellmann’s interpretation and reiterating his own increasingly entrenched views.39 What followed was a series of exchanges whereby intellectual blows were traded without either achieving a knockout.40-43 To some observers it appeared that Trevor-Roper had got the better of the dispute44, however, Alistair Morrison, with the benefit of his long-term friendship with Hoeppli considered Ellmann’s interpretation was the more perceptive.17 He also deemed that the postscript, although kind and fair, was redolent with Hoeppli’s sense of humour and the absurd, an aspect that would not necessarily be apparent to someone who did not know him.17

Despite these challenges, Trevor-Roper’s opinions on Hoeppli would ultimately be accepted as definitive, being reiterated unquestioningly by others. Even as late as 1993, Trevor-Roper refused to revise his views of Hoeppli. In an ‘afterword’ to a new edition of his biography, proclaiming in melodramatic bafflement why Hoeppli had never recorded his doubts and “so positively and publicly assert his belief and thereby encourage others to echo it?”45, a frankly bizarre interpretation of Hoeppli’s writings on the subject. This flawed interpretation would continue to be highly influential and only with the publication in 2011 of one of the Backhouse memoirs, *Decadence Mandchoue*, along with Hoeppli’s original postscript would a more sympathetic view begin to emerge.21 Morrison17 considered that Hoeppli would have been amused by the Trevor-Roper/Ellmann conflict over him, and he may also have taken the same tolerant attitude to his tarnished reputation that persisted from this time.

**Conclusion**

Like Edmund Backhouse, Reinhard Hoeppli remains an enigma. To his scientific colleagues he was a well-respected researcher. Modest, amiable and witty, he was always ready to offer hospitality and help.3, 7 To close friends such as Alistair Morrison he was a dignified but complicated figure, kind and generous but having an old-fashioned formal courtesy and liked to be treated in a similar fashion. Yet lurking behind this formal exterior a well-developed mischievous sense of humour could be found, with a lively and sympathetic interest in humanity’s oddities and aberrations, making him an amusing raconteur.17 However, Trevor-Roper1 presented a different aspect to the man, quoting an anonymous source describing him as “a stiff, tight-lipped, old-maidish person, with an ambiguous expression and secretive manner” he concluded that he was a naïve and uncritical individual. Although Hoeppli was undoubtedly an unusual man, ultimately his many achievements should not be eclipsed by his involvement in the Backhouse affair.

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