

The Olavide Museum (I): History

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Introduction

For many years, one of the priorities of Spanish dermatologists has been the recovery of the figures that made up the so-called Olavide Museum.¹ Successive Boards of Directors of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology have made an effort to locate these figures with the aim of exhibiting them to the entire profession. Thanks to the work of numerous colleagues, in December 2005 the Board of Directors presided over by Prof. José Luis Díaz Pérez was able to recover the 120 missing crates needed to complete the collection of the Olavide Museum, thus fulfilling the promise he made during his election campaign.

The current Board of Directors, with Prof. Julián Sánchez Conejo-Mir as its president, has taken up the difficult challenge of seeing to the restoration of these figures, and of finding an appropriate space in which to exhibit them. To this end, it unanimously ratified my appointment as Director of the Olavide Museum, charging me with the responsibility of carrying out this task. This is a difficult and costly challenge, but the new Board has decided to support this initiative unconditionally, in the belief that the recovery of this artistic treasure will be a source of prestige for the Academy and for the dermatological profession in general.

At the last meeting of the Board of Directors in September of 2006, Dr Esteban Daudén Tello, the current editor of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas*, raised the possibility of adding a new journal section entitled "The Olavide Museum," dealing with the history of the museum's creation, its recovery, and the participating sculptors, with commentaries on the numerous wax figures. These figures represent a broad range of dermatological diseases, some of which no longer exist today, but they have educational value, serving as a reminder of how widespread they were in days gone by.

We have very little information about the Olavide Museum, since most of its documentation was burned along with the archives of the Hospital San Juan de Dios when it was bombed on November 19, 1936, during the Spanish Civil War. For this reason, there are still many gaps in the history of this museum, although we believe that among the contents of the 120 crates that were recently recovered there may be documentation that sheds light on what is not known.

The Olavide Museum: History

In the mid-19th century, the study of various kinds of figures began to be introduced into medical education, especially in anatomy and dermatology. These figures were created using real patients as models, and had the same functions as audiovisual teaching aids, which did not yet exist. One of the most characteristic forms they took were figures molded in wax or "moulages," which were at their height in Paris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

During the World Congress of Dermatology held in Paris in 1889, the Museum of the Hôpital Saint-Louis was officially opened to the great admiration of all the conference participants, who returned to their respective countries with the intention of creating similar museums. A few years later, almost all dermatology services in Europe had a collection of figures very similar to those in the Hôpital Saint-Louis. In Spain, the best example of such collections was the Olavide Museum.

The Olavide Museum was preceded by the Gabinete Dermatológico de la Facultad de Medicina, in which illustrations and papier-mâché figures from Thibert's collection were exhibited. Another precedent worthy of mention is the Museo Anatómico y Patológico del Hospital General, created in 1851 with specimens modeled and painted by Dr González Velasco.²⁻⁴

The Olavide Museum was founded by the illustrious dermatologist Don José Eugenio Olavide in the mid-19th century, and opened in 1882. From that moment onward, its history has been replete with all manner of vicissitudes that led eventually to its disappearance in 1966 and 1967, when the Hospital San Juan de Dios, then located on Calle Dr Esquerdo in Madrid, was demolished. The museum had always been situated next to the Hospital San Juan de Dios

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since its location on Calle Atocha, as well as later when the hospital moved to the Calle Dr Esquerdo site in 1897.

According to information in the most recent issue of *El Siglo Médico*, the museum of the Hospital San Juan de Dios was opened in 1882, possibly on December 26 of that year, under the name of the Museo Anatómico-Patológico, Cromo-Litográfico y Microscópico of the Hospital San Juan de Dios. During the opening ceremony Olavide gave a speech in which he made reference to the works on display and the persons who had participated in their creation, to which Dr Castelo replied with enthusiasm. In any case, there is also a citation in the catalogue of the Museo Anatómico-Patológico indicating that the museum, along with the micrographic laboratory, was created in the 1870s through the initiative of Their Excellencies Don José Eugenio Olavide and Don Eusebio Castelo Sierra, eminent members of the hospital's medical faculty.² Upon Olavide's death (1901) the museum was renamed in his honor, and at present it continues to be known as the Olavide Museum. In the museum, in addition to the wax models, there are exhibits of preparations, photographs, and phototypes made by Mendoza and Olavide's son, along with illustrations from Olavide's book *Clínica Iconográfica*.

