



PERNKOPF'S ATLAS — A PRODUCT OF NAZI ATROCITIES PERPETRATED IN AUSTRIA DURING WORLD WAR II

David Querido

In 1995, Ernst¹ published a moving account of the history of the Medical Faculty of Vienna with particular emphasis on the consequences for the Faculty of the Nazi occupation of Austria in 1938. Ernst wrote the article following a period (1990 - 1993) as Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Medical Faculty of Vienna, during which time he 'gradually became aware of . . . [historical] events. . . and started researching them'.¹ The present author focuses on one aspect of Ernst's article, namely Pernkopf's *Atlas*, and presents additional information concerning this controversial work.

EDUARD PERNKOPF

Eduard Pernkopf was born in Rappottenstein (Lower Austria) in 1888, was educated at a secondary school (Horn gymnasium) which prepared students for university, commenced studies at the Medical Faculty of Vienna in 1907 and graduated in medicine in 1912.² In 1928 Pernkopf was appointed Professor of Anatomy in the Medical Faculty of Vienna, and in 1933 Director of the Anatomy Institute, at which time he commenced work on his anatomical atlas.²

Within a week of the Nazi occupation of Austria in 1938 Pernkopf, an 'outspoken Nazi',¹ was appointed Dean of the Faculty. One of his first tasks as Dean was the identification and dismissal of those members of staff considered undesirable by the Nazi regime; according to Ernst,¹ 153 of the 197 members of the Faculty were summarily dismissed — most emigrated, many died in concentration camps and some committed suicide. In 1943 Pernkopf was appointed Rektor Magnificus (President) of the University, and served in that



Eduard Pernkopf (1888 - 1955) as a young man. (Photo reproduced with permission from the Institute for the History of Medicine, University of Vienna.)

capacity until the end of the war.² As Dean/Rektor, Pernkopf must also be considered to have been ultimately responsible for the experiments performed on human prisoners at Dachau, under the leadership of Viennese Professors Wilhelm Beigelböck and Hans Eppinger, both of whom 'were discussed during the Nuremberg Trials: Beigelböck was sentenced and Eppinger committed suicide.'¹ Though never convicted of war crimes, Pernkopf did 3 years hard labour at an allied prison camp (Glasenbach) near Salzburg, and was released in 1948.² He then returned to the Faculty and continued working on his atlas until his death in 1955.

PERNKOPF'S ATLAS

Pernkopf's *Atlas of Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy*³⁻⁵ is an anatomical atlas comprising more than 800 meticulously detailed watercolour paintings of dissections performed by Pernkopf. He commenced work on the first volume in 1933, and the atlas was completed more than 2 decades later, after Pernkopf's death. The four Viennese artists responsible for most of the paintings were Erich Lepier (1898 - 1974), Ludwig Schrott jun. (1906 - 1970), Karl Endtresser (1903 - 1978), and Franz Batke (1903 - 1983).² All were active members of the Nazi party, to the extent that some of them incorporated Nazi emblems into the signatures on their paintings; Lepier used a swastika,² while Endtresser replaced the 'ss' in his name with the twin lightning-bolt emblems of the Nazi SS (*Schutz-Staffel*).⁶ These are still visible in early editions of the atlas, but the

David Querido is a senior lecturer in the Department of Physiology at the University of Cape Town. His research activities and fields of publication have included reproductive endocrinology, renal physiology and forensic science. This article reflects his strong opposition to human rights abuse in general, and to National Socialism in particular.



publishers have removed most of them from later editions. The atlas has been translated into several languages and has been disseminated across the globe.

Of particular relevance is the allegation that Pernkopf's *Atlas* 'contained material from children killed in a Viennese hospital'.¹ The source of this allegation, believed to be the thesis by Lehner⁷ (Professor E Ernst — personal communication, July 1997), is confirmed by Cutler,⁸ who states that 'a claim has been made that the gorgeous watercolor-wash illustrations of newborn infants in Pernkopf's section on abdominal viscera were made from murdered children', with Lehner's work quoted as the reference source.

