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“Cleansing” anatomical collections: The politics of removing specimens from German anatomical and medical collections 1988–92

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SUMMARY

In 1989–90 an intense debate erupted in the Federal Republic of Germany over the status of anatomical specimens from the period of National Socialism. Pressure was brought on the German universities and research institutes to remove body parts. The solution was deemed rapid burial of all specimens whose provenance was in doubt. A range of options was considered, and the eventual decision to bury cremated remains was deemed the best way to draw a line under an uncomfortable past of Nazi medical atrocities. The aim was to achieve closure on this issue by a rapid “cleansing” of collections. However, identification of victims was left unresolved amidst the heated debates at the time.

Keywords

Nazi medicine; Nazi anatomy; Anatomical specimens; Victims’ burial; Anatomy; Euthanasia

In 1989–90 an intense debate erupted in the Federal Republic of Germany over the status of anatomical specimens from the period of National Socialism. Pressure was brought on the German universities and research institutes to remove body parts. The solution was deemed rapid burial of all specimens whose provenance was in doubt. A range of options was considered, and the eventual decision to bury cremated remains was deemed the best way to draw a line under an uncomfortable past of Nazi medical atrocities. The aim was to achieve closure on this issue by a rapid “cleansing” of collections. However, identification of victims, the circumstances of their death and the ensuing utilisation of their bodies for research and teaching were left unresolved amidst the heated debates at the time.

Since the early 1980s there was increasing concern with German medicine during National Socialism, and with continuities from this problematic past. At Tübingen a critical group researched Nazi medicine from the perspective of nature therapy, leading to wider concerns with the racialising of medicine (Wuttke-Groneberg, 1982; Volk und Gesundheit, 1982). Leftwing radicals argued that the academic establishment held positions of status, power and privilege, drawing on the legacy of National Socialism. In 1983 Götz Aly, a former Rote Hilfe activist, was researching towards a Habilitation in Political Science at the Free

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University Berlin; he applied for access to the collection of brain anatomical slides at the Edinger Neurological Institute in Frankfurt am Main. The slides derived from Julius Hallervorden who had been director of the histo-pathological department of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research at Berlin-Buch since 1937, and after the war at the Max-Planck Institute (MPI) for Brain Research at Giessen until the Institute moved to Frankfurt in 1962.

Aly was rightly concerned about provenance of the slides and specimens, and suspected their murderous origins, but his agenda was loaded with controversial political implications. Contention was that medical elites in the Federal Republic sustained authoritarian power structures from National Socialism on into the Federal Republic. As he bitingly wrote, “Die Täter waren vorher und nachher am Werk” (Aly, 1985a, p. 73). His application triggered a long-running discussion as to the status of the Hallervorden collection – whether it was a historical collection that might be considered “Archivgut”, or whether it fell under medical confidentiality restrictions? (Aly, 1984b). High profile newspapers publicised his confrontationist agenda. The accusations became news stories with significant national and international impact.

Once Aly’s permission to view the Hallervorden collection and associated archives was granted, he visited the Edinger Institute on 23–24 May 1984 and researched the documentation on each specimen. His detailed report Aly, 1984c to the Max Planck Society (Max Planck Gesellschaft, hereafter MPG) demonstrated that the Hallervorden collection included brains of “euthanasia” victims. He identified a group of 33 children, all killed on 28 October 1940. His verdict was that the brain sections should be destroyed “out of respect to victims of Nazism” (Aly, 1984a, 1985a, p. 78). Despite Aly’s documentation, his claims were regarded as contentious. Aly searched for further evidence at the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry in Munich on 1 April 1985. The ensuing publication by Aly (1985b) was strongly contested by Professor Peters as Institute Director (Peters, 1985).

Aly’s interest was in removal and destruction of the brain specimens. His concerns were the perpetrator elites and the continuities of power structures from the National Socialist era. His role was pioneering in terms of challenging anatomists with the legacy of the past. Yet he could not see beyond the issue of “disposal”. In the atmosphere of confrontation and defensive self-justification, the issues of commemoration, identification and responsibility were lost from sight. At discussions between Aly and the author of this paper in 1987, Aly appeared to have given no thought about what should happen to the specimens after their removal. I was left wondering whether burial might not be premature, in case a scientific technique was ever devised to determine individual identity.

