



## Evolution and current state of Forensic Odontology in Europe: A personal perspective

I would like to express my gratitude to the **Indo Pacific Academy of Forensic Odontology (INPAFO)** for accepting me as a member of the academy and for giving me the opportunity to share my views as a young Forensic Odontologist on the evolution and current state of this field in Europe.

Forensic Odontology is widely used on all continents of the globe, out of which Europe identifies as a place of firsts in this field. The first use of dental identification is said to have occurred here. In Rome, circa 49 AD, Agrippina, the wife of Claudius the emperor of Rome, in a fit of jealousy, ordered Lollia Paulina's death [1]. Upon instruction, the soldiers brought her head back to prove the death. Having her facial features distorted, Lollia Paulina could only be recognised and confirmed dead by looking at her dental alignment and distinctive teeth characteristics.

Also, the first comprehensive text on Forensic Odontology "L'art Dentaire en Medicine Legale" by Dr Oscar Amoëdo, "the father of Forensic Odontology" [1], was published in Europe, in Paris 1898. It was based on his doctorate dissertation with the same title.

Another first note worth mentioning was in age estimation. In 1897, also in Paris, Dr Emile Magitot documented and published for the first time, in the "Archives d' Anthropologie Criminelle", his findings related to the age estimation case of a body thought to be Prince Louis XVII [1]. Prince Louis XVII died in prison in 1795 at the age of 10 years and 2 months. When a corpse was found buried in a Parisian cemetery a century later, experts were called in to determine the age of the remains and try to identify them. Dr Magitot noted that there were no baby teeth present and that the wisdom teeth had already developed and erupted, putting the age at 16 to 18 years. The remains were determined not to be those of Prince Louis XVII.

Europe is also the place of many students' first steps into the world of Forensic Odontology, including mine. I have to admit I went into this field headfirst, only with my passion and love for investigation series as my fuel. Of course, I received some information about this field during Dental University years, but it was rather more informative about the existence of this field, rather than details related to what it consists of, or what to expect if you would ever choose this profession. During my Master at KU Leuven, Belgium, I was fortunate enough to meet people who were willing to help me with some guidance, but not every student has the same luck. In Europe, at least, this field is rather difficult to work in, despite what you read on the internet, where all search results speak about how demanded specialists in Forensic Odontology are. The truth is it is pretty hard to find an opportunity to practice what you've been training for. Right after graduation, it can be a challenge to find a way to continue doing what you love and find the right people to guide and help you navigate the challenges that arise. Not to mention the fact that identification cases and mass disasters in Europe are (fortunately) rather scarce and they rely mostly on DNA testing. Due to the rising migration [2], age estimation cases are becoming more common in some countries. However, even those are often performed

by dentists who have received a brief training in the field. Furthermore, not all countries recognise the Forensic Odontology specialty and do not see the need for these experts.

To conclude, I believe that everyone should remember their first steps into Forensic Odontology and do everything possible to support new graduates and young specialists. After all, forensic science is about bringing together multidisciplinary team of experts to work on a case, about teamwork and fruitful collaborations in order to deliver the best possible case outcome. Focus is always centred on the individual (living and/or deceased) and everyone can contribute and has a voice that should be heard.

I wish you all a healthy and productive 2021! I hope it will be a year of development and progressive efforts to promote our specialty.

Yours Sincerely,

**Dr. Anca Ruxandra Iliescu**

**References:**

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2. C. Boswell (2005) Migration in Europe. A paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration

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