

## OLAVIDE MUSEUM

# The Olavide Museum (III): Recovery

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## Recovering the Olavide Museum

For the past 50 years, locating and restoring the models of the Olavide Museum has been a pending issue for Spanish dermatologists. Many practicing dermatologists have never had the opportunity to visit the museum while others, now retired, remember it vaguely as the place where wax models could be seen in glass display cases, but from what our professors told us, all of us knew of the existence of this marvelous collection of wax models of incalculable sentimental, historical and monetary value.

For a number of reasons, many of which result from the vagaries of chance, we do not have exact information or documentation on the museum from before 1940. We believe that many of the documents disappeared, along with most of the information on the Hospital de San Juan de Dios, on November 19, 1936 when, during an air raid, a bomb fell on the Diputación Provincial building, located on the Cuesta de Santo Domingo at the corner of Calle Fomento. Most of the documents and archives of the hospital were lost.<sup>1</sup>

A careful review of the journal *Actas Dermosifiliográficas* turns up no references to the museum, either during its initial period (1909-1936) or in the years preceding its closure in 1967. In addition, in the 1967, 1968, and 1969 issues of *Actas*, we find no mention of the museum's closure.

We have found references only to Antonio Zofio Urosa and José Olavide y Malo, who were listed as founding permanent members of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology in the years 1910-1911, and subsequently during the years 1915-1919, to José Olavide Torres (the son of José Eugenio Olavide) as a resident member.

It is both odd and telling that in *Actas* we could find no article from that period with a mention of the Olavide Museum. In an article on the history of the Hospital de San Juan de Dios in Madrid (1898-1953), published in *Actas* in 1953 (when the museum was located in the Hospital San Juan de Dios and must have been open), E. Álvarez Sainz de Aja makes no mention of the museum. He refers only to Olavide (the son) "as the director of the museum

created by his father."<sup>2</sup> This suggests a minimal or nonexistent relationship between the Academy and the museum, which was understandable at that time since the museum was under the authority of the Diputación Provincial and had no connection to the academic and scientific community.

The only information we have on the closure of the museum comes from a report in the *ABC* newspaper on the museums of Madrid in which the journalist Pedro Crespo interviewed Rafael López Álvarez as he was packing the wax figures into crates.<sup>3</sup>

From the 1960s until its closure, in late 1967 or early 1968, the museum languished slowly, its existence all but unknown even to dermatologists, since there were so few references to it. Research on this period becomes even more complicated at the point at which the Hospital de San Juan de Dios was torn down and work began on the Ciudad Sanitaria Francisco Franco, now known as the Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón. Before the demolition, Don Rafael López Álvarez, holder of a diploma in fine arts and one of the sculptors of the wax models of skin diseases in the museum's collection, took charge of packing the models away in more than 200 crates, which were then stored in an unknown location.

There are reports and journalistic accounts suggesting that the museum came to possess a collection of some 1500 models, although they do not say whether they were ever all on display together. We think that during the museum's final period, on Calle Doctor Esquerdo, the entire collection was not on display, only a selection of around 300 models. Among the crates that have been recovered, we have found some whose seals show dates ranging from 1902 to 1909, so it is evident that the total number of models would come to well above 300.

From the time of the museum's closure, the models and their accompanying documentation began a long peregrination lasting into the present. We can document more than 4 different locations for the Diputación Provincial, which is now the health ministry (Consejería de Salud) of the autonomous community of Madrid.

In addition to the problems occasioned by these moves, the existing documentation is difficult to locate because it is now dispersed among the different buildings in which the new Madrid Consejería de Salud is located.

For more than 40 years these crates remained in an annex of the Ciudad Sanitaria Francisco Franco, now the Hospital

