

Articoli/*Articles*

“IN ALL ITS HIDEOUS AND APPALLING NAKEDNESS AND TRUTH”: THE RECEPTION OF SOME ANATOMICAL COLLECTIONS IN GEORGIAN AND VICTORIAN ENGLAND

LAURENCE TALAIRACH-VIELMAS

Alexandre Koyré Centre for the History of Science and Technology (UMR 8560
- CNRS - EHESS - MNHN)

SUMMARY

This article explores the reception of some anatomical collections in Georgian and Victorian England. Both private medical museums and public anatomical museums reflected the central role played by anatomy in medical knowledge and education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, because they were associated with death and sexuality, anatomical museums were both products of enlightenment science and potentially immoral loci likely to corrupt young and innocent women. But, as this article shows, the reasons behind the hostile receptions of some collections varied throughout the centuries, revealing in so doing the gradual professionalization of the medical field and growing monopoly of medical professionals over medical knowledge.

The Specola museum, which opened in Florence in 1775, attracted numerous European travellers. Many diaries, travel narratives or guidebooks published throughout the nineteenth century recorded the visitors' or reviewers' impressions. Some, like Stendhal, for instance, admired the collections, particularly praising the orderly exhibition of anatomical objects:

Key words: Anatomical museums - Anatomical models – Wax - Audiences

Musée d'histoire naturelle. – Quel plaisir doit avoir un anatomiste en entrant dans le Musée ! Rien ne m'a paru plus propre, plus net, plus instructif. Ces signes sont disposés de manière à donner sans efforts des idées nettes. La salle des accouchements me semble fort supérieure à celle de Bologne et de Vienne. Je me souviens avec plaisir de la visite que je fis à l'Académie Joséphine et à cette salle with lady A.

Je vois avec le plaisir des yeux d'un ignorant les muscles et les nerfs, qui sont exprimés très nettement ... J'ai vu ici le premier squelette qui m'ait paru beau. On sent de quel genre de beauté est susceptible un squelette : le grandiose ; mais il en a vraiment. Il est à gauche en entrant dans les salles de préparations en cire, dans une belle cage de verre¹.

For others, however, the exhibited models were too unwholesome to be shown to all audiences. As Lady Blessington put it, for example, the Gabinetto Fisico was a revolting place, in particular because the anatomical models revealed the body's most private secrets:

I entered the Gabinetto Fisico today, and though I only remained a few minutes ... I carried away a sense of loathing that has not yet left me. Surely some restriction should exist for preclude men and women from examining these models together! ... It is meet that we should know that we are fearfully and wonderfully created; but not that we should witness the disgusting and appalling details of the animal economy in all its hideous and appalling nakedness and truth. What a lesson for personal vanity does this exhibition convey!

I told that its fearful images will recur to my memory when I behold some creature, in the zenith of youth and beauty, who almost believes that she is not formed of the perilous stuff so shockingly delineated in the Gabinetto Fisico².

Blessington's review of the place highlights her concern with the issue of audience and the fact that men and women alike were allowed to visit the place simultaneously. It is, similarly, what Joseph Forsyth noted as well in his travel book, as the mysteries of the human body on display were not unrelated to sexual reproduction:

I was struck by the immensity of this collection, which occupies fourteen rooms ...

This awful region, which should be sacred to men of science, is open to all. Nay, the very apartment where the gravid uterus and its processes lie unveiled, is a favourite lounge of the ladies, who criticise aloud all the mysteries of sex³.

The fact that the Florentine anatomical models could provide sexual information to the “gentler sex” permeated, indeed, many reviews, be they written by men or women. If the Specola Museum epitomized enlightenment science, the knowledge about sexuality that was unashamedly on display should be reserved for mature men only as most reviewers suggested:

Le Musée d’histoire naturelle renferme dans des salles séparées de belles collections des trois règnes. Quatorze chambres et une galerie sont entièrement remplies d’ouvrages en cire, formant un cours complet d’anatomie humaine ; on y voit toutes les pieces les plus secrètes de notre machine. Cette partie du musée est sans doute très-curieuse ; mais l’entrée ne devrait, ce me semble, en être permise qu’aux hommes de l’art ou aux personnes d’un âge mûr⁴.

The fainting of many women during the guided tour of the Specola anatomical collection is another indication of the impact that the models had on the “weaker sex”⁵, and visitors frequently regarded the visit as “a sort of pre-deflowering [that] was sometimes even planned”⁶. Moreover, if, apart from some middle- and upper-class reviews, such as the ones above mentioned, little remains known of the reactions of less cultivated visitors, Anna Maerker suggests that the administrators’ decision to put locks on the showcases displaying the genitals was probably symptomatic of many visitors’ responses to the Italian anatomical collection⁷.

These reviews of the Specola anatomical waxes are good illustrations of the mixed responses spurred by anatomical collections. Even if the Italian anatomical Venuses looked more sleeping than dead, their nakedness and open bodies offered to the audience’s gaze were more

often than not deemed indecent for the “gentler sex”. As this article will show, because they were associated with death and sexuality, anatomical museums were both products of enlightenment science and potentially immoral *loci* likely to corrupt young and innocent women. For, although the Specola was the first scientific museum that was opened to the public, the debate around the Specola collection was certainly not new in the last decades of the eighteenth century and may be traced back to the beginning of the circulation and exhibition of anatomical collections, notably in England. However, as shall be seen, the reasons behind the hostile receptions of some collections varied throughout the centuries, revealing in so doing the gradual professionalization of the medical field and the growing monopoly of medical professionals over medical knowledge.