Similar claims to those of Aly regarding a former Kaiser Wilhelm Institute’s involvement in murderous research were made by the geneticist Benno Müller-Hill in 1984 about Josef Mengele as the de facto Auschwitz-based assistant to Otmar von Verschuer, Director of the KWI for Anthropology. Müller-Hill pointed out the Institute’s role in obtaining blood samples and body parts such as heterochromic eyes of murdered victims (Müller-Hill, 1984; Hesse, 2001). The MPG consequently linked the accusations by Aly and Müller-Hill and searched for specimens that might have derived from Verschuer and Mengele. Despite the

apparent radicalism of their claims, Aly and Müller-Hill only repeated what was known at the time of the Nuremberg Medical Trial of 1946–47 on the basis of extensive documentation, suggesting that in the interim the concern to rebuild science in the Federal Republic had been accompanied by a politics if not of denial then of overlooking provenance of collections and how medical research had taken a key role in the realisation of National Socialist agendas (Alexander, 1945; Weindling, 2004). The MPG authorities were concerned both about the substance of Aly's accusations and their organisation's public image, but considered the claims regarding Nazi victims might well be exaggerated by leftwing radicals MPG, 1988.

Despite such scepticism the MPG set out to evaluate and verify Aly's documentation. Until 13 October 1989 when the MPG president issued a press statement acknowledging that certain specimens derived from euthanasia killings, its position regarding Aly's allegations was that the evidence was not conclusive. Scientists regarded the allegations as unproven, and defended the use of the specimens for research and teaching (Kreutzberg, 1989). In 1989 the position of both sides underwent modification.

Radical medical students took up Aly's accusations, and agitated on the issue of the retention of body parts of victims of Nazi "euthanasia" being used for anatomical teaching and research. The University of Tübingen was a crystallisation point. The historian Benigna Schönhagen documented how the anatomical utilisation of corpses made Tübingen the end point of Nazi extermination (Schönhagen, 1987, p. 119). Medical students at Tübingen initiated a series of lectures on Medicine under National Socialism. The anatomist Professor Ulrich Drews lectured on 17 November 1988 on the problem of the supply of bodies. The students supported excavations at the anatomical burial ground.

The regional television station, Badische Fernsehredaktion (1988) ran a programme on 19 December 1988 on anatomical specimens of National Socialist victims. Drews now denied that his institute held any remains of Nazi victims (Völklein, 1989). He later reflected on the customary depersonalisation regarding slides, "until now, nobody has thought about histological sections as being part of the body" (Walsh, 1989; Drews, 1992). The issue of provenance became crucial. When the national television station, ARD, broadcast a news item on 2 January 1989 about the use of Nazi victims' bodies for medical teaching, an international furore erupted. The sceptical detachment of the scientific community was overwhelmed by the lay public's indignation.

There were demonstrations at the German Embassy in Israel against the use of the body parts of Holocaust victims for teaching. The Israeli Minister for Religion, Zevelun Hammer, petitioned Federal Chancellor Kohl. The Federal Chancellor ordered on 11 January 1989 that all state ministries require universities to investigate the matter, and SPD and Green fractions lobbied on the issue (Dickman, 1989a). Aly intensified the public shock and horror with an article in the prestigious weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit*, using Hallervorden's request for brains ("the more the better"/"je mehr desto lieber"), appearing on 3 February 1989 (Aly, 1989b). Aly reflected how the problem related not only to the perpetrators but also to the wider scientific and medical community, "I have not heard of one German anatomist who after the war repudiated Nazi practices and buried his ill-gotten collection" (Walsh, 1989).

On 8 February 1989 the Bavarian Ministry for Science and the Arts (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1989) ordered that all specimens of Nazi victims and those of uncertain origins should be removed. This established a pattern for wholesale and rapid removal of specimens without resolving questions of provenance that would in turn have raised uncomfortable questions about the involvement of scientists in the Nazi “euthanasia” policies. While the killings of psychiatric patients were acknowledged, the role of researchers in obtaining brains and other body parts was not. The Minister for Science and Culture, Baden-Württemberg on 20 January 1989 and then the Hessen Wissenschaftsministerium required anatomical institutes to conduct a survey of their collections. Finally, the German conference of rectors on 25/26 January called for all West German ministers for higher education (Kultusminister) to undertake surveys of collections, and to remove specimens of victims of National Socialism and – importantly – those specimens of questionable origin (Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 1989). The period of denial and inertia of the 1980s had become transformed: removal and disposal were seen as a means of offering a final solution to the problem of anatomical body parts. Removal – nothing was recommended as to subsequent handling of the body parts – was prioritised over finding out about provenance.

