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INVITED REVIEW

### Anatomy in the Third Reich â€“ The Anatomical Institute of the *Reichsuniversit t Strassburg* and the deliveries of dead bodies

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### Abstract

August Hirt (1898â€“1945) was director of the Institute of Anatomy of the *Reichsuniversit t Strassburg* from November 1941 to November 1944. During this period, he was involved in many criminal activities: mustard gas experiments on prisoners of KL Natzweiler-Struthof, creating a collection of Jewish skeletons by gassing 86 Jews from KL Auschwitz in the Struthof-Natzweiler gas chamber, and involvement in experiments on phosgene gas performed by Otto Bickenbach. Extensive literature exists on these crimes. However, there has been very little work completed on the so-called normal activity of the Institute of Anatomy of which he was head and in particular the question of deliveries of corpses. We estimate that between 244 and 724 bodies were delivered to the Anatomical Institute of the *Reichsuniversit t Strassburg* between

1942 and 1944. In the course of our investigations, we have determined the identity of 232 corpses received between 1942 and 1944, the vast majority of Soviet prisoners of war from two hospitals for prisoners of war (Strassburg and Mutzig). Other sources of dead bodies have been found, such as hospital patients and French citizens who had been executed by shooting. Most of the corpses were used for dissection by medical students, but many anatomical preparations were also made from the bodies. The bodies were buried during and after the war, but the fate of the anatomical and histological specimens is unknown. Newly discovered archival record allowed us to identify and find three jars with tissues from the 86 gassed Jews. These pieces were in the Museum of the Institute of Forensic Medicine of Strasbourg. At this point the following proposals are made: (1) opening of the Medical Faculty of Strasbourg archives, (2) creation of an historical commission, (3) identification and publication of the complete inventory of all preparations at the Strasbourg Anatomical Museum, (4) research of the fate of the dry and wet preparations made under National Socialism, (5) verification of histological slides, embryological specimens and the tissues from the institutes already existing under National Socialism, (6) verification of the pieces of the Museum of Forensic Medicine, (7) publications of these results and information of the press and (8) creation of a memorial for the victims of the NS delivered to the Institute of Anatomy.



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## Abbreviations

ADBR, Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin (Strasbourg, France); AVCUS, Archives de la Ville et de la Communauté urbaine de Strasbourg (Strasbourg, France); BAB, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (Berlin, Germany); DCAJM, Dépôt central des archives de la Justice militaire (Le Blanc, France); KL, *Konzentrationslager* (Concentration camp); NS, National Socialism; RUS, Reichsuniversität Strassburg

## Keywords

August Hirt; Anatomy; National Socialism; Reichsuniversität Strassburg; Dead bodies; Strasbourg; Natzweiler-Struthof

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