



G5 A Man Without a Head: Postmortem Decapitation by German Shepherd Dogs

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that in cases of postmortem animal depredation of human corpses or remains, physicians and crime scene investigators not experienced in the field of forensic medicine are often unable to attribute the questioned injuries to their true origin.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing that postmortem injury by domestic animals is only rarely documented in the literature therefore lacking knowledge regarding morphologic features and the criteria for the differentiation of such postmortem soft tissue destruction may cause considerable complications in clarifying the cause of death. This is particularly true when postmortem animal depredation is caused by a domestic dog's activity.

A case of a 55-year-old man will be presented who was found putrefied in the bedroom of his apartment; head and neck of the body were missing. The rest of the body, in particular the hands, was intact. Also his well-fed two German shepherd dogs (8 and 1½ years old) were in the flat. The flat was locked with the windows closed. He had been seen for the last time one week before the incident. The public health service had been called one year earlier because the man and his two dogs had not left the dwelling for eight weeks. Policemen were called to the scene as the dogs had been barking for four days. In the hallway and the living room they remarked several remnants of small supposed human bone parts and crowned teeth in puddles of feces and vomitus. The flat was in messy condition with garbage, emptied alcohol bottles, and moldy food in every room. Lots of accessible dog food was also found. The dogs are brought to pet asylum, and an autopsy of the incomplete body is ordered. Autopsy showed a fatal gastrointestinal bleeding by rupture of esophageal varicose veins (while head and neck were still missing). Furthermore, signs of chronic alcoholism could be determined. Toxicological examinations led to no specific findings. At postmortem, animal depredation signs, canine-like bite traces and tissue defects were found surrounding the collar region. The right pleural cavity was opened by animal depredation; parts of the right pulmonary lobe were missing as well as the cervical vertebral bodies 1-6. The clavicles, the scapulae and 7th cervical vertebral body showed extensive gnawing traces. After autopsy, the apartment was searched again for head and neck of the man by forensic scientists and police; still the missing parts could not be found. From forensic point of view, it must be presumed that the dogs ate head and neck of the corpse completely. **Postmortem Injuries, German Shepherd Dogs, Animal Depredation**