

Andreas Vesalius (1514 - 1564)

Vesalius was an anatomist, physician, and founder of modern human anatomy. He was one of the first to dissect dead bodies.

Vesalius was born in Brussels, Belgium, which was part of the Holy Roman Empire, to a family of physicians. His father was the illegitimate son of Emperor Maximilian's Royal Physician. He persuaded to learn Greek and Latin being family tradition. In 1528 Vesalius entered the University of Leuven taking arts, but he decided to pursue a career in medicine at the University of Paris. During this time he developed his interest in anatomy, and was often found examining bones at the Cemetery of the Innocents. He was forced to leave Paris in 1536 due to the opening of hostilities between the Holy Roman Empire and France, and returned to Leuven. Here he completed his thesis, but he left after a dispute with his professor. After settling briefly in Venice in 1536, he moved to University of Padua to study for his doctorate.



He published his meticulous drawings of his work for his students. When this reached Paris one of his former professors published an attack on this version. In 1538 he also published a letter on venesection, or bloodletting. This was a popular treatment for almost any illness, but there was some debate about where to take the blood from. Vesalius, undeterred, went on to stir up more controversy, this time disproving not just Galen but also Mondino de Liuzzi and even Aristotle; all three had made assumptions about the functions and structure of the heart that were clearly wrong. Vesalius was only 30 years old when the first edition of *Fabrica* was published. Duke Cosimo I de' Medici persuaded him to move to the expanding university in Pisa, which he turned down. Vesalius took up a position in the court, where he had to deal with the other physicians mocking him as being a barber.

In 1565 that Vesalius was performing an autopsy on an aristocrat in Spain when it was found that the heart was still beating, leading to the Inquisition condemning him to death. The story went on to claim that Philip II had the sentence transformed into a pilgrimage.

After struggling for many days, on his way home, with the adverse winds in the Ionian Sea, he was wrecked on the island of Zakynthos. Here he soon died in such debt that, if a benefactor had not paid for a funeral, his remains would have been thrown to the animals. At the time of his death he was scarcely fifty years of age.