“To the Curious of both Sexes”: Early Enterprises

In eighteenth-century England anatomy was mostly taught privately through lectures. These lectures were generally illustrated with imported anatomical models, such as the models by the French surgeon Guillaume Desnoues († 1735). The French surgeon exiled in Italy started working in 1699 with the Sicilian modeller Gaetano Giulio Zummo (1656–1701), famous for his macabre artworks, such as *The Plague* or *The Tomb*, which featured decomposing corpses. The partnership aimed at first at providing Desnoues with enough models and preparations for his courses. But the two men quickly started exhibiting and selling their models. Although the association of Desnoues and Zummo did not last long, both went on making, exhibiting and selling anatomical models in the following years, this time in Paris. Desnoues formed a partnership with another artist, François de La Croix, presenting his models for the first time in Paris in 1711 and creating the very first museum of wax anatomical models⁸. The models did not stay in Paris, however, but were soon exhibited in Europe, in particular in England, where many anatomists giving lectures for

professional and lay audiences were in need of models to illustrate their talks. The scarce number of modellers in England (apart from Joseph Towne (1806–1879) who was active in Guy's Hospital in the mid-nineteenth century) explains why English anatomists imported many models for their private lessons, especially as in England the shortage for corpses for dissection, which intensified throughout the eighteenth century because of the rise of private medical schools, made artificial and natural anatomies all the more valuable. Hence the interest in Desnoues's models.

Many of the notices pointing out the circulation and exhibition of Desnoues's models provide indications as to the reception of anatomical waxes in Georgian England. In August 1718, the *Daily Courant* published a notice announcing that Desnoues's models were still to be seen in London but should soon leave for France. The "Price as usual"⁹ suggests that the models had already been exhibited in London before that date. In March 1719, the same journal notified that four new models were then to be seen near Southampton Street in the Strand "to the Curious of both Sexes", offering different prices for those who had already seen the other models and would only like to see the new ones¹⁰. As the adverts suggest, Desnoues's waxes were used by British surgeons, like John Sargent in Charles Street, Covent Garden in 1728¹¹. From 1718 to 1728, the adverts all imply that the wax models could be seen by men and women alike. However, in 1728 the notice made explicit that a "Gentlewoman [would] attend the Ladies" who wished to look at the exhibits whilst Sargent's lectures seemed more intended exclusively for the gentlemen willing to know more about anatomy. Two years later, the *Daily Journal* reported that the models brought over from Paris were now to be seen at the chemist's at the corner of Pall Mall. Among the four models described in the advertisement, "The Body of a woman big with Child, wherein is seen the natural Position of the Foetus before Terme" and "The Real Body of a Woman gone nine Months with Child, dried

and prepared, with the Muscles, Viscera and Womb”¹² stressed the focus of the collection on sexual reproduction. In February 1731, Desnoues’s models were this time associated with the surgeon Abraham Chovet, “demonstrator of anatomy at Surgeons’s Hall”, who illustrated his anatomical lectures with Desnoues’s models and his own,¹³ offering various anatomical courses as well,¹⁴ making the exhibition “the most complete of any thing in that Kind in Europe”.¹⁵ The association of Desnoues’ and Chovet’s anatomical models and the ways in which both were presented in notices is indicative of the audiences that anatomical demonstrations and exhibitions targeted in eighteenth-century England. At the time (1733) Chovet promoted his sensational model of “a Woman chain’d down upon a Table, suppos’d open’d alive; wherein the Circulation of the Blood is made visible through Glass Veins and Arteries; the Circulation is also seen from the Mother to the Child, and from the Child to the Mother; with the Histolick and Diastolick Motion of the Heart and the Action of the Lungs” through various notices, exhibiting the model at his place or at other medical professionals’. In most of the announcements of the exhibition of his parturient figure readers were informed that “a Gentlewoman, qualified, [would] attend the Ladies”¹⁶. But Chovet also proposed courses on “Human Anatomical Operations in Surgery, with Fractures, Dislocations, and their Several Bandages” at his house, for instance, this time the adverts aiming, it seems, at a more professional audience¹⁷.

