



Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências

ISSN: 0001-3765

aabc@abc.org.br

Academia Brasileira de Ciências

Brasil

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Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências, vol. 82, núm. 2, junio, 2010, pp. 539-544

Academia Brasileira de Ciências

Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

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Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências (2010) 82(2): 539-544
(Annals of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences)
ISSN 0001-3765
www.scielo.br/aabc

Disector Z-axis mechanical method for stereology

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Manuscript received on November 18, 2008; accepted for publication on November 4, 2009

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to calibrate a not expensive microscope to be applied in Optical Disector estimation. The evaluation of “Z-axis” bias and the “Z-axis” calibration were made utilizing a cover slip and a “manual digimatic outside micrometer scale” (Mitutoyo, Japan). Calibrating the cover slip we performed the calibration of the “Z-axis” of a microscope. In the cover slip two lines were painted with different colors using a pen glass. A blue line was painted on the up surface and another line (red) on the bottom surface of the cover slip forming a cross. Two micrometer rings with one palette welded in each were adapted in the microscope. Other palette was welded in the gross focus in order to restrict the route of the fine focuses (Z-axis study) using the two palettes fixed in both rings. Results showed that 10 micrometers in “Z-axis” were equal to 3.2 micrometers in the scale of its fine focuses of the microscope. The Disector of $10\mu\text{m}$ ($10\mu\text{m}$ in Z-axis) is equal to 3.2 micrometers in the fine focuses of this microscope. In conclusion, “Z-axis” calibration is crucial to assure enough precision for Disector Method since the equipment can be manufactured without the ideal precision or its precision can be lost after use.

Key words: stereology, disector, optical disector, morphometry, Z-axis.

INTRODUCTION

The calibration of a system is crucial to make morphometric evaluations. Concerning morphometric microscopical studies using test-systems in an established area and volume of a tissue, we have to develop special tools, such as, “d” calibration of a system (Weibel 1979) “forbidden line” to avoid overestimation of particles in a specific area (Gundersen 1977, 1978) and in a specific volume, which has been solved using the “Disector Method” (Sterio 1984). Also, the problem of loss of biological structures on the surface of a slice is necessary to be considered (Andersen and Gundersen 1999).

The precision of the Z-axis to perform the Disector Method is really crucial to its use. Nevertheless, concerning the fine focus, the equipment can be manufactured without the ideal precision, or its precision can be lost after use. Simple or sophisticated scientific equip-

The Stereological Research Laboratory (University of Aarhus, Denmark) developed the Optical Disector (O.D.) System. This system was considered the best system for Stereological quantification. However, this system is extremely expensive for small and modest laboratories in many parts of the world. Thus, here we propose a simple low cost and easy method to allow the use of Optical Disector Method in every small laboratories of the world.

Our goal was to calibrate a not expensive microscope in order to be applied in Optical Disector estimation. This use in cheap microscope will help all laboratories to get into the Stereology world and mainly into the world of Disector.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An old fashioned microscope was utilized to evaluate



of a cover slip was utilized to calibrate the “Z-axis” using a “manual digimatic outside micrometer scale” (Mitutoyo, Japan). The ideal precision is 0.001 mm ($1\mu\text{m}$). In the central region of the cover slip, two lines were painted with different colors using a pen glass. A blue line was painted on the up surface and another line (red) on the bottom surface of the cover slip forming a cross. Two metal rings with one palette welded in each were welded in the microscope. One other palette was welded in the gross focuses in order to restrict the route of the fine focuses (Z-axis study) using the two palettes fixed in both rings (Figs. 1 and 3). Note that palettes welded in the rings bump into the palette welded in the gross focuses, but the palettes welded in the rings can also pass by the palette welded in the gross focuses (after bumping it) to better visualize the biological tissue (Figs. 1D and E).

RESULTS

Using the “manual digimatic outside micrometer scale” (Mitutoyo, Japan), we found the thickness of 0.160 mm ($160\mu\text{m}$), from the superior surface of the superior line (blue) painted on the cover slip to the inferior surface of the cover slip (without painting the red line). The inferior surface of the cover slip was not painted (red line) in this procedure because, in the following procedure, we also used de superior surface (tight to the glass) of this inferior line painted on the bottom surface of the cover slip in order to calibrate the Z-axis.

After this, it was necessary to check out the fine focuses scale of the microscope, the Z-axis distance from the superior surface of the superior line painted on the cover slip to the superior surface (tight to the glass) of the inferior line painted on the bottom surface of the cover slip as said before. In our microscope, we found this distance equal to 51 micrometers (Fig. 2). The scale of the fine focuses in our microscope was 50 micrometers (which means a rout of 360 degrees in fine focuses).