Ernst's article prompted responses from several readers, in particular letters by Panush and Briggs,⁹ Panush,¹⁰ and Israel and Seidelman,^{11,12} and an article by Panush.¹³ Some believe that Pernkopf's *Atlas* should be removed from circulation.^{9,10,13} Although this end has not been achieved, Panush¹³ reports that Pernkopf's *Atlas* has been expunged from Saint Barnabus Medical Center. Others are of the opinion that a suitable acknowledgement, outlining the history of the atlas and commemorating the victims of National Socialism, be inserted into all future editions of the atlas.¹¹

DELVING INTO THE PAST

In 1995 Yad Vashem (the Israel Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority) requested of the Austrian authorities and the publisher that an official (outside) investigation be conducted to determine the identity, and cause of death, of the subjects portrayed in Pernkopf's *Atlas*.¹¹

Drugs in Lactation

UCT Medicines Information Centre

July 1998, A4 ring-bound

The UCT Medicines Information Centre has gathered information from a variety of sources in one easy to use publication. *Drugs in Lactation* groups drugs within therapeutic groups, gives recommendations and contra-indications, as well as adverse reactions. This peer-reviewed publication gives tips on how to pick the right drug for a lactating mother. It is produced in an easy-to-use, flip-open format, with each page printed on one side only. This leaves plenty of space for notes. Drugs of abuse, such as tobacco and alcohol are also covered.

Drugs in Lactation is available from the South African Medical Association (Multimedia) at R75 per copy, VAT and postage included. Please address your order to Private Bag X1, Pinelands 7430, or tel (021) 531-3081, e-mail: jstrydom@samedical.co.za or fax (021) 531-4126. Prepayment by cheque, Visa or Mastercard is required.

In November 1996 Prinz,¹⁴ of the Associated Press in Vienna, quoted the Deputy Dean of the Medical Faculty of Vienna as having said that it was 99% certain that Pernkopf's *Atlas* 'did not contain any drawings of Jews or other victims from concentration camps'. Whether or not they were Jews is irrelevant. What is relevant is that (at least some) were known to have been victims of political terror, since Pernkopf's

DEBRIDING NECROTIC ESCHARS (E.G. FOLLOWING AMPUTATION, DIABETIC FOOT ULCERS) WITH INTRASITE GEL.

It is effective in the most difficult cases of hard, necrotic eschars, which fail to respond to conventional treatments.

99 CLINICAL STUDY 3

BALE S.* BA, RGN, NDN, HV, DipN, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Dept. of Surgery, University of Wales College of Medicine and HARDING K.G.* MB, ChB MRCCP, Honorary Research Fellow, Dept. of Surgery, University of Wales College of Medicine

*Data on file at Smith & Nephew

IntraSite® Gel

THE WORLD'S BEST SELLING HYDROGEL



Smith+Nephew
Leadership in Worldwide Healthcare



institute is known to have received bodies of prisoners executed at the Vienna district court and at Gestapo execution chambers in Linz, Munich and Prague.¹⁵

According to Prinz,¹⁴ the Dean of the Faculty is alleged to have said that Pernkopf had protected the Austrian assistants who made the anatomical drawings from being drafted into the German army. 'Out of gratitude, those added swastikas to some of the paintings.' This contradicts an authoritative work by Williams.² In 1988, Williams published an article on the history of Pernkopf's *Atlas*. While acknowledging that Pernkopf's *Atlas* will always remain controversial (by virtue of its association with Nazism), Williams wrote the article primarily as an appreciation of the artistic merits of the atlas and personally interviewed Batke and relatives of Pernkopf as well as some of the other artists. It is a scholarly work, providing details of the personal and professional lives of Pernkopf and his collaborators.

Williams states that 'Batke, a front line soldier in the German army, participated in field operations in Russia in 1941, for which he was awarded the Iron Cross, first and second class. . . . Endtresser and Schrott were also in the military, Endtresser seeing action on the Eastern Front and Schrott on the Western Front.'

The February 1997 edition of the *British Medical Journal* contained an announcement that the University of Vienna had agreed to investigate the university's involvement with Nazism,¹⁶ and in August 1997 the University of Vienna issued to universities and libraries a notice, for insertion into the atlas, entitled 'Information for Users of the Pernkopf-Atlas' (Public Relations Department of Yad Vashem — personal communication, November 1997). The notice informs readers that an official investigation is underway to determine whether 'corpses or parts of corpses of victims of the National Socialist despotism. . . [were used to produce] some of the anatomic reproductions' contained in Pernkopf's *Atlas*. The notice also provides information concerning the publication history of the atlas, and of the posts held by Pernkopf, 'a high-ranking Austrian National Socialist.' It concludes by informing the reader that it is 'the ethical responsibility of the individual user to decide whether and in what way he uses this work until the investigation results are published.'

