Special Issue "Anatomy in the Third Reich"

Anatomists and historians review a dark period of German history

German anatomists were directly or indirectly involved in the tyranny of the National Socialist regime. They willingly accepted the bodies of thousands of Nazi victims and dissected them for teaching and research purposes. This association was topic of an international symposium of the Anatomische Gesellschaft (Anatomical Society) held in Würzburg/Germany in October 2010. The contributions to this symposium have now been published in the scientific journal Annals of Anatomy. The articles in this volume were written by anatomists, medical historians and historians not only from Germany, but also from the US, Israel and Great Britain. Guest editors of the issue are two experts on the issue, Dr. Sabine Hildebrandt, an anatomist of German origin who is teaching at the University of Michigan, and Dr. Christoph Redies, professor of anatomy at Jena University Hospital in Germany.

Several of the contributions to the special issue shed light on German anatomists' use of bodies of executed persons, who fell victim to the Nazi injustice system. This practice is described for the universities of Gießen, Göttingen, Halle/Saale, Jena and Würzburg in an exemplary fashion. "It can be assumed that similar procedures concerning the use of bodies of the executed took place at most - if not all - anatomical institutes in the Third Reich," says Christoph Redies, who documented the history of the anatomical institute in Jena during the Third Reich. Other articles deal with the post-war aftermath of this period in German anatomy, with a particular focus on the continued use of anatomical specimens that originated in the Nazi context. Last but not least, the anatomical society itself is a subject of the special issue, as well as anatomists whose lives and careers were disrupted or terminated by Nazi policies.

"The special issue summarizes the knowledge obtained in Germany and abroad during the last years and also identifies areas of future research that will require attention," emphasized Sabine Hildebrandt. "The recent candid treatment of this issue among German anatomists is recognized internationally."

With the special issue, the Anatomische Gesellschaft, an international society founded 125 years ago, acknowledges its involvement in this dark period of German history. Already in its Festschrift (memorial issue) on this occasion, the society published a memorial list of German anatomists persecuted by the Nazi regime.

**Literature:**
For additional background information, see also the home page of the Institute of Anatomy in Jena.

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