The idea that the models could be seen by women while the lectures were more reserved for a male (professional) audience increasingly marks the separation of male and female audiences. The case was fairly similar with Desnoues’s models. After Desnoues’s death, his nephew and heir, M. Lacourège, decided to sell Desnoues’s models at auction. The models were then exhibited at Somerset House and Cecil Street in March 1736¹⁸, and a day was reserved for “Ladies only”¹⁹. On May 11, most of the models were bought by Dr. George

Thompson and remained exhibited at Somerset House, “gentlemen” being admitted on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays while “ladies” on Wednesdays and Saturdays.²⁰ The number of models varied between 14 and 17²¹ whole models, the exhibition offering examples of human and animal anatomy, natural and artificial anatomies, complete models and parts. In August of the same year, a special mention appeared in an advert highlighting the “real Body of a Virgin, where all the Solid Parts, both External and Internal, are severally discovered”²²; on another notice could be read that the “Dissection of the real Body of a Woman that died in Labour” may attract “the Curious and Learned Part of the World”²³. Revealingly, the advert published on 14 August 1736 mentioned for the first time that the objects were exhibited in glass frames²⁴. This detail illuminates the gradual transformation of the place into an anatomical museum, clearly denoting a dividing line between the public and the exhibited objects. Moreover, male and female audiences are still separated, with days reserved for gentlemen and women. Around the same time, Chovet’s figure, representing “a Woman big with Child, suppos’d to be open’d when alive”, was still to be seen in London for the same price (one shilling) and opened to “ladies” on Wednesdays and Saturdays²⁵. Although this time no mention was explicitly made of a “qualified” female attending the ladies for Desnoues’ and Chovet’s models, the patent separation of the objects from the public, as well as the separation of gendered audiences, intimate the licentious content of anatomical exhibitions.

The fate of both Chovet’s and Desnoues’ models in the second half of the eighteenth century brings to light the connections between their audiences and the breaking up of some collections. In 1739, George Thompson published a new catalogue for the exhibition, pointing out “the different Positions of the Child in the Womb &c., as they are exactly and accurately shewn in Anatomical Wax-Figures of the Late Mons. Denoue”²⁶, to which was added in 1742 “A Dissertation

on the Parts of Generation in Men and women, of the Foetus in the womb, of the Birth, &c²⁷. The association of the anatomical models with the development of the discourse and knowledge about sexual reproduction throughout the eighteenth century is significant. For it shows how the emergence of gynaecology and obstetrics was linked to debates around the appropriateness of anatomical collections for female audiences. Indeed, anatomical knowledge raised suspicions because of its frequent focus on sexuality. But the debate was frequently crystallised around waxworks, as this passage from a pamphlet on the state of matrimony illuminates:

Tis a deplorable Truth, that our young Ladies, a great many of them at least, are wiser, and more knowing in the Arts of Coquetry, Galantry, and other Matters relating to the Difference of Sexes, &c. before their come to be Twenty, than our Great-Grandmothers were all their Lives. Thanks to our Plays, Songs, Poems, and more Conversation, for that; unless you will allow the late Anatomical Wax-Works with the Explainers of them, to have a great Share in teaching them such useful Knowledge. I really wonder some of our breeding Women did not bring forth Children, cut and mangled after the same Manner, unless such Births are meer Fables. Perhaps they are grown so familiar with such Speculations, that now they make no impression on them. However, I believe our Women would be full as good Breeders, and our Young Men as proper for the Propagation of their Species, without such vast Knowledge of the Parts belonging to it²⁸.

It may be difficult to say for certain that such recommendations to keep women away from anatomical knowledge and/or anatomical waxworks was a mere sign of Georgian prudishness. For women's practical role as healers at home and their knowledge over birthing was soon dismissed as being unscientific at the time when eighteenth-century scientists turned to women's reproductive functions and defined gynaecology and obstetrics as a male medical profession. The responses to anatomical collections and female audiences must therefore also be related to the growing exclusion of female midwives and control of male medical practitioners. Indeed, the re-

ception and fate of some collections were partly related to their link with medical figures who became associated with fringe medicine. This idea is particularly illustrated by the circulation of both Chovet's²⁹ and Desnoues's waxworks in the following decades. Their anatomical models all found their way into Rackstrow's museum and were exhibited for some time on 197 Fleet Street in London in the 1740s. A notice dating from 1746 advertised Chovet's sensational anatomical model, displayed at "B. Rackstrow's, Statuary, in Fleet-Street", and a catalogue was published in 1747 to explain the figure exhibited with "other curious anatomical preparations" at Rackstrow's³⁰. Both the advert and the publication stress that lay audiences were welcome to visit; but a note was added, however, in the advert: "Due Attendance to show the Figure, and other curious Anatomical Preparations. A proper Person to attend the Ladies"³¹. The female lecturer was of course intended to ensure the respectability of the place. But the interesting detail here is that, unlike former demonstrators, Rackstrow was not a medical professional. However, as Matthew Craske surmises, Rackstrow must have had medical connections³²: moulding required the dissection and preparation of bodies and Rackstrow's collection soon promoted sexual reproduction as the central point of the exhibition.

As a matter of fact, the modeller collaborated with a midwife, Catherine Clarke, and the evolution of Rackstrow's collection intimates that the "proper person" who attended the ladies at the museum was much more than only a guarantee of respectability. In fact, Rackstrow's museum was gradually transformed through the last decades of the eighteenth century. In 1767, a guidebook describing Rackstrow's Wax-Works explained that the exhibits were displayed in two rooms with a separate price for each room. The anatomical collection was in the second room where Chovet's parturient model could be seen alongside a variety of skeletons, "a number of curiosities in spirits, amongst which are foetus's from the size of a fly to

the time of delivery”³³. Craske contends that Catherine Clarke was probably in charge of the second room, attending ladies and providing midwifery education (“Ladies are attended by one of their own sex, who is skilled in midwifery”)³⁴, which would explain why Rackstraw later bequeathed the anatomical figures to her³⁵.