The University of Tübingen was exceptional and exemplary in its conduct: it rapidly issued a public apology on 11 January 1989, and then convened a full commission on the matter. Anatomist Michael Arnold published in the *Deutsche Ärzteblatt* on 9 February 1989 on the need for transparency (Arnold, 1989). The Commission examined the contents of collections on a university-wide basis, and fully investigated the provenance of each specimen, taking account of earlier Allied post-war investigations, the definition of a National Socialist victim, and associated ethical questions. The Commission’s report was presented on 13 July 1989 (Tübingen University, 1989). Removal was accompanied by identification and full disclosure as to provenance.

The Tübingen model set a standard of best practice. The MPG recognised the importance of the “Tübingen formula”. However, the MPG adapted the model in two ways. The first was to modify the idea of a public commission to conform to the MPG’s internal procedures, essentially that of Selbstverwaltung. The MPG President Staab asked MPG archivist Eckart Henning to examine all relevant documents, patient files and specimen collections from the period 1933–1945 (Staab, 1989a; Henning, 1989a). Second, in the course of this, the MPG opted for complete removal of all dubious specimens from the period 1933–45. This complied with the requirements of the Kultusminister conference, and avoided the time-consuming tasks of tracing provenance and providing identification. This arose from a sense that the pressures of the situation called for prompt resolution, although the wider questions of scientists’ complicity in the killings were uncomfortable. Given the location of MPG collections in diverse institutes and their size, it would have taken some time and considerable research to have produced a report at a time when public pressure was building up. There were two further factors. First, the MPG understood that opinions might differ on exactly how to define a Nazi victim. The main international sensibilities concerned Jewish victims, and it was primarily in Germany that radicals were concerned with the euthanasia killings of the mentally ill and disabled. Second, the hope that removal of all dubious

specimens would ensure closure of the issue was an incentive for adopting the solution of rapid disposal.

Thus the MPG did not convene a public commission with external experts but conducted a comprehensive internal review. The MPG archivist undertook a full survey (Staab, 1989b). This involved careful inspection of various MPG holdings for neurological research, brain research, and psychiatry. The MPG was faced with the choice of a wholesale removal of specimens from the Nazi period, or (as Tübingen) instituting a commission to identify those preparations having an unethical provenance. Given that the latter would take time, a wholesale removal of all dubious specimens appeared the better option (Henning, 1989a,d).

On 27 April 1989 the MPG decided to follow its understanding of the “Tübingen formula”, in that all specimens for which the provenance was uncertain should be cremated. The ashes were to be buried. The glass slides would be buried as a melted glass block (MPG, 1989a). This led to some disagreements, as not all scientists wished to relinquish slide collections when a Nazi provenance was uncertain. The MPG re-inspected collections and pressed for a removal and collective burial of all slides and specimens of uncertain provenance for the period 1933–45 (Henning, 1989c; MPG, 1989b). All documentation was transferred to the MPG archives. By this time Aly shifted his position from destruction to burial. Thus effectively, both critics and holders of the collection found common ground.

However, not everyone agreed with the burial. Wolfgang Schlote (1989b) as Director of the Edinger Neurological Institute, Frankfurt am Main stated in a letter to *Die Zeit* that a mass grave was inappropriate. The slides needed to be kept at the relevant institute or in a special documentation centre. For the fate of victims had also been to be dumped in a mass grave. He finally reflected that we could never free ourselves from the past, but remembering was the way that one might live with it (Schlote, 1989c; Kreutzberg, 1989; Klee, 1989).

There was no composite listing issued to the public or kept for reference to the remains that were buried at the Waldfriedhof. The historian has to reconstruct this from documentation that the MPG has recently made available. A statement of 25 May 1990 was that the burial consisted of: eight euthanasia victims from the Hallervorden collection along with thousands of slides of unknown provenance; from Cologne, three uncertain cases; from Munich 650 cases of which 162 were children killed in euthanasia in Haar, and seven executed persons. Overall, 2940 specimens were removed from the Hallervorden Collection, housed at the Edinger institute. Other specimens came for MPI for Neurological Research (Cologne), and the MPI for Psychiatry (Munich). From the Luftwaffensammlung that had involved the neuro-pathologist Hugo Spatz, 1400 specimens and ca 250 organs were removed (Schlote, 1989a; MPG, 1989a; Dickman, 1989b, 1990; Henning, 1989b). The MPG took the burial in the Munich Waldfriedhof on 25 May 1990 as the opportunity to stress “Selbstbegrenzung” (MPG Presseinformation, 1990; Trauerfeier für Präparate von NS-Opfern, 1990; Staab, 1990). The implication of this principle was that this was an internal matter for academics to resolve responsibly without political or public interference. The burial tangibly demonstrated its competence so to do.

