It is not good to analyse an epiphany too closely.

Three well-documented epiphanies occurred during Rademaker’s life. I give them here in chronological order. A fourth, less well-documented incident is recalled to round off this epilogue.

First of all, a group of English neurologists from the National Hospital in Queen Square, London, together with other scientists, visited Magnus’s laboratory in Utrecht in 1924. They were particularly struck by an experiment they saw Rademaker performing there. This event made a particularly deep impression on Francis Walshe, one of the neurologists, who was a member of Sherrington’s school, and he reported on it in extenso later. As he put it, “Rademaker was catapulted to fame and his name and appearance became symbols for the genius of the experimental physiologists from the grand school of Dutch physiology in the midst of the 20th century”. Walshe was well acquainted with experimental physiology in general and the decerebration model in particular, and in his own research he tried to find the significance of the results obtained with this model for neurology patients who might be thought to be in comparable clinical situations. (See Book VI, part 6.1 of this biography.)

Four years later, Raymond Garcin experienced a similar epiphany during a working visit of French physiologists and neuropsychiatrists to Amsterdam to view Prof. Brouwer’s newly opened neurology clinic at the University of Amsterdam. The French professor of Neurophysiology Henri Baruk, who had been working in Amsterdam for several months on a Rockefeller Foundation grant, acted as guide to the French delegation. During the visit, Rademaker gave a demonstration, which he accompanied by his own commentary in fluent French. The following quotation is taken from Baruk’s account of this visit, published in Revue Neurologique:

Nous n’oublierons jamais la magistrale démonstration qui nous fut donnée par Rademaker sur la preparation d’un chat décérébré dans la laboratoire de Brouwer. Son habileté était véritablement prestigieuse, grand majesteuse
autant que simple et modeste, Rademaker donnait une impression de force, et d’aisance que rien ne peuvait rebutter.

(We will never forget the masterly demonstration Rademaker gave of the preparation of a decerebrate cat in Brouwer’s laboratory. His skill was truly remarkable, his bearing at the same time majestic yet simple and modest. Rademaker gave an impression of power combined with unconquerable ease.)

Garcin in particular was literally dumbstruck by the demonstration. (Other members of the French delegation commented that he seemed to have received a ‘coup de foudre’.) He immediately changed his return ticket to Paris to allow him to continue his discussion with Rademaker about the latter’s other animal experiments and their significance for clinical practice. He forgot completely about the rest of the working visit and went off to Leiden where he stayed with Rademaker for a few days, leaving the rest of the French group to return to Paris without him, somewhat dumbfounded by his sudden departure. (See Book III, part 3.2.)

The third epiphany again involved Garcin. Rademaker only appears here indirectly. It has been reported in the Journal of Neurology by Garcin’s old pupil Prof. P. Rondot. Garcin had read a paper to the Société Neurologique in Paris in 1932 describing the animal experiments he had been carrying out with Rademaker since 1929 and his introduction of a new clinical sign, the step sign, derived from these experiments. During the discussion that followed, the grand old man of French neurology Babinski jumped up excitedly as if stung by a bee and asked Garcin’s permission to visit the latter’s ward to examine the patients in question himself since he suspected that the Rademaker-Garcin step sign might be related to his own Babinski’s sign. Garcin was so taken aback by Babinski’s totally unexpected request that he was seen to sweat profusely. This event was long discussed by French neurophysiologists: is not every day that one can present a new neurological reflex test… and even less frequent that such a discovery elicits such an enthusiastic reaction from so eminent a source! (See Book III, Part 3.2.1.)

The above incidents remind the author of the fact, also documented, that Rademaker’s old friend and former pupil Henk Verbiest, one of the first professors of Neurosurgery in the Netherlands, often asked him to give talks to small groups of colleagues and research assistants about the experiments that had been carried out in Utrecht and Leiden