After Rackstraw’s death, the Museum was renamed as an “anatomical exhibition”³⁶. Interestingly, the presentation of the collections, as illustrated by the various catalogues that were published in the last decade of the eighteenth century, confirms this gradual specialization of the museum. In the 1784 catalogue, the anatomical collection was presented first, comprising of a mix of wax models, dry and wet preparations and examples of pathological and comparative anatomy. Separate sections appeared in the catalogue for “Diseased wombs”, “Children still-born, preserved in spirits”, “Miscarriages, or Abortions”, “Monstrous births, from women”, “Monstrous births, from beasts”, “Monstrous births, from birds”, Placentae, or After-Births” and “Skeletons”. The anatomical collection was mostly centred on sexual reproduction, with comments from time to time explaining how “an able midwife might perhaps have saved this woman”³⁷. Many parturient figures are mentioned and the collection still promoted its comparative display of foetuses³⁸. Audiences could thus be as much entertained with freaks as instructed on the organs of reproduction and the biological differences between men and women. The anatomical collection was followed by the “Collection of Natural and Artificial Rarities; consisting of preserved Animals, and parts of Animals; Birds and Fishes, &c. Dried, and in Spirits”, and the “Collection of Figures resembling Life”, its appearance in second position foregrounding even more the significance of the anatomical collection. In 1787, the catalogue indicated a different setting. The museum was this time divided up into five different rooms with an introductory “Passage”. The seventy-two-foot skeleton of a Sperma-Ceti Whale welcomed visitors alongside the collection

of “figures resembling life” and famous wax figures in the second room, together with a mummy and various casts. The many women who died undelivered, as well as the wax models of sexual parts and those preserved in spirits, the still-born children preserved in spirits, etc. were exhibited in the fourth room, while various preparations, Chovet’s anatomical model and examples of placentae were on display in the last room³⁹. In the following catalogues, published in 1791, 1792 or 1794, the first room still welcomed the visitors with sensational exhibits, from the whale skeleton to figures of dwarfs and giants or exotic animals, the wax models were in the second and third rooms, together with a collection of stuffed animals and birds while the fourth room contained various objects, from baboons and lizards to corals, a series of skulls, shell-works or a few women who died undelivered. But most of the anatomical figures and preparations were now exhibited in the last room. The gradual centering of the collection around the anatomy section, situated in the ultimate room, the careful detailing the parts of generation of women in the catalogue and the explanations concerning the process of reproduction and conception are highly emblematic of Catherine Clarke’s administration of the collection.

As Matthew Craske explains, Catherine Clarke inherited the museum after Rackstrow’s death in 1772 and bequeathed it to her son, a surgeon and anatomist⁴⁰, in 1788 who, however, sold the whole collection in 1799. Craske’s attempt at reassessing Rackstrow’s museum lays stress on the role that Catherine Clarke played as mid-wife, opening a private lying-in clinic in rooms connected to the museum. Although Craske argues that there is “[n]o evidence that the museum was held in moral contempt”⁴¹, Catherine Clarke later became associated with the practise of abortion (hence the comparative collection of foetuses) and the treatment of venereal diseases. Rackstrow’s Museum closed down in 1799, the very same year when the Royal College of Surgeons purchased the collec-

tions of the renowned anatomist John Hunter. The closing of the Rackstraw's museum may have been due to a decline of popular interest in anatomy but the shortage for corpses for dissection before the Anatomy Act of 1832⁴² still made wax anatomical models crucial for medical education. Thus, even if the place was used for the training of midwives and medical practitioners⁴³, the reasons of the ultimate demise of its collection may either have been due to this illicit activity or to the fact that the museum's audiences were not exclusively restricted to medical professionals as Hunter's museum would be when it opened in 1813⁴⁴.

This idea is confirmed by the fate of many of the anatomy museums which were created in England in the second half of the eighteenth century⁴⁵ and first half of the nineteenth century, attracting men and women alike. The way in which these new exhibitions were received, as we shall now see, typifies the growing influence and domination of medical practitioners.

“So disgusting and immoral”: Dr. Kahn’s Anatomical Museum

ANATOMICAL STUDIES—MRS. SEXTON, the Popular Lecturer to Ladies at Dr. Kahn’s Museum, encouraged by the great success her lectures have met with, begs to inform her patronesses in general, and strong-minded ladies in particular, that it is her intention to open a summer class of anatomy at the sea-side. The great advantage of this new course will be, that the truths will be demonstrated, not by wax models, but by living figures. The first lecture will take place in the open air on the sands at Ramsgate, and will be carried on during such time as the gentlemen remain in the sea, bathing. The second lecture will be at Margate during the same hours. The terms of subscription may be ascertained at the Marine Library, the Hospital, and the principal Chemists’ shops, in each place⁴⁶.

