



Mercury belongs to the most hazardous substances known and despite its use having been banned or phased out, mercury continues to occupy an important place in toxicology. Some of the famous residents and natives of Idrija, who used to or still explore the toxicology of mercury, are presented below.

Paracelsus (1493 – 1541), born Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, a Swiss physician, alchemist, lay theologian, and philosopher, credited as the father of modern toxicology, spent some time in Idrija while studying the toxicity of mercury and its use in alchemy. His postulate “Alle Dinge sind Gift, und nichts ist ohne Gift; allein die Dosis macht, as sein Ding kein Gift ist,” (All things are poison, and nothing is without poison; the dosage alone makes it so a thing is not a poison.) remains the basic principle of toxicology.



Rubens' portrait of Paracelsus (Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels)



Another notable resident of Idrija was **Giovanni Antonio Scopoli (1723 – 1788)**, an Italian physician and naturalist. In 1754 Scopoli was appointed a physician of the mercury mine in Idrija, remaining there until 1769. In 1761, he published *De Hydroargyro Idriensi Tentamina* on the symptoms of mercury poisoning among mercury miners. Besides working as a physician, Scopoli spent time studying local natural history, publishing *Flora Carniolica*, as well as a major work on the insects of Carniola, *Entomologia Carniolica*. Scopoli corresponded with Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist, who laid the foundations of modern taxonomy. The alkaloid scopolamine, a well-known medicine and poison, is named after him.



Scopolia carniolica Jacq. (<http://www.botanicni-vrt.si/300-let-scopolija>)



Belsazar de la Motte Hacquet (1739 – 1815) was a Carniolan surgeon of French descent who also worked in Idrija. Hacquet researched the geology and botany of Carniola, Istria, and nearby places, and was the first explorer of the Julian Alps. In his work *Oryctographia Carniolica* he provided an in-depth report of the Idrija mercury mine, where he worked for some time with Giovanni Antonio Scopoli.



Pedicularis haquetii Graf (<http://flora.nhm-wien.ac.at/Seiten-Arten/Pedicularis-hacquetii.htm>)

More recently, **Alfred Bogomir Kobal (1934 -2021)**, an occupational physician from Idrija, spent most of his working life looking after health and well-being of the Idrija mercury mine employees. He was also a devoted researcher. His doctoral thesis “Occupational exposure to elemental mercury and the content of mercury in blood, red blood cells, plasma, exhaled air and urine, and activity of catalase-biological markers of occupational exposure to elemental mercury” presented an important milestone in using human biomonitoring as an aid to explore causes of disease and improve health. Dr. Kobal was a highly regarded member of the Slovenian Society of Toxicology.



Alfred Bogomir Kobal
(<https://www.dnevnik.si/1042427333>)



Another native of Idrija, Janja Snoj Tratnik, continues the exploration of exposure to mercury and its impact on health, such as association of prenatal mercury exposure from maternal fish consumption with neurodevelopment in children. Besides mercury, Dr. Snoj Tratnik has also been involved in a range of other human biomonitoring activities, and will be presenting some of her work at EUROTOX2023.



Janja Snoj Tratnik (<https://www.delo.si/novice/znanoteh/clani-znanstvene-skupnosti-smo-prijatelji-in-zavezniki/>)