The MPI for Psychiatry examined the provenance drawing a distinction between different categories of criminality. It suggested that only certain persons be accorded burial at the Waldfriedhof, as fourteen appeared to have been legitimately condemned, whereas six persons were genuine victims of the Nazi “Terrorjustiz” (MPG, 1990). The evaluation of the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry holdings meant that at the same time the “genealogical collection Rudin” was evaluated as extensive – as a gigantic experiment covering the whole of Germany, linking the hereditary record of all hospital patients. This statement would seem to establish the value of its extensive patient and genealogical records. But in the rush to remove potential items of controversy, this collection was declared to be of no academic value and should consequently be destroyed (MPG, 1989a). However, later memoranda endorsed the historical value of the collection. The collection and the extent to which it has survived have an immense historical importance that needs to be fully assessed.

The number of victims, particularly from euthanasia killings, remained in dispute – the MPG said 33 children, but critics now stated ca. 700 children in the Hallervorden collection (MPG, 1989c; Aly, 1989a). The memorial celebration took place on 25 May 1990 at the Waldfriedhof Munich. The officiating religious ministers – Catholic, Protestant and Jewish – did not raise the issue of identity and provenance. Indeed, one wonders whether any Jewish victims’ body parts were buried at the ceremony. They legitimated a ceremony predicated on the idea of victims as a collectivity rather than as named and identified individuals.

The controversy found resonance abroad. International pressure threatened a boycott of German medical research, and this called for a rapid response. The MPG realised that identification would take considerable time and resources. It preferred complete and wholesale removal to settle the problem definitively. The international criticism called for identification, but did not offer to participate in what would have amounted to a significant undertaking. Those involved in criticising Nazi science from overseas never thought of making available resources of documentation in locations like the USA and Canada (where crates of documents on Nazi science and medicine were sent by post-WW2 Canadian scientific intelligence officers). Indeed in the Canadian case, what happened in terms of the seized documentation as part of a policy of scientific exploitation has never been assessed, and what happened to the crates of documents on medicine under National Socialism remains unclear (Weindling, 2010).

The Canadian physician William Seidelman argued forthrightly as regards the anatomical victims: “There must be public documentation of who these people once were, how they died and how institutions representing science, medicine and higher education used their remains for almost half a century after the defeat of the Nazi regime” (Seidelman, 1989a). On September 12 Seidelman and Caplan (1989) issued “A Call for an international commemoration” (Seidelman, 1989b,c). This sought to internationalise the understanding of any burials, and to construe them in the context of bioethics.

The student representative body, the Fachschaft Medizin, in Frankfurt considered various alternatives. The Frankfurt anatomist Jürgen Winckler, requested that the specimens be retained as both a memorial and a warning to scientists (Caro, 1990b). German universities considered that the reactions in Israel and North America were exaggerated, but they wished

to appease their critics in order that current research collaborations should not be disrupted. The reactions showed a high level of sensitivity over Jewish victims, but appropriate as far as large numbers of victims were indeed involved. There was public and political criticism of the academics on the domestic front. The Hessen Minister for Science and the Arts, Wolfgang Gerhardt (1989) complained about the reluctance of universities to survey their collections, and that he obtained a response only on the second time of requesting information. Frankfurt and Heidelberg adopted policies of rapid disposal. In the event the search for body parts from Auschwitz that might have been held by von Verschuer did not produce anything (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1989).

In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg the SPD presented a petition on 12 January 1989. In Heidelberg Rektor Volker Sellin phoned through the order for “complete removal” [vollständige Entfernung] on 13 January 1989 – “removal” being understood in terms of burial and in the case of glass slides their destruction (Eckart personal information; Eckart et al., 2006, pp. 665–6). On 20 January the state decreed that specimens obtained under National Socialism could no longer be used for teaching and research. Twenty-seven bodies and twelve sets of slides were removed from the anatomical collection, and in October 1990 buried in a collective grave marked to honour them as victims of Nazi justice. Their individual names were not given. It was stated that the remains of children killed for research under Carl Schneider were removed in the 1960s, around this time specimens of children killed for research at the Psychiatric Institute disappeared (Mundt et al., 2001).