In the nineteenth century, medical museums and public anatomical museums alike were generally praised by the medical profession. In *The Anatomist’s Instructor, and Museum Companion* (1836), John

Frederick Knox aimed to “make the student *really* fond of visiting museums”, insisting, however, on the fact that “there can indeed be nothing in an anatomical museum calculated to amuse any one”⁴⁷. The need for medical lecturers and students alike to make use of anatomical museums is stressed throughout Knox’s essay, recalling the central role of anatomy in medical education at the time and the role played by anatomical collections in particular. Medical collections became pivotal tool in medical education⁴⁸, whilst public anatomical museums opened their doors to professional and lay audiences. In London, Antonio Sarti’s (1839–50), Reimers’s (1852–3) and Dr. Kahn’s (1851–72) were amongst the most famous collections to be visited by men and women alike⁴⁹, whilst some were exclusively reserved for women, such as Madame Caplin’s⁵⁰.

Artificial anatomical models, however, especially after the 1832 Anatomy Act, which allowed the supply of unclaimed corpses to licensed schools, met a less enthusiastic reception from medical professionals, as underlined here:

Casts and wax-models, &c. form at present a large part of these collections, but I rather think that they are not exactly so invaluable as they were considered some years ago ; I am of opinion, indeed, that the museum of most teachers of midwifery are at present made up with erroneous views; and, at all events, there are many preparations which can be of little real utility to the teaching the sound principles of that branch of our profession. Thus it seems to me that the series of foetuses, put up without dissection, and forming so large a part of these museums, are mere store for the anatomist. The gravid uterus, as seen in most cases, I consider as so much treasure locked up, for the present locked up, in fact, in a double sense: first, by means of the key of the museum; and, secondly, by the walls of the uterus being entire. All specific aberrations in Nature’s productions unexamined and undissected, are mere objects of curiosity; and amusement should never form a feature in an anatomical museum. I remember, in assisting to draw up a catalogue of the Barclayan Museum, I was forcibly struck with the vast number of objects of curiosity contained in the collection⁵¹.

The growth of medical collections destined for medical education in England, in particular the high number of dry and wet specimens that were more and more preserved and exhibited, and the subsiding interest in wax models may explain the reception of some public collections, as we shall now see. Of course, as Francesco de Ceglia contends, the various responses to anatomical collections and representations of corpses throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not unrelated to the change in aesthetics. The morbid aesthetics of the late eighteenth century aligned the corpse, “especially if decomposed and disarticulated” with “the dominance of the wild, thereby opened the floodgates of an uncontrolled sexuality”, while in the nineteenth century, death would flirt with pornography “so ‘other’ as to be unmentionable and unrepresentable”⁵². This point is also underlined by Pamela Pilbeam who recalls that wax exhibitions were often promoted in almanacs that included pornographic images⁵³, and the recumbent anatomical Venuses, especially the late-eighteenth-century Florentine models, with their flowing hair were certainly not free of sexual titillation. This is certainly what suggests *Punch*’s caricature cited above, proposing a summer class of anatomy with living female bodies replacing wax models. However, the story of the reception of Kahn’s anatomical museum reveals as well other reasons explaining why most public anatomy museums closed down in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Dr. Kahn’s Anatomical Museum opened in London in 1851. Owned by Joseph Kahn, a German “medical doctor”, as he called himself, the museum comprised natural and artificial anatomies, the collections displaying normal and morbid anatomy. The review published in the *Medical Times* praised, indeed, the collection:

Dr. Kahn’s Anatomical Museum. We have this week paid a visit to the museum, Oxford-street, and were much gratified by its numerous and varied contents. The collection consists of about 350 preparations well arranged

*useful for the medical student, and interesting to the public. The progress of the embryo, from its deposition in the uterus to the time of birth, is clearly shown by a number of preparations of each successive week of development, as is also the gradual progress of ossification, by a series of foetal skeletons, commencing from the second month after conception. Preparations in leather and in wax, exhibit very correctly the course of the arteries, veins, and nerves of the trunk and extremities, also the vessels and nerves of the cranium and face. These are well worthy of notice from their extreme delicacy and minuteness. We have then a gradative representation of the progress of deglutition. A number of sections of the human brain as compared with those of lower animals now follow, a, [sic] also, models of the eye, ear, tongue, heart, &c. Considerable space is also devoted to preparations illustrating various positions of the foetus at the period of parturition; and there are some very curious specimens of *jeux de nature*, arising generally from arrested foetal development. The most beautiful and interesting part of this museum is a series of 103 figures, representing the microscopic appearances of the embryo from the moment of conception. The correctness of this series may be inferred from the fact, that Dr. Kahn has received an order to remodel a portion for the use of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It commences with magnificent views of the spermatozoa, female ovum, and the female generative organs, and progresses through every stage of development until the period of the birth of the child. Another series illustrates the incubation of the hen's egg. The progress of gonorrhoea and syphilis is beautifully exhibited in a series of excellent models, taken from cases in the Hôpital des Vénériens and Val de Grace. Two full length figures show the fatal effects of tight lacing, and the mode in which the Caesarian section is performed; and a third takes entirely to pieces, exhibiting the relative position of each organ. The Museum is decidedly the best ever exhibited in London, and we recommend our readers to pay Dr. Kahn a visit⁵⁴.*

