



A93 Forensic Anthropology in Greece: An Overview of the Discipline's Status

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have gained an insight into forensic anthropology practices in Greece.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a comprehensive description of the education, research, and practice of the forensic anthropology discipline in Greece, a country faced by increasing challenges in forensic identification in mass fatalities, such as the recent shipwrecks in the Aegean and wildfires on the mainland.

Forensic anthropology is a fast-growing discipline with numerous applications in medicolegal contexts. Among many European countries exists certain variability in the educational system, research focus, and actual casework. This presentation seeks to present an overview on the status of forensic anthropology in Greece with the goal of informing young forensic practitioners and the broader medicolegal community on the advances and limitations of the discipline in a challenging geographic area with often-increased needs for specialized forensic services.

The foundation of forensic anthropology in Greece began with the establishment of the Forensic Anthropology Unit (UoAFAU) at the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in 2008. The Unit has been operating ever since under the directorship of the only employed forensic anthropologist in Greece who holds an Associate Professor's position. The Unit, which is fully equipped with maceration facilities and analytical tools, provides anthropological examinations at the request of the Court, Prosecution Office, or police. In addition to the usual forensic cases involving crime scene investigation, the establishment of a biological profile, personal identification, evaluation of skeletal trauma, and estimation of the postmortem interval, the Unit also undertakes examinations aimed at estimating the age of living individuals. Furthermore, the Unit provides training to graduate and postgraduate students of different universities, as well as training to forensic pathology residents at the University of Athens. Forensic anthropology services are also provided by trained forensic pathologists with postgraduate degrees in forensic anthropology at the University of Crete and Ioannina. These professionals are employed as forensic pathologists, though, and they deal with forensic anthropology as part of their routine casework; thus, their anthropological report is incorporated into the routine autopsy report and does not comprise a separate document. The protocols followed in each institution are mainly subject to available equipment and resources. For example, the University of Crete is not equipped with a maceration chamber, but instead heavily decomposed remains can be examined through Postmortem Computed Tomography (PMCT) as part of the Virtopsy.GR research project. Thus, the examination protocol of heavily decomposed remains includes a routine PMCT examination, which is evaluated by a forensic pathologist trained in forensic anthropology and virtopsy techniques. The main guidelines followed by forensic anthropology professionals in Greece include the recommendations of the American (Working Group for Forensic Anthropology) and European (Forensic Anthropology Society Europe) standards, as currently there is no accreditation system for forensic anthropology practitioners.

The limited number of forensic anthropologists in the country hinders the development of a robust educational system of forensic anthropology in Greece. Most graduates are seeking further training outside the country and primarily end up performing postgraduate training in the United Kingdom. Most universities in Greece offer a PhD option in a Forensic Anthropology topic resulting in an increase of research outputs in the last decade. The advances in research are further enhanced with the creation of two modern, documented skeletal collections in Athens (2003) and Crete (2005), which served as research material for numerous population-specific and other types of studies.

The increased number of mass incidents in Greece (immigration crisis, fires, etc.) calls for employing more forensic anthropology experts in the medicolegal system. In addition, the reorganization of the Greek Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) operational procedures since 2017 highlighted the need for trained forensic anthropologists to equip the new DVI teams. It is hoped that the presentation of the current status of forensic anthropology in Greece will serve as a cornerstone in the promotion of the discipline at educational and professional levels, so it can meet the increased needs of the country.

Forensic Practice, Greece, Forensic Anthropology