By August 1990 the Hessen Wissenschaftsministerium and Frankfurt University were discussing burial arrangements. Universities in general favoured rapid “disposal” following the MPG’s example, rather than any investigative commission on the Tübingen model. For unrelated reasons Minister Gerhardt had to resign with the collapse of coalition in 1991, so that he could no longer contribute to the final report of the conference of Kultusminister. The momentum of political pressure was lost.

The victims’ bodies were seen as “polluting” German anatomical collections. The rapid disposal of specimens meant that rarely was there any investigation of provenance and identification. The whole “disposal” operation was conducted with little publicly available documentation. The hope was that with burial of body parts, the controversy would also be finally buried. The burial of body parts from certain universities took place in Frankfurt am Main in early December 1990. There were buried: 45 macroscopic specimens, one skull of unknown origins, 30 preparations of tumours and malformations from the Frankfurt obstetrics clinic, 35 histological preparations from the University of Marburg, 6 specimens of veins from executed persons, 10 specimens from the universities of Heidelberg and Leipzig, and a further 2050 specimens from the Frankfurt neurological institute (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1990). Burial was in large aluminium containers, following the precedent of the MPG.

Medical students complained that their researches into provenance were blocked. The Fachschaften Medizin of Frankfurt, Giessen and Marburg, and the student representative ASTA Frankfurt protested that organisations of victims and the persecuted were not invited to the resulting burial of body parts from Hessen universities in the Frankfurt Hauptfriedhof

in December 1990. Moreover, the students asked why were there no identifications and why was no research project on the topic initiated? With a flourish of heavy handed irony, the students complained that it was the successors of the perpetrators who organised the burial (Fachschaften Medizin Frankfurt Giessen Marburg, 1990). Newspapers like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) publicised these protests. The FAZ reporter noted the absence of identifying names, “Vor allem keine Namen. Wer die Toten waren, ob Mann oder Frau oder Kind, wieviel es waren, derer gedacht werden sollte, alles war unbekannt” (Schostack, 1990; Peiffer, 1991).

The pattern for most universities was a shift from denial to rapid disposal. The anatomical museum Hamburg closed but resisted scrutiny (Rothmaler, 1990). Each institution investigated and disposed of the body parts, as it thought best. There was no national collation of evidence, apart from the final report to the Kultusminister by the German universities in 1994. The report prioritised removal, but did not inquire further as regards the earlier removals of specimens and documents from the Psychiatric Institute Heidelberg or the Anatomical Institute of the Charité Hospital, Berlin (Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994).

The critics stressed also the priority of removal and disposal. In July 1990 the Frankfurt anatomist, Jürgen Winckler made a perceptive comment. He criticised the representative student Fachschaft as demanding what amounted to a “posthumous cleansing”. He pleaded that these specimens of a traumatic period should be retained by institutes as a “Mahnung”, a warning (Caro, 1990b). Winckler was clearly uneasy with the prevalent parlance – the idea that victims’ remains somehow polluted collections. He was concerned about the mode of thinking, that scientific integrity required defence whereas the victims’ body parts were deemed extraneous and defiling.

The Tübingen student Christoph Rubens went further: he argued that respect for the victims meant that they should not be used as objects of historical research. This position raises a further question – how historical research can serve the interests of commemoration. An alternative view would be that historical research is in the victims’ interests in that it restores a sense of human identity and integrity, and explains the reasons for the murderous dissections. However, the Tübingen commission realised a need for new guidelines and – something still not done – the adopting of international standards on how medical institutions should act regarding body parts of victims killed in the context of genocide and political injustice (Caro, 1990a).

The Tübingen commission raised the difficulty of how widely to define a victim of Nazism. Initially, attention was limited to Jewish and euthanasia victims. The Tübingen commission worked at first with a definition taken from the compensation law (BEG) of 1953. For anatomy it was problematic given the overall rise in executions under National Socialism, excluding certain categories of victims, not least suicides, and persons executed by special courts. The Commission recognised that there were substantial ethical problems regarding so-called “legally acquired bodies”. The Commission concluded with reflections on the need for fully open documentation, as well as ethical guidelines as the basis of anatomical collections that would bring Germany into line with other countries.

William Seidelman was invited to Germany to scrutinise the Commission's findings. Seidelman had reports of undisclosed body parts in Munich, but their existence could not be confirmed. In effect Seidelman took on the role of external scrutineer. The strength of his position was that he was well connected with the North American medical establishment, whom the German Foreign Office and academic interests were anxious to appease. Despite his engaged and committed efforts, his de facto role as scrutineer was by no means easy to fulfil, as the German academic institutions wanted closure rather than on-going research and commemoration. A full-scale critical history using archives and institute records did not follow.