A very similar review was published in *The Lancet* in 1851, especially applauding the Anatomical Venus. The article mentions, however, that the room in which the ravages of syphilis and gonorrhoea are exhibited is set apart and exclusively restricted to members of the medical profession⁵⁵. Interestingly, the question of who might visit Kahn's collection was at the root of heated debate that took place in the "Answers to Correspondents" section of *The Lancet*

in the years that followed the opening of the museum. Kahn had been accused of allowing women to all the rooms in the museum, in particular the room containing the models representing the damages of syphilis and gonorrhoea. In June 1854, Kahn replied to the editor of *The Lancet* that “not only is ‘the room for medical men’ in the museum closed on the days that ladies are admitted, but all the models in the other room which could offend the most prudish taste are removed”⁵⁶. The following week, a response to Kahn’s answer appeared, the correspondent—“J. Leach, M.D.”—a former lecturer at the museum, arguing that females had indeed been “permitted to inspect the syphilitic models, without distinction of age”⁵⁷. In the following week, Kahn sent another answer to the medical journal:

*... It is perfectly true that I have at one period admitted ladies, who expressed a particular interest to see the midwifery models, to visit the “room for medical men”, but, finding that some objections were made to my so doing, I discontinued that procedure, and that before Dr. Leach left me. At the present time my course is this: to allow the ladies, on certain days set apart for that purpose, to visit the large room in my exhibition, closing the “room for medical men” at that time, except under the following circumstances, which occasionally occur—viz., the visit of nurses, midwives, and other persons professionally interested in these matters, and who bring with them a recommendation from a medical man. If anything, even in the large room, be considered by any professional gentleman who may visit the museum as unfit to be viewed by ladies, I shall at all times be happy to receive a suggestion from him, and will remove such preparation or model accordingly*⁵⁸.

The week after, a new notice asserted that Dr. Kahn had been true to his words as had followed some recommendations regarding the removal of a few models, overtly supporting the museum “which might be made the means of advancing the studies and researches of the junior members of the profession”⁵⁹.

The story of the debate around Kahn’s museum in *The Lancet* is significant because it shows that the issue of female visitors having

access to anatomical material deemed improper for their sex will later be overshadowed by another debate which will cause the museum's demise. Indeed, in 1857, complaints about Kahn's Museum appeared again in *The Lancet*. The museum, described as a "den of obscenity ... [s]o disgusting and immoral, so determinedly arranged for the purposes of depraving the minds of the ignorant and unwary", should be closed, the author argued, so as "to guard public moral and to respect public decency"⁶⁰. If the terms may suggest that the collections might shock the uninitiated, the question of female visitors was nonetheless this time not at stake. In fact, the "filthy wax models"⁶¹ which the review denounced emblematised the disquiet around the museum's sale of quack remedies for venereal disease, Kahn collaborating with the company Perry and Co., offering cures for venereal diseases⁶².

The reception and debates around the opening and closing of public anatomical collections such as Dr. Kahn's in the middle of the nineteenth century, or their dispersal and demise in the preceding decades, typifies the ways in which the medical field became more and more dominated by medical professionals in the years preceding the 1858 Medical Register⁶³. As we have seen, anatomical collections evidenced the increasing central part that anatomy played in medical knowledge and education. However, anatomical models, which had particularly been associated with women, be they midwives, as the example of Catherine Clarke showed, or wax modellers (such as Angélique Marguerite Le Boursier du Coudray (1712–1798), Marie-Catherine Biheron (1719–1786), or even the celebrated Anna Morandi-Manzolini (1714–1774)) later became related with quackery. For since the 1832 Anatomy Act, the supply of corpses benefitted exclusively licensed schools⁶⁴, and anatomical models were therefore regarded as the teaching tools of fringe medical professionals and the province of quacks. In 1857 the passing of the Obscene Publications Act offered a legal means of closing Dr. Kahn's Museum down as the Act condemned "conduct inconsistent

with public morals”⁶⁵, thereby providing a way to “regulate popular anatomy selectively”⁶⁶. The contents of the museum were ultimately confiscated by the police in February 1873. Significantly, the first objects that were destroyed were anatomical waxes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

1. STENDHAL, *Journal 1810–1811*. Tome IV, Paris, Le Divan, 1937, p. 340-341.
2. Marguerite Countess of Blessington, *The Idler in Italy*. Paris, Galignani, 1839, p. 215.
3. FORSYTH J., *Remarks On Antiquities, Arts and Letters, During an Excursion in Italy in the Years 1802 and 1803*. 4th ed. London, John Murray, [1813] 1835, pp. 33–4.
4. M. R. C. [Romain Colomb], *Journal d'un voyage en Italie et en Suisse durant l'année 1828*. Paris, Verdière, 1833, p. 50.
5. MAZZOLINI R. G., *Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections*. In: de CHADAREVIAN S. and HOPWOOD N. (eds.), *Models: The Third Dimension of Science*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 43–70, p. 54.
6. DE CEGLIA F., *Rotten Corpses, a Disembowelled Woman, a Flayed Man. Images of the Body from the End of the 17th to the Beginning of the 19th Century. Florentine Wax Models in the First-Hand Accounts of Visitors*. Perspectives on Science 2006; 14/4: 417–56, p. 439. Francesco de Ceglia mentions that in France Denis Diderot used Marie-Catherine Biheron’s (1719-1795) anatomical models to prepare his daughter for matrimony.
7. MAERKER A., *Anatomy and Public Enlightenment: The Florentine Museo ‘La Specola’*. In: ALBERTI S. J. M. M., and HALLAM E. (eds), *Medical Museums: Past, Present, Future*. London, The Royal College of Surgeons, 2013, pp. 88–101, p. 99.
8. LEMIRE M., *Artistes et Mortels*. Paris, Chabaud, 1990, p. 74.
9. *Daily Courant* 5240 (Thursday, August 7, 1718).
10. *Daily Courant* 5421 (Saturday, March 7, 1719).
11. *Daily Journal* 2487 (Friday, December 27, 1728); *Daily Journal* 2508 (Tuesday, January 21, 1729).
12. *Daily Journal* 3088 (Saturday, November 28, 1730); *Daily Journal* 3091 (Wednesday, December 2, 1730).