Then, it should be made a quite simple calculation in order to identify the distance of the adapted palettes welded in the rings fixed in the fine focuses to be used for the Disector Method (Fig. 1C and Fig. 3).

$$X = \frac{5100}{160} = 31.875\mu\text{m}$$
 in the fine focuses of the microscope = $100\mu\text{m}$ in Z-axis.

Then, an unusual Disector of $100\mu\text{m}$ means $31.875\mu\text{m}$ in the fine focuses of the microscope.

For instance, an usual Disector of $10\mu\text{m}$ means $31.875/10 = 3.1875$ in the fine focuses of the microscope.

One way of finding, for instance, the value of $10\mu\text{m}$ (for a Disector of $10\mu\text{m}$) in the fine focuses of the microscope is to divide 51 per 16, finding the same 3.1875. The value of $20\mu\text{m}$ (for a Disector of $20\mu\text{m}$) in the fine focuses of the microscope is to divide 51 per 8, finding 6.375.

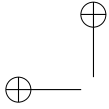
But the simplest way of finding the equivalent value of $1\mu\text{m}$ in the Z-axis of the microscope is to divide 51 per 160, finding 0.31875. So, $1\mu\text{m}$ in the Z-axis is equal to 0.31875 in fine focuses of the microscope. Then, this value can be multiplied to find the value of the Disector to be used (for instance, a Disector of $10\mu\text{m}$, a Disector of $15\mu\text{m}$, a Disector of $20\mu\text{m}$, or a Disector of other dimension).

This means that $3.2\mu\text{m}$ in the fine focuses of the microscope is equal to $10\mu\text{m}$ in Z-axis of the microscope because fine focuses of the microscope lost their precision or were not manufactured with the ideal accuracy. Then, a distance of 10 micrometers in the Z-axis of this microscope is equal to 3.2 in the scale of its fine focuses.

Now the fine focuses of the microscope will have to be positioned with a distance of 3.2 from one palette to the other palette fixed in the two metal rings (Fig. 3).

DISCUSSION

In Stereology, we had to solve several problems of calibration of the equipment as the “d” calibration of a system (Weibel 1979), the “forbidden line” to avoid overestimation of particles in a specific area (Gundersen 1977, 1978, 1981), and also in a specific volume (Disector Method) (Sterio 1984, Gundersen 1986). For the development of the Disector Method, it was compulsory to consider the exclusion of certain particles in the area to avoid over-estimation and the current easier, simpler

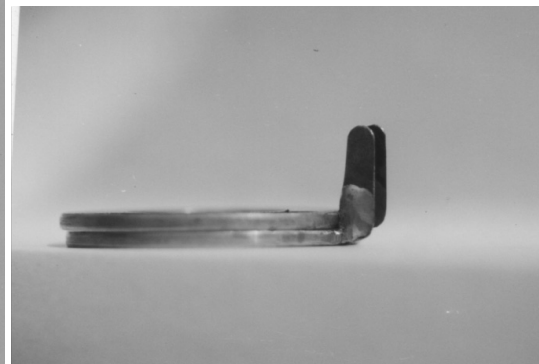


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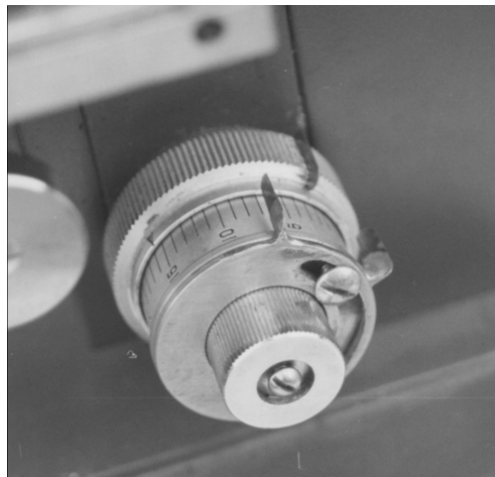
DISECTOR Z-AXIS MECHANICAL METHOD FOR STEREOLOGY



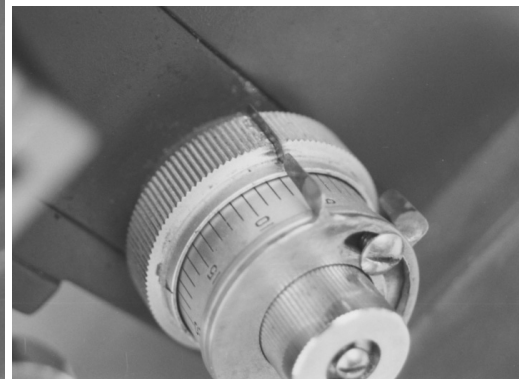
(A)