The final report of the conference of Kultusminister of 25 January 1994 was a summary overview by the Länder (federal states), University and institution. The report took account of Seidelman's inquiries (although his name was consistently misspelt and University incorrectly located) and the inadequate disclosures by universities in the former German Democratic Republic. The University of Jena claimed not to have retained bodies from the era of National Socialism (Redies et al., this issue). The actual extent of anatomists involvement under Nazism was not under discussion (Redies et al., 2005). The report came to conclusions that minimised the issue. For in declaring that only two federal states (Baden-Württemberg and Hessen) found with certainty specimens with a Nazi origin, but in seven Länder there were specimens whose provenance was uncertain, it accepted the lack of serious research into provenance (Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994).

Overall, the report by the conference of Kultusminister was cursory – giving no indications of numbers of victims. The report relied on official notifications by university institutes. The question of individual identification was ignored showing that at that officials were concerned with removal and burial. The report was not published, again indicating a lack of accountability on the part of the German academic and political establishment. Regrettably from today's hindsight, it is clear that the report contained a number of inaccuracies. It was assumed that if an institute was destroyed in the war that its post-war collections were free from Nazi victims. This need not necessarily be the case given that collections could be out-housed, transferred and amalgamated. Moreover, student claims of confronting decapitated cadavers at institutes as at Giessen were later substantiated.

Austria had to wait for the international furore over the Pernkopf anatomical atlas, when Vienna convened a commission that did investigate provenance (Hubenstorf, 2001). Here Seidelman (2000, also this issue) in conjunction with Yad Vashem took a crucial role in driving forward the issue, as again the prospect of exclusion from North American medical circles caused concern. The university conducted comprehensive evaluations of all holdings, and certain other Vienna collections – notably that of the Spiegelgrund children – were also dealt with. At first, the City of Vienna decided not to opt for “disposal” or burial of the children's remains, but for an alternative, namely turning the collection into a memorial to itself, thereby avoiding to destroy it. It is interesting to note that certain neuroanatomists had also suggested this for the MPG specimens but that these were deemed not “Archivgut” (suitable for an archive). The report was not published, but remains available on demand (Vienna University, 1998). Other Austrian anatomical institutes, notably Graz and

Innsbruck, have still to resolve these issues. Further collections of body parts of victims in Vienna and Austria have still to be resolved (Czech, 2002).

Clearly, the majority of German universities and research institutes only followed what had become known as “the Tübingen model” in terms of disposal of specimens from Nazi victims or of doubtful provenance, but not their identification. Coming under public, student and international scientific pressure, the solution was that of rapid disposal of body parts. Collective burial in a grave without victims’ names appeared to offer closure. The German Anatomical Society (Anatomische Gesellschaft) took no position on the issue. No thought was given to German anatomical institutes beyond the borders of the Federal Republic, notably Austria. What the situation might have been at the Reich Universities of Strassburg, Posen, and Königsberg was not considered. The Strassburg case shows the need to identify victims, as until the victims were identified by Hans-Joachim Lang, all except one – identified from the tattoo of his Auschwitz number – were unidentified (Lang, 2004). Non-identification of the victims’ remains left multiple issues unresolved, even though – it was rightly pointed out – that to identify who the victims were would take time and resources. The dissenting views of the Frankfurt anatomists Schlote and Winckler show great sensitivity. The idea of continuing responsibility directly contrasted with the policies of rapid disposal and closure.

This paper is presented as part of a wider historical project to identify all victims of human experiments and coerced research under National Socialism (Weindling, 2011). Information on executed victims remains sparse – the detailed listing by Forsbach on anatomical victims at Bonn remains exceptional (Forsbach, 2006). It remains often necessary to identify the victims, the history of research undertaken on the body parts until the time of disposal, the circumstances of the disposal in each institution, the persons with administrative responsibility, and finally the legacy in terms of commemoration and any historical researches. Each victim deserves named commemoration, as well as full a documentation as possible (Weindling, 2010). The questions dealt with shows how standards have changed between 1990 and 2011. There is a greater readiness to divulge information on the period of National Socialism, and a far less defensive attitude. The transformation of values coincided with longer term structural changes of reunification. Here the universities of Berlin, Halle and Jena have shown themselves ready to engage with their past (Redies et al., 2005). Identification and burial of victims in Vienna, and a memorial in Heidelberg for victims of brain anatomical research are just two examples of recognition of victims as persons. These innovations represent on-going responsibilities rather than the closure that was strived for in the early 1990s.

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