13. *Daily Advertiser* 5 (Monday, February 8, 1731).
14. *Daily Journal* 3135 (Friday, January 22, 1731).
15. *Daily Journal* 3157 (Wednesday, February 17, 1731).
16. *London Evening Post* 952 (December 25, 1733 - December 27, 1733). See also *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 27 (Wednesday, December 4, 1734).
17. *Daily Journal* 4337 (Saturday, December 7, 1734). In 1735 Chovet's anatomical and chirurgical lectures would be given in the Amphitheatre at the Barbers and Surgeons Hall; *London Evening Post* 1187 (June 26, 1735 - June 28, 1735).
18. *London Evening Post* 1305 (March 27-30, 1736).
19. *London Evening Post* 1312 (April 13, 1736 - April 15, 1736).
20. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 497 (Friday, June 4, 1736).
21. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 558 (Saturday, August 14, 1736).
22. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 556 (Thursday, August 12, 1736).
23. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 558 (Saturday, August 14, 1736).
24. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 558 (Saturday, August 14, 1736).
25. *Daily Post* 5506 (Thursday, May 5, 1737).
26. *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* 1393 (Monday, April 16, 1739)
27. *Daily Advertiser* 3706 (Saturday, December 4, 1742).
28. Philogamus, *The Present State of Matrimony: Or, The Real Cause of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages*. In: *a Letter to a Friend. With some Reflections on the State of Matrimony among the Antient Greeks and Romans; and a View of their manner of Educating their young Ladies, compared with the Modern Practice*. London, John Hawkins, 1739, pp. 25–6.
29. *London Evening Post* 2952 (October 4-7, 1746).
30. *An Explanation of the Figure of Anatomy, wherein the Circulation of the Blood is made visible thro' Glass Veins and Arteries. With The Actions of the Heart and Lungs. As Also, The Course of the Blood from the Mother to the Child, and from the Child to the Mother. By which Means Any Person, tho' unskilled in the Knowledge of Anatomy, may, at one View, be acquainted with the Circulation of the Blood, and in what Manner it is performed in our living Bodies. Adorned with a Copper-Plate: wherein the Structure of the Heart is designed, and the Glass Vessels exactly represented in their Order, as they are in the Figure to which they are to be referred* (1747).
31. *London Evening Post* 2952 (October 4, 1746 - October 7, 1746).
32. CRASKE M., 'Unwholesome' and 'pornographic': A Reassessment of the Place of Rackstraw's Museum in the Story of Eighteenth-century Anatomical

- Collection and Exhibition’.* Journal of the History of Collections 2011; 23/1: 75–99, p. 81.
33. *A Companion to Every Place of Curiosity and Entertainment in and about London and Westminster.* London, J. Laurence, 1767, p. 63. At that time Desnoues’s models were no longer exhibited at Rackstrow’s Museum; they had been donated to Trinity College Dublin, probably in 1753.
 34. *A Companion to Every Place of Curiosity and Entertainment in and about London and Westminster.* London, J. Laurence, 1767, p. 63.
 35. CRASKE M., “Unwholesome” and ‘pornographic”, ref. 32, p. 84.
 36. CRASKE M., “Unwholesome” and ‘pornographic”, ref. 32, p. 84.
 37. *A Descriptive Catalogue (Giving Full Explanation) of Rackstrow’s Museum: consisting of a large and very valuable Collection of Most Curious Anatomical Figures and real Preparations: Also Figures resembling Life; With a great Variety of Natural and Artificial Curiosities to be seen At N°. 197, Fleet-Street, Between Chancery-Lane and Temple-Bar* (London, 1784), p. 17.
 38. *A Descriptive Catalogue (Giving Full Explanation) of Rackstrow’s Museum: consisting of a large and very valuable Collection of Most Curious Anatomical Figures and real Preparations: Also Figures resembling Life; With a great Variety of Natural and Artificial Curiosities to be seen At N°. 197, Fleet-Street, Between Chancery-Lane and Temple-Bar* (London, 1784), p. 19.
 39. *A Descriptive Catalogue (Giving Full Explanation) of Rackstrow’s Museum: consisting of a large and very valuable Collection of Most Curious Anatomical Figures and real Preparations: Also Figures resembling Life; With a great Variety of Natural and Artificial Curiosities to be seen At N°. 197, Fleet-Street, Between Chancery-Lane and Temple-Bar* (London, 1787).
 40. CRASKE M., “Unwholesome” and ‘pornographic”, ref. 32, p. 77. Craske explains as well that Benjamin Clarke established a surgical practice and anatomy theatre in the same building.
 41. CRASKE M., “Unwholesome” and ‘pornographic”, ref. 32, p. 75.
 42. The beginning of anatomy legislation may be traced back to 1540, when Henry VIII allowed anatomists the use of the bodies of four hanged felons per year. This allowance was extended to six by Charles II, until the 1752 Murder Act granted anatomists the use of all the criminals hanged at Tyburn and later Newgate from 1783. The 1832 Anatomy Act radically reformed anatomy, granting anatomists the right to use unclaimed pauper bodies from workhouses. See BAILEY J. B., *The Diary of a Resurrectionist, 1811–12, to which are Added an Account of the Resurrection Men in London and a Short History of the Passing of the Anatomy Act.* London, Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1896,

