

**Evaluation of the Anatomical Collection at the Anatomical Department I of LMU  
Munich concerning specimens deriving from victims of National Socialism**

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## **1. Information on mandate and procedure of the evaluation**

Following an invitation by Professor Jens Waschke, director of Department I of the Anatomical Institute of Ludwig-Maximilian-University (LMU) Munich, a commission was formed to evaluate the anatomical collections of Department I concerning potentially remaining specimens derived from bodies of victims of National Socialism. Traditionally Department I is responsible for the macroscopic collection, while Department II administrates the microscopic collection. Members of the commission were: Professor Jens Waschke, Anatomy LMU Munich, Department I; Professor Reinhard Putz, retired chair of Anatomy LMU München, Department I; Prof. Dr. Florian Steger, chair Institute for History and und Ethics in Medicine, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg; Mathias Schütz, MA, Institute for Ethics, History and Theory of Medicine, LMU Munich and Anatomy LMU Munich, Department I; and Sabine Hildebrandt, Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard Medical School, Boston. The group pursued its fact-finding mission in Munich from February 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 2014. At the beginning of the evaluation Prof. Waschke and Prof. Putz informed the other commission members that there was no written documentation on the origin of any of the specimens in the collection. Also, there do not exist any body-registers or specimen-registers from the 1930s and 1940s that could elucidate the sources of the specimens. Thus it was decided that, in addition to an on-sight inspection of the collection, further information should be gathered that had been passed down the generations of anatomists and technicians in an oral fashion. Invitations were extended to former members of the anatomical faculty and staff to share their memories of the collection and its creation with the commission. All colleagues were kind enough to accept this invitation, namely the current technicians Mr. Axel Unverzagt and Mr. Michael Becker from Department I; Professor Winfried Lange, retired from Department III; Professor Ulrich Welsch, retired from Department II; Professor Michael von Lüdinghausen, retired from Department I; Professor Hans Loeweneck, retired from Department I; Professor Helmut Bartels, Institute for Functional and Applied Anatomy

Hannover, formerly Department II; and Professor Wolfgang Eisenmenger, retired chair of the Department of Forensic Medicine, LMU Munich.

## **2. Inspection of the Anatomical Collections: teaching collection and anatomical exhibit**

The macroscopic anatomical collection of Department I consists of a teaching collection and an exhibit. Due to a recent complete renovation of the historic buildings of the Anatomical Institute, all collections have been newly sorted and relocated. Mr. Becker and Mr. Unverzagt, who have been working for Department I since the 1980s, are responsible for the maintenance and care of the collections. The teaching collection consists of two areas:

- Area 1: teaching collection of wet specimens, which are stored in large vats in a special storage room. These specimens are only taken from the containers for specific teaching events and are then returned. Area 1 is accessible only to the technicians and teaching faculty.
- Area 2: teaching collection with wet specimens stored in glass containers, some dry specimens, bones/skeletons and models. This area is accessible to the technicians, teaching faculty and researchers.

About area 1: Mr. Becker and Mr. Unverzagt reported that none of the wet specimens were older than 1959. Most, but not all, body parts and torsos carried wooden markers that indicated the year, in which the donated body was received, as well as the serial number the body was given in order of its arrival at the institute. These labels clearly correspond to individual donors. For example, if the label reads “88/70”, this indicates the eighty-eighth body received in the year 1970, and the donor’s name can be found in the body register of that year. There were two further labeling systems (white number on black ground, plastic; red number on white ground, enamel), which had been used on some specimens before 1995. None of these specimens was said to be older than 1959. A series of stillborn neonates had been received before the year 1984. Prof. Loeweneck confirmed that all the torsos had been dissected by him and his colleagues after his arrival at the

institute in 1959. There were no other markers that could lead to an identification of the specimens.

About area 2: This is a teaching collection with glasses that contain individual specimens or several specimens of one kind. The containers are only labeled with the name of the organ and/or type of dissection, e.g. “cranial nerves” and give no indication of the identity of the body they derived from. Mr. Becker and Mr. Unverzagt could identify several specimens as having been added to the collection during their time of employment. They were asked to label these newer specimens accordingly. No information concerning the age of specimens could be deduced from the shape or type of glass used, as some newer specimens had been embedded in older glass containers. Several specimens were injected with silicone, a technique that was introduced in the 1960s, and thus these specimens could also be excluded from the investigation. Apart from specimens of isolated organs, there were 20 to 30 head specimens. Prof. Loeweneck remembered the dissectors and the time of the dissection in all but four of these head specimens. These four specimens were then presented to forensic expert Prof. Eisenmenger with the question whether he could see signs of a beheading by guillotine on them. While he mentioned that he had had no previous experience with the investigation of executions by guillotine, he identified saw marks on the cervical body of one the specimens. Another specimen was decapitated below C7, a level too low for decapitation by guillotine. For two head specimens a conclusive verdict in terms of their origin in time was not possible and they were marked accordingly.