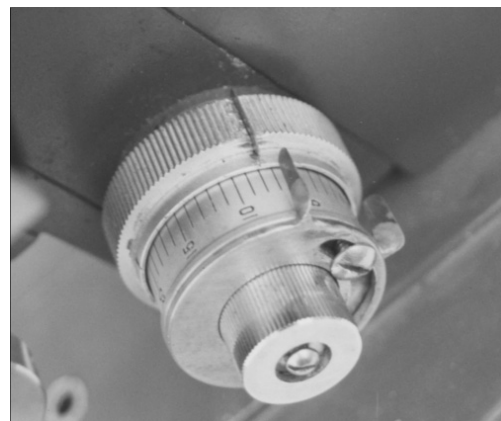
(B)



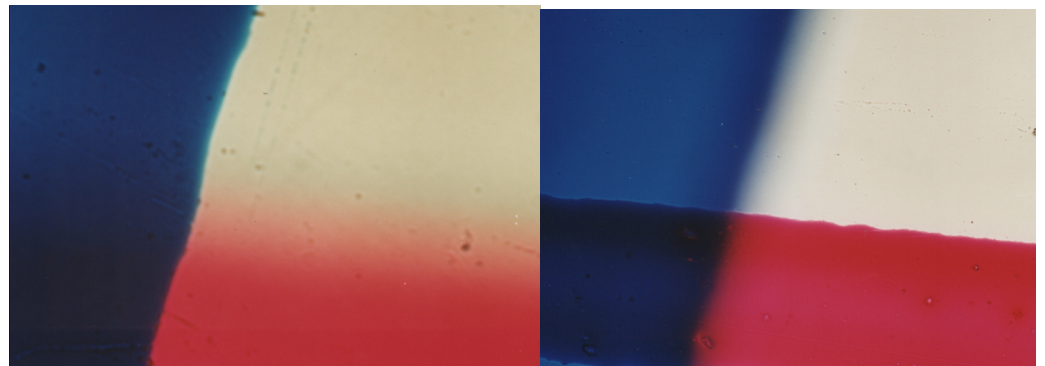
(C)



(D)



(E)



(A)

(B)

Fig. 2 – Microscopic visualization of a cover slip. In the central region of the cover slip, two lines were painted with different colors using a pen glass. A blue line (A) was painted on the up surface and another line (red) (B) on the bottom surface of the cover slip forming a cross. Using the “manual digimatic outside micrometer scale” (Mitutoyo, Japan), we found the thickness of 0.160 mm ($160\mu\text{m}$), from the superior surface of the superior line (blue) painted on the cover slip to the inferior surface of the cover slip (without painting the red line). The inferior surface of the cover slip was not painted (red line) in this procedure because, in the following procedure, we also used the superior surface of this inferior line painted on the bottom of the cover slip (tight to the glass) in order to calibrate the Z-axis. After this, it was necessary to check out the fine focuses scale of the microscope, the Z-axis distance from the superior surface of the superior line painted on the cover slip to the superior surface (tight to the glass) of the inferior line painted on the bottom surface of the cover slip as said before. In our microscope, we found this distance equal to 51 micrometers (Fig. 2). The scale of the fine focuses in our microscope was 50 micrometers (which means a rout of 360 degrees in fine focuses).

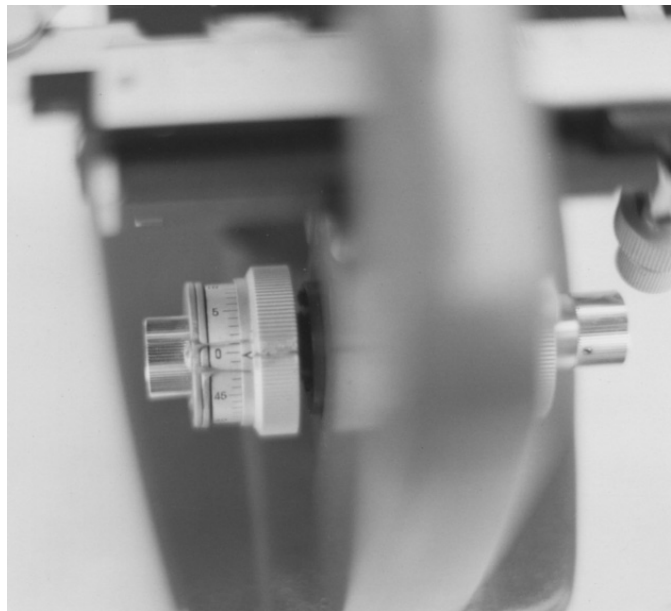


Fig. 3 – The correct position of the palettes welded in the rings of our microscope.