The Olavide Museum was officially opened two years before the museum of the Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris, which began to be built in 1884 as a museum-library and was officially opened in 1889, coinciding with the First International Congress of Dermatology. Nevertheless, as early as 1867 J. Baretta, the Paris museum's principal sculptor, had already begun to create wax figures which were stored in various hospital wards.⁵

The Olavide Museum obtained international recognition in 1889, when 90 figures, all created by Enrique Zofio, were moved to Paris for display at the First International Congress of Dermatology. Dr José Olavide (both father and son), Dr Eusebio Castelo and Dr Fernando Castelo⁶ were in charge of transport. Zofio's models were highly praised by such important figures as Kaposi, Boeck and Morris. They found especially worthy of note the color of the Spanish models, which were of different shades according to profession or type of disease. This contrasted with the nearly uniform color of Baretta's figures. It is thought that the French sculptor used an unvarying formula to give the same general color to the wax he used for all his figures.²

The figures in the Olavide Museum were of different sizes. By contrast with those in the French museum, Zofio's figures included a broad area of healthy skin along with the lesion they represented. In this way, it was possible to identify the anatomical region involved, and to compare diseased and healthy skin. Some of the models represented the entire body, another innovation.

The figures were grouped in glass display cases or glass cupboards, according to different criteria: etiology, morphology, or clinical resemblance. Each piece was usually

accompanied by a brief description or legend (Figures 1 and 2). A note indicated the medical practice to which the patient who served as the model belonged. Interestingly, all the figures created by Zofio were numbered and accompanied by a clinical history, while those created at a later date by Barta and López Álvarez lack this information, which complicates the task of cataloguing them.

In 1903 the Imprenta Provincial (located at Calle Fuencarral, 48) published the *Catálogo del Museo Anatómico-Patológico del Hospital de San Juan de Dios*. We believe this is the only catalogue in existence. It contains references to 367 figures, distributed among 33 display cases, each of which contained between 8 and 15 figures. Display case 33 contains two reclining figures, the first of which represents "generalized tinea favosa" and the second a case of "malignant exfoliative erythroderma" in a woman.³ This second figure has been recovered, and was on display at the XXXIV Congress of Dermatology held in Madrid in May 2006.

From 1927 until the museum's closure in 1966, the only information we have indicates that José Barta and Rafael López Álvarez continued to create figures, both individually and in collaboration. For this reason, it is highly likely that the total number of models the museum came to possess was greater than 1000 pieces.

In one paragraph of the 1903 catalogue we find the following: "The sculptor is the skilled artist D. Enrique Zofio, sole creator of all the models in this museum, and to his credit it should be noted that, at the request of the current Director, D. Fernando Castelo, he is pleased to offer instruction to others in his techniques for modeling, wax composition, coloring, etc, so that the life of the Museum may continue into the future without interruption."³ The catalogue is signed by the director, Dr Fernando Castelo, and by the medical supervisor of the museum, Dr José Olavide.

Physicians were allowed entry into the museum at specific times. The teaching faculty of the Hospital San Juan de Dios, when they deemed it appropriate, taught their classes there, using this magnificent collection to illustrate their lectures. For example, it is known that Juan de Azúa (1859-1922), the first professor of dermatology in Spain, taught his last class in the presence of these figures on the morning of the day he died of a cerebral hemorrhage, on May 5, 1922.²

The Olavide Museum was intended not only to familiarize doctors with skin diseases through the display of wax models, but had broader social functions as well. We know, for example, that during the Spanish Civil War Rafael López Álvarez showed the museum's collection to militiamen on leave from the front so that they would understand the devastating effects of venereal disease.⁷

The figures in the Olavide Museum were known throughout Europe, and enjoyed high prestige. To take one example, in 1919, when Don Florestán Aguilar organized



Figure 1. Scrofulous phagedenic lupus in healing phase.