CONCLUSION

Whatever the outcome of the official investigation, Pernkopf's *Atlas* should be seen not only as 'the pinnacle of color anatomic illustration',² but also as a tangible legacy of Nazi atrocities perpetrated in Austria during World War II.

The present author is of the opinion that Pernkopf's name should cease to be 'remembered and honored through the atlas',¹¹ and that the atlas should be unconditionally condemned and excised from the body of literature from which we seek enlightenment. It should, however, be retained within

archives as a grim reminder of an era in which the medical profession of the Third Reich, abandoning its fundamental principle of 'First, do no harm', committed 'medicalised murder'¹⁷ in accordance with Nazi tenets of 'race hygiene'. The lessons of the genocide, which 'might have been avoided but for the active leadership of the medical profession',¹ should never need to be learned again.

I wish to thank the following people for their assistance during the preparation of this article: Professor S R Benatar (Head, Department of Medicine, University of Cape Town and Director of the University of Cape Town Bioethics Centre) for inviting me to present this material at the meeting of the Bioethics Centre held at Groote Schuur Hospital on 28 November 1997, and for the valuable discussion which ensued; Professor E Ernst (University of Exeter), for providing reprints of many of his articles, for directing me to additional reference material and for offering advice; Professor R S Panush (Saint Barnabus Medical Center) for providing reference material not available locally; and the Public Relations Department of Yad Vashem, for providing a copy of the 'Information for Users of the Pernkopf-Atlas'.

The opinions expressed by the author are his alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of Cape Town or of the University of Cape Town Bioethics Centre.

References

1. Ernst E. A leading medical school seriously damaged: Vienna 1938. *Ann Intern Med* 1995; **122**: 789-792.
2. Williams DJ. The history of Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*. *J Biocommun* 1988; **15**: 2-12.
3. Ferner H, ed. *Atlas of Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy* (Translation of: Eduard Pernkopf. *Atlas der topographischen und angewandten Anatomie des Menschen*, tr by H Monsen). 2 vols. Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1963/64.
4. Ferner H, ed. *Eduard Pernkopf Atlas of Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy*. 2nd ed. Vols 1-3. Baltimore-Munich: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1980.
5. Platzter W, ed. *Pernkopf Anatomy. Atlas of Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy*. 3rd ed. Vols 1-3. Baltimore-Munich: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1989.
6. Broder J. The corpses that won't die. *Jerusalem Report* 1996; 22 Feb, 24-25.
7. Lehner M. *Medizinische Fakultät der Universität in den Jahren 1938 - 1945*. Dissertation, University of Vienna, 1990.
8. Cutler DS. Origins of the Pernkopf Anatomy Atlas (Letter). *JAMA* 1997; **277**: 1122.
9. Panush RS, Briggs RM. The exodus of a medical school (Letter). *Ann Intern Med* 1995; **123**: 963.
10. Panush RS. Nazi origins of an anatomy text: The Pernkopf Atlas (Letter). *JAMA* 1996; **276**: 1633.
11. Israel HA, Seidelman WE. Nazi origins of an anatomy text: The Pernkopf Atlas (Letter). *JAMA* 1996; **276**: 1633.
12. Israel HA, Seidelman WE. Origins of the Pernkopf Anatomy Atlas (Letter). *JAMA* 1997; **277**: 1123.
13. Panush RS. Upon finding a Nazi anatomy atlas: The lessons of Nazi medicine. *Pharos* 1996; **59**(4): 18-22.
14. Prinz R. School denies Nazi link. *Associated Press*, 29 November 1996. (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/anatomy.html>).
15. Charatan FB. Anatomy textbook has Nazi origins (News). *BMJ* 1996; **313**: 1422.
16. Charatan FB. Investigation of Nazi anatomy textbook to start (News). *BMJ* 1997; **314**: 536.
17. Ernst E. 50 years ago: The Nuremberg Doctors' Tribunal. Part 1: the descent towards medicalised murder. *Wien Med Wochenschr* 1996; **146**: 574-576.