DISECTOR Z-AXIS MECHANICAL METHOD FOR STEREOLOGY

Z-Plane” that have to be chosen between two planes of an Optical or Physical Disector (Q^- or Q^+ plane) within arbitrary distance depending on the tissue studied. We also have to consider the thickness of the slice to avoid the problem of loss of biological structures on the surface of a histological section (Andersen and Gundersen 1999). In Disector, the particle touching the previously established “Forbidden Z-plane” must be excluded. Like the “Forbidden Line”, then, Disector could also be called “Forbidden Plane” or “Forbidden Z-plane”. Some other methods of excluding particles in the area do not have this same characteristic of having “Forbidden Lines”, neither the possibility of thinking about the existence of a “Forbidden Plane” or “Forbidden Z-plane” (Sterio 1984, Gundersen 1986). The elaborator of the Disector (Sterio 1984) (“Forbidden Plane” or “Forbidden Z-Plane”) had a profound knowledge of the “Forbidden Line” (Gundersen 1977, 1978, 1981).

Here we utilized a cover slip to calibrate the “Z-axis” of a not expensive old monocular microscope. Other option, more expensive, to calibrate the “Z-axis” fine focus of a microscope is the use of small spheres of a known diameter, for instance, micro-spheres with a diameter of $10\mu\text{m}$ (standard deviation = $0.08\mu\text{m}$, coefficient of variation = 0.8%) (Electron Microscopy Sciences, USA). Nevertheless, it costs about US\$275,00 (plus freight about US\$40,00).

The Olympus Denmark C.A.S.T. – Grid System, which we consider to be the best system to biological quantifications for Stereology, costs approximately 50.000 USD, which is very expensive to small and modest laboratories. Because of this, we aimed to develop a very simple procedure to calibrate and utilize microscopes to perform Optical Disector Method to permit all laboratories of the globe to enter in the world of Disector Method of quantification (Gundersen et al. 1988a, b, Nyengaard and Gundersen 1992, Xavier-Vidal and Madi 1999, Xavier-Vidal 2000, 2006, Xavier-Vidal et al. 2004, 2006).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

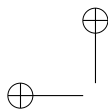
The author acknowledges so much his Lord and God

sure the thinking of the cover slips, and for his in and friendship; Prof. Doctor Jens R. Nyengaard (Biological Research Laboratory, Aarhus University, Denmark), Prof. Doctor Luiz Querino de Araúdas (Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Brazil), and Prof. Doctor Bertoldo Klinger Machado (Universidade Santa Úrsula (USU), Brazil), for their in and friendship; his student Prof. Luiz Roberto M. Barboza, for his questions and incentive; the author acknowledges, his father José Vandir Jorge Viçosa (Memoriam) and his mother Marina Xavier Viçosa for their incentive and support. During this work, the author had a PhD Grant from Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) – Brazil. The Xavier-Vidal Association acknowledged Faculdade Maria Thereza (FAMATH, Brazil) for the donation of the old fashion microscope here utilized. English revision of this article was performed by Maria da Graça Vidal Carneiro.

RESUMO

O propósito deste trabalho é a Calibração de um micrômetro comum de baixo custo de forma a usá-lo para estimar o Método Disector Óptico. A avaliação do viés e da calibração do “eixo-Z” foram feitas usando uma laminula e um “micrômetro manual digital” (Mitutoyo, Japan). Com a calibração da laminula, calibramos o “eixo-Z” de um microscópio. Foram pintadas duas linhas com diferentes cores utilizando canetas para vidro. Uma linha (azul) foi pintada na superfície superior da laminula e outra linha (vermelha) foi pintada na superfície inferior da laminula, formando uma cruz. Anéis de metal com uma paleta de metal soldada a cada um deles foram adaptados ao micrométrico do microscópio. A paleta foi soldada ao macrométrico do mesmo microscópio, que foi feito de forma a limitar o percurso do microscópio (eixo-Z) pela ação desta em conjunto com a ação das paletas fixadas no micrométrico. Os resultados mostraram que 10 micrômetros no “eixo-Z” do microscópio foi igual a 3,2 micrômetros na escala do seu micrométrico. Assim, um Disector de $10\mu\text{m}$ no eixo-Z é igual a 3,2 micrômetros no microscópio utilizado. Concluindo, a calibração do

é crucial para assegurar a precisão suficiente para as



Palavras-chave: estereologia, disector, disector óptico, morfometria, eixo-Z.

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