The anatomical exhibit is used as a study area for medical students and is open to the public on Monday afternoons. It has been newly arranged by Prof. Putz following the renovation of the building. During the relocation process Prof. Putz has handled every single one of the specimens for cleaning purposes and repositioning. He did not detect any indication on these specimens concerning their origin and/or the identity of the body from which they derived. Specifically, there was no indication that any of the specimens had an origin from the bodies of NS victims. The inspection of the collection by the commission could also not contribute to an identification. There were head and neck

specimens that show dissections identical to those of images from the atlas authored by Titus von Lanz, who worked at Department I from 1924 to 1938 and again from 1945 to 1967. These specimens show intact necks without any signs of strangulation marks. It is also unlikely that they stem from military executions during NS times, as Mr. Schütz pointed out that such bodies had not been delivered to the anatomical institute in Munich, according to the documents sighted so far. The anatomical institute was only slightly damaged during the war and the exhibit collection remained essentially intact. Prof. Loeweneck could identify many of the specimens as deriving from his own or his contemporary colleagues' dissections. He will make this information available for a new catalogue, which is being planned to accompany the exhibit. It should also be mentioned that Prof. Putz has included two showcases in the exhibit, which document the history of the anatomical institute. One section documents the unethical use of bodies of victims of the National Socialist system for anatomical purposes, and another one points out the contemporary annual memorial service organized by medical students in gratitude towards the body donors.

In conclusion to the inspection of the anatomical collection at Department I the commission stated that no indication for the origin of anatomical specimens from NS victims could be found due to a lack of identification on the specimens themselves or in the manner of their dissection. Most specimens in the teaching collection and the exhibit stem from a time after 1960. Two head specimens from the teaching collection could not be dated at all and an origin from NS times could neither be proved nor excluded. Thus these specimens will be marked and stored separately.

### **3. Information on previous inquiries and investigations of the collections, 1945 to 2014**

All anatomists interviewed for this evaluation confirmed that the anatomical institute in Munich had been object of several inquiries and investigations concerning bodies of NS victims since World War II. This information could be confirmed by a collection of

documents, which Prof. Putz has assembled in a file named “*Aktenordner NS-Präparate*” (file NS specimens) since the start of his work as the new director of Department I in 1989. This file is now maintained and continued by Prof. Waschke. Prof. Putz’ predecessors Robert Heiss, Titus von Lanz and Hans Frick had not archived any similar documents. Additional sources of information are available and referenced in the following chronological listing of all inquiries known so far:

- Winter 1946: inspection of the Bavarian Anatomical Institutes, including Munich, by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Removal of bodies of foreigners and German executed persons (Noack, 2012, p. 288). According to a statement by Mr. Haubner, technician at Department I from 1946 to 1981, 90 bodies of executed persons were still present at the anatomical institute on May 8, 1946. These were “not bodies of persons executed for political reasons” (Interview Mr. Haubner, January 26, 1993, *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*). The term “not bodies of persons executed for political reasons” should be noted here, as it reflects a common postwar perception, which did not take into account, that executions legitimate by NS-law might still be iniquitous. NS-legislation included capital punishment not only for murder and capital crimes, but also for minor delinquencies, e.g. looting and “defeatism”. At the time persons executed for non-political reasons were often not seen as victims of the NS system but as “common criminals. (Hildebrandt, 2013a, b). This perception is reflected here in Mr. Haubner’s statement.
- October 1947: intervention by Philipp Auerbach, State commissioner for the racially and politically persecuted in the Bavarian state ministry of Internal affairs. Auerbach demanded that bodies of executed persons should no longer be used for research purposes but be buried, and 22 bodies were confiscated by the UNRRA commission in October 1947. However, at least 18 bodies of executed persons were still being used for the medical dissection course as late as the winter semester 1947/48 (Noack, 2012, p. 290).
- 1970s: according to Prof. Loeweneck there had been a “First action” under the direction of Prof. Frick in the 1970s. Prof. L. reported that a commission from the