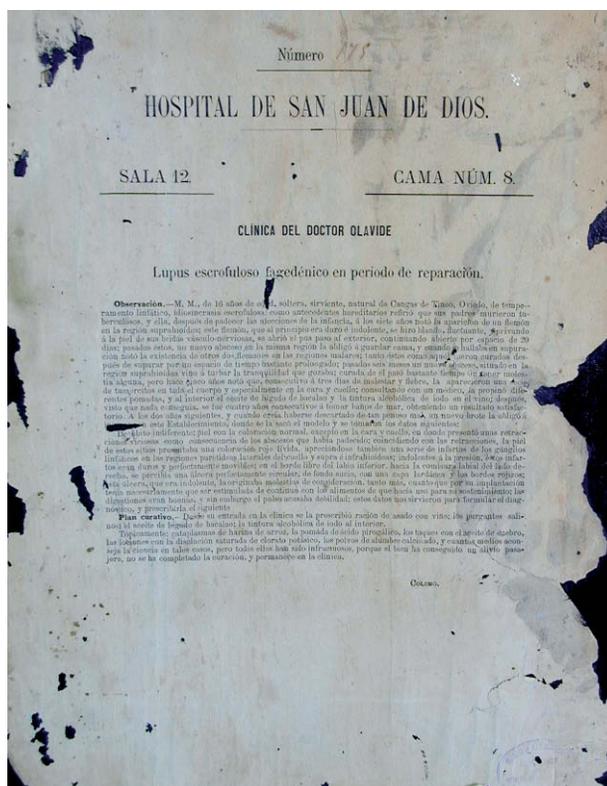


Figure 2. Original case history of scrofulous phagedenic lupus in healing phase.



Figure 3. José Barta giving visitors a tour of the museum. Frame from the film *La terrible lección* ("The Terrible Lesson"). Director: Fernando Delgado; story: Leopoldo Bejarano; screenplay: Leopoldo Bejarano; director of photography: Enrique Blanco; scientific consultant: Julio Bejarano; subject: the fight against venereal disease; 35 millimeter black-and-white film; silent; duration: 14 minutes and 31 seconds. 1927.

the International Exposition of Medicine in the Crystal Palace in Madrid, a series of the figures from the museum were exhibited there. The German delegation, which had museums of its own in Dresden and Munich (later destroyed during World War II) offered to pay 30 million *pesetas* for the figures on exhibit.⁴

There is not much information available on the museum, but in one scene of a movie entitled *La terrible lección* (*The Terrible Lesson*), filmed in 1927 and recovered thanks to Dr Carlos Daudén Sala, the museum can be seen when the sculptor José Barta Bernardotta shows it to some illustrious visitors (Figure 3). This film was directed by Fernando Delgado and produced by the Comité Ejecutivo Antivenéreo. The story and screenplay are the work of Leopoldo Bejarano, and Dr Julio Bejarano served as scientific consultant. In the film, there is a tour of the hospital, and in one scene the visitors view a group of wax figures in a hallway or corridor close to some windows. The figures, as in the Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris, were kept in large glass floor-to-ceiling display cases.

The directorship of the museum seems to have been taken up first by Don José Olavide, then by his son, José Olavide Malo, and it is believed that he was succeeded by José Barta, and finally by Rafael López Álvarez, as stated in an interview

that appeared in 1966 in the newspaper *ABC*.⁴ This interview was conducted shortly before the museum was closed and the models packed away. After that point, we lost track of the figures and they became part of the legends circulated among the young dermatologists of that time.

In December 2005, after much searching, the 120 crates that we believe complete the Olavide Museum collection were found at last. The memorable story of their recovery will be detailed in future issues of this journal.

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