

06.07.2017

Historical Commission for the Medical Faculty of the Reichsuniversität Straßburg, 1941-1944

Background

At the suggestion of the former President of the Université de Strasbourg Alain Beretz and the then acting President of the University Michel Deneken, the Université de Strasbourg (Unistra) decided on 27 September 2016 to convene a historical commission to investigate the history of the Medical Faculty of the Reichsuniversität Straßburg (RUS). The Commission is international in its composition and independent in its statutes. The Commission is investigating the period between 1941 and 1944 as well as earlier and later periods.

The Commission is evaluating all Unistra medical collections to make sure that there are no specimens of victims of National Socialism remaining in its collections. Because of its role in the Jewish skeleton collection and other research on Nazi victims, the Anatomical Institute's collections are being given special attention with the support of its Director. Other key institutes are pathology, psychiatry and surgery. Military research on chemical weapons is being reconstructed as involving often deadly human experiments.

The Commission consists of 12 members:

Five external experts from outside the University of Strasbourg :

- Prof. Hans Joachim Lang, cultural anthropology, Universität Tübingen.
- Prof. Volker Roelcke, history of medicine, director of the Institute for the History of Medicine, Universität Giessen.
- Prof. Carola Sachse, contemporary history, Universität Wien.
- Dr. Florian Schmaltz, contemporary history and history of science, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin;
- Prof. Paul Weindling, historian of medicine, Oxford Brookes University, and member of the Research Centre of the German National Academy of Sciences, Leopoldina.

Five members from the University of Strasbourg :

- Prof. Christian Bonah, history of life sciences and health, Unistra
- Prof. Jean-Marie Le Minor, anatomy, Unistra
- Prof. Catherine Maurer, contemporary history, Unistra
- Prof. Jean-Sébastien Raul, forensic medicine, Unistra
- Prof. Norbert Schappacher, history of mathematics, Unistra

Two external specialists:

- Dr. Frédérique Neau-Dufour, director of the Centre Européen du Résistant déporté (CERD),
- Dr. Raphaël Toledano, independent researcher, Strasbourg.

The Commission Presidents are Prof. Paul Weindling and Dr. Florian Schmaltz, who were elected by the members of the commission at its first meeting on 27 September 2016.

That two specialist historians and the five international members are all without affiliation to Unistra means that a majority of the members are not affiliated to Unistra. This guarantees the independence of the commission.

Aims

The Commission conducts objective and impartial research on the faculty of medicine of the Reichsuniversität within the wider context of the Nazi system of power, and the post-war period.

The research agenda includes:

- The scientific and political activities of members of the Reichsuniversität (1941-1944).
- The links of the Reichsuniversität to the concentration camp of Natzweiler-Struthof.
- The involvement of the SS and other agencies, including the German Research Fund (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) in supporting research at the Reichsuniversität.
- Identification of victims of research, administrative and medical practices and persecutions which took place at the Reichsuniversität, especially for the many Jewish and Roma victims.
- The staff and students of the Reichsuniversität.
- The identification of human remains produced by the Reichsuniversität, and their use for teaching and research;
- The transfers of collections and evacuation of staff at the end of the war, and post-war continuities.
- The longer term impact and representation of the activities of the Reichsuniversität Medical Faculty after 1945, as well as the continuities and discontinuities between the RUS and the Université de Strasbourg.

The Commission has a three-year full time postdoctoral researcher, Dr Gabriele Moser, and a first doctoral studentship to conduct further research on the collections of the pathology, psychiatry and surgery is about to be filled. It is hoped that further studentships will reconstruct staff and students, and military research on chemical weapons as involving human experiments.

We ask anyone holding documents, photos, or family papers, as well as persons with a special interest in the topic to contact us.

Contact presse

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