- and RICHARDSON R., *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*. Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press (1987) 2000, p. 36.
43. Craske compares the museum with the museums of William and John Hunter and particularly shows the connections between Benjamin Clarke and John Hunter throughout the article.
 44. The Hunterian collection was only open to the public for a couple of months every year and by introduction.
 45. COLE F. J, *History of the anatomical museum*. In ELTON O. (ed.), *A Miscellany Presented to John Macdonald Mackay, LL.D. July, 1914*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1914), pp. 302–17, on p. 305; qtd. in BATES A. W., ‘Indecent and Demoralising Representations’: *Public Anatomy Museums in mid-Victorian England*. Medical History 2008; 52: 1–22, p. 4.
 46. “Anatomical Studies—Mrs Sexton”, *Punch, or the London Charivari* 31 (13 Sept. 1856): 108.
 47. KNOX J. F., *The Anatomist’s Instructor, and Museum Companion: Being Practical Directions for the Formation and Subsequent Management of Anatomical Museums*. Edinburgh, Black, 1836, p. vi.
 48. As Bates explains, anatomy teachers were expected to own a museum worth more than £500 in the 1820s to be recognized by the College of Surgeons; BATES A. W., ‘Indecent and Demoralising Representations’: *Public Anatomy Museums in mid-Victorian England*. Medical History, 2008; 52: 1–22, p. 5. Bates cites DESMOND A., *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 162–3.
 49. Kahn’s Museum, first opened to men only, opened to women two months later (BATES A.W., ‘Indecent and Demoralising Representations’. See note 48, p. 10).
 50. BATES A. W., ‘Indecent and Demoralising Representations’. See note 48, p. 11.
 51. KNOX J. F., *The Anatomist’s Instructor, and Museum Companion*. See note 47, p. 131.
 52. De CEGLIA F., *Rotten Corpses, a Disembowelled Woman, a Flayed Man. Images of the Body from the End of the 17th to the Beginning of the 19th Century*. See note 6, p. 430. Francesco de Ceglia cites Gorer G., *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*. London, Cresset Press, 1965.
 53. PILBEAM P., *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*. London & New-York, Hambledon, 2003, p. 16.
 54. “Dr. Kahn’s Anatomical Museum”, *Medical Times: Journal of Medical Science, Literature, Criticism, and News*. new series, 1851, vol. 2, January 4–June 28, London, John Churchill, 1851, p. 496.

55. "Dr. Kahn's Anatomical Museum", *The Lancet* 1, 1851, p. 474.
56. "Dr. Kahn's Anatomical Museum", *The Lancet* 1, 1854, June 17, p. 654.
57. "Dr. Kahn's Anatomical Museum", *The Lancet* 1, 1854, June 24, p. 684.
58. "Dr. Kahn's Anatomical Museum", *The Lancet* 1, 1854, July 1, p. 700.
59. "Pater Familias, A Visitor, and Others", *The Lancet* 2, 1854, July 8, p. 22.
60. *The Lancet* 2, 1857, August 15, p. 175.
61. *The Lancet* 2, 1857, November 28, p. 558.
62. BATES A. W., *Dr Kahn's Museum: Obscene Anatomy in Victorian London*. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 2006; 99: 618–24, p. 620.
63. After the Apothecaries Act of 1815, which specified that qualified apothecaries should be in possession of a licence issued by the Society of Apothecaries (involving courses, experience, and examination), general practitioners still complained about unfair competition from unqualified druggists and quacks. Eventually, the Medical Act of 1858 created a single public register for all legally recognized practitioners. It then became illegal for those who were not on the Medical Register to claim to be medical practitioners, although they could still legally practice healing (see PORTER R., *Disease, Medicine and Society in England, 1550–1860*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1987] 1999, pp. 47–8).
64. BATES A. W., 'Indecent and Demoralising Representations'. See note 48, p. 8.
65. BATES A. W., *Dr Kahn's Museum: Obscene Anatomy in Victorian London*. See note 62, p. 621.
66. BATES A. W., *Dr Kahn's Museum: Obscene Anatomy in Victorian London*. See note 62 p. 621.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas

e mail laurence.talairach-vielmas@univ-tlse2.fr