

History of the Department of Anthropology, University of Vienna

In 1919, [Rudolf PÖCH](#) founded the **Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography**.

PÖCH's famous expeditions to Australia, New Guinea and South Africa enriched both scientific disciplines enormously and in 1927 two new institutes followed: The **Anthropological Institute** and the **Institute for Ethnology**. The **Anthropological Institute** was renamed in 1972 by Emil BREITINGER, the former director, to the **Institute for Human Biology**. Until the year 2005, the institute's name was **Institute for Anthropology** and belonged to the *Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics* at the *University of Vienna*. Since 2005 the *University of Vienna* changed its internal structures, and the institute was renamed finally to **Department of Anthropology**.



The department is the only of its kind in Austria, but nevertheless traditionally there are narrow and intensive cooperations in education and research with institutes all over Austria. Physical anthropology has always been an interdisciplinary science, including first of all medical sciences. In the late 20's and early 30's the *Viennese school of morphology* was developed by Josef and Margarete WENINGER. Unfortunately, this was simultaneously the beginning of the involvement of physical anthropology in the ideology and practice of National Socialism (Seidler & Rett, 1988). After 1945, the first director was Josef WENINGER, who continued with his wife Margarete WENINGER the classical tradition of morphology. After WENINGER's retirement in 1955, the chair of the Viennese institute was offered to Emil BREITINGER. He accomplished two important innovations: On the one hand he started the methodological biostatistic orientation, on the other hand, he gave the impulse for the other focal point of research: Questions concerning evolution of hominids (Breitinger, 1955).

The development of physical anthropology in Austria was continued by three of BREITINGER's students: Gertrud HAUSER (*Institute of Histology, Faculty of Medical Sciences*), Johann SZILVASSY (who has been head of the *Anthropological Department, Museum of Natural History, Vienna*), and Horst SEIDLER (Head of the *Department of Anthropology* until 2012).

A very close scientific research cooperation started in the early 70's with Andreas RETT, concerning mental handicapped children and questions of social-anthropology (Rett & Seidler, 1980). The work of the *Viennese school of morphology and historical anthropology* has been continued by Maria TESCHLER-NICOLA, Herbert KRITSCHER and Johann SZILVASSY (all belonging to the *Anthropological Department* at the *Museum of Natural History, Vienna*) in education and research. Further developments in the tradition of biostatistics and

biomathematics were being carried out by Horst SEIDLER and Werner TIMISCHL. In 1991, the Tyrolean Iceman research started and collaborations with radiology, statistics, engineering, and rapid prototyping developed. A new interdisciplinary emerged, Virtual Anthropology, which was strengthened in the early 2000s by an additional professorship for biometrics, held by Fred BOOKSTEIN. The department in Vienna has built up a reputation as a pioneering institution in the development and application of new quantitative methods to study hominoid ontogeny and phylogeny, for instance the coordination of the largest anthropology grant in Europe (EVAN) or the worldwide first textbook published for Virtual Anthropology. Also since the early 2000s, the department was active in field work in the Pliocene deposits of the Ethiopian Afar Triangle (Galili) where several hominin findings were made.

The department is now awaiting the appointment of a new full professor for anthropology (expected in 2014). It is currently organized in working groups with overlapping competences:

- Human Evolution
- Human Ecology
- Human Ethology
- Human Life History