- US had visited the anatomical institute to inspect the macroscopic and possibly also the microscopic collection. The commission had also inspected other anatomical institutes. Specimens of unclear provenance have been removed from collections and buried. In Munich there was only one head specimen with injected vessels which was of doubtful origin and thus interred. At this point no corroborating documentation for this “First action” has been discovered.
- Summer 1988: the Israeli journalist Shaul Ben-Haim of the daily newspaper Ma’ariv paid an unannounced visit to the anatomical institute demanding access to the microscopic collection, which was granted. On inspection of the collection and files he found no evidence of specimens deriving from NS victims (interview with Prof. Welsch February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014; letter Profs. Welsch and Lange to Bavarian State Ministry of Science and Culture February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1989; *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*).
  - January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1989: Inquiry by the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and Culture on behalf of the Association of Anti-Fascists concerning the potential retention of remains from bodies of NS victims at the anatomical institute Munich. After discussions with their predecessors, Profs. Welsch and Lange answered that they excluded the possibility of the continued existence of such remains in their institute (letter Profs. Welsch and Lange to Bavarian State Ministry of Science and Culture February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1989; *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*).
  - February 2, 1990: inquiry from the administration of cemeteries Munich concerning potentially remaining specimens from NS victims at the anatomical institute and offer of a dignified burial place. Prof. Putz answered that such specimens did not remain in the collection (letter Prof. Putz to Friedhofsverwaltung München, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1990; *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*).
  - 1991-1993: inquiry by Prof. William E. Seidelman, McMaster University Canada, concerning reports that during the winter semester 1987/88 bodies of circumcised men had been demonstrated during anatomical lectures. Prof. Seidelman included the specimen numbers of 17 bodies in his letter. These bodies had been said to be those of “war criminals from the war years” (letter Dr. Vincent C. Frank-Steiner to Prof. Putz, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993, *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*). An internal

- evaluation as well as an inspection by forensic pathologist Dr. Randolph Penning and pediatric surgeon Dr. Hans-Georg Dietz of the LMU Munich followed and no signs of a ritual circumcision could be found on the bodies. The identifiable specimen numbers belonged to body donors of non-Jewish religion who arrived at the institute many years after the war (all documentation of the correspondence Putz-Seidelman in *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*).
- November 21th, 2001: inquiry by the author Sönke Zankel concerning the remains of the bodies of the members of the resistance group “*Weisse Rose*” (white rose; *Aktenordner NS-Präparate*). According to research by Thorsten Noack it is most likely that the bodies of Christoph Probst, Sophie Scholl and Hans Scholl had been retrieved from the anatomical institute by their families and were interred. Their graves are located next to each other in the Perlacher cemetery in Munich.

#### **4. Microscopic collection, Department II**

The microscopic collection includes the educational collections for the student courses in histology, the replacement collection for this course, the original blocks from which the specimen derived and a teaching collection from an embryology course, which is no longer taught. No other boxes of specimens are known. The microscopic slides are marked with numbers that identify their place in the course collection. There are no indications of either organ or donor source. Any relevant documentation or specimen registers that could aid the identification of any of these specimens do not exist. An unofficial inspection of the collection revealed no indication that any of the slides could stem from bodies of victims of the National Socialist system. An official internal inspection of the collection is planned for a later date.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The fact that all German anatomical institutes used the bodies of NS victims for anatomical purposes is well documented (Hildebrandt, 2009, 2013b). The anatomical institute of the LMU Munich used bodies of executed persons from the execution site Stadelheim for teaching and research (Noack, 2012; Schütz et al., 2013). These bodies were used in the anatomical dissection courses as late as the winter semester 1947/48. Thereafter several inquiries and inspections concerning the potential retention of remains of NS victims at the institute ensued and resulted in the removal of bodies, body parts and other specimens that were proven or likely to derive from NS victims. This fact, as well as the definite postwar provenance of many of the macroscopic specimen makes a continued presence of specimens deriving from NS victims in the collection nearly 70 years after World War II very unlikely. The absence of many of the body- or specimen-registers from the relevant time period and the lack of identification on the specimens themselves makes definitive statements as to their provenance difficult. Two of the head specimens from the teaching collection could not be dated at all.

In conclusion, the commission states that the continued existence of specimens derived from bodies of NS victims in the macroscopic collection is highly unlikely, but cannot be excluded in individual cases. Given the fact that this is a teaching collection and exhibit of unique historical value, containing irreplaceable anatomical specimens, the commission recommends retaining all specimens in the collection, with the exception of the two unclear head specimens mentioned. This recommendation is issued in accordance with the “Recommendations on the treatment of human remains in collections, museums and public places” issued by the *Bundesärztekammer* (Federal Physicians Association of Germany) from 2003 (Bundesärztekammer, 2003), which allows for the retention of specimens as an exception in cases valued as of higher importance (paragraph E III, Bundesärztekammer, 2003). The two questionable head specimens should be removed from the collection and either stored separately, in case a later identification should become possible, or alternatively should be buried in a dignified manner.

**Literature:**

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