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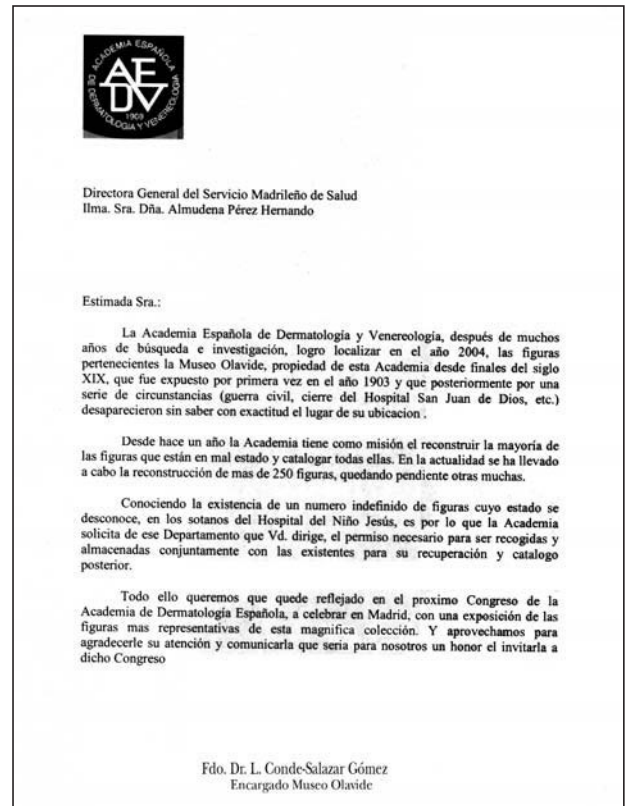
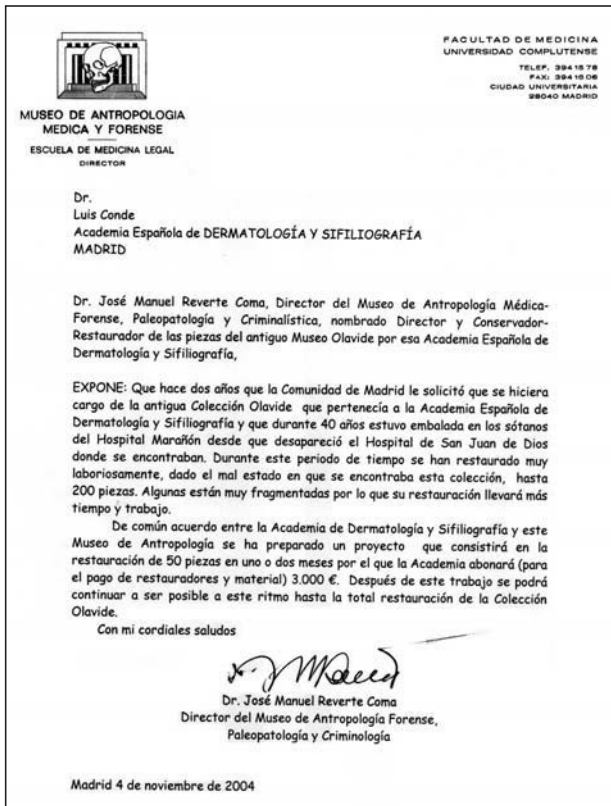
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Gregorio Marañón, where the former ministry of health was located, adjacent to the old maternity hospital. This space was considerably deteriorated and lacked the conditions necessary for the preservation of the wax models. In recent years, with the construction of the new maternity hospital at the same location, the models disappeared again.

In the late 1980s the autonomous government of Madrid received a request to photograph some of the models in the old Hospital de San Juan de Dios for a thesis entitled "Contribución al estudio de D. José Eugenio de Olavide y su obra" ("Contribution to the Study of D. José Eugenio de Olavide and his Work"), by Jaime José Padrón Lleó, whose thesis supervisor was Professor Joaquín Calap Calatayud. At that point, Don Carlos Gasca Ferré, the head of the Servicio del Patrimonio y Asuntos Generales of the Servicio Madrileño de Salud, searched for and located some crates containing models that had been stored in the Madrid autonomous government building, close to the old maternity hospital, and gave permission to take the pictures required for the thesis.

In 1987, Professor Antonio García Pérez and Dr Pablo Lázaro organized an exhibit of some 20 wax models at the XI Iberian and Latin American Congress of Dermatology held in Madrid. Subsequently, in the late 1990s, Professor García Pérez and Dr Emilio del Río wrote several pieces on the history of dermatology in Madrid, the Hospital San Juan de Dios, and the Olavide Museum. These publications furnish much of the information on which our research is based.<sup>5-11</sup>

In 2002, the autonomous government of Madrid entrusted to Professor José Manuel Reverte (Director of the Museum of Medical and Forensic Anthropology of the Universidad Complutense in Madrid) a collection of models



Documents relating to the recovery of the Olavide Museum models.



**Figure 1.** Warehouse of the Hospital del Niño Jesús where the crates were found on December 27, 2005.

to be restored. Professor Reverte's team (Amaya Maruri, Adriana Mora, and David Aranda) eventually restored more than 100 wax models.

In view of our knowledge of the existence of the models, and the longstanding friendship between one of us (Dr Conde-Salazar) and Professor José Manuel Reverte, a formal proposal for the restoration of the models was presented to the board of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV). The models were to be first restored by Professor Reverte's team, with funding from the Academy, which would then acquire title to them.

The bulk of the collection was still missing, but was later found thanks to information provided by Professor Reverte and the assistance of Don Carlos Gasca Ferré (autonomous government of Madrid): it was located in a storage area in the Hospital del Niño Jesús, where it had been moved 5 years earlier by the autonomous government of Madrid. At that time the warehouse was scheduled for demolition in order to permit the construction of new hospital services.

In this manner, on December 27, 2005, at the Hospital del Niño Jesús and with the invaluable assistance of Dr Antonio Torrello, the 120 crates were enumerated and classified. The crates were of very different sizes, some more than 1.80 m tall. They were generally in good condition, although some were broken or open (Figure 1).

We had no idea what we would find in these crates. As a rule there were between 4 and 6 figures in each crate, but some crates also contained paintings, plaster molds, or statues of unknown origin (Figure 2).

Once all the crates had been classified, they were transferred by a company specializing in such removals (Gil Stauffer) to a storage facility in San Fernando de Henares appropriately equipped for the preservation of the models.

In February 2006 the board of the AEDV, with Professor José Luis Díaz Pérez as its president, agreed to hire the three restorers from Professor Reverte's team (Amaya Maruri, Adriana Mora and David Aranda) and approved the funds necessary to complete restoration of the models.



**Figure 2.** Opening of the crate in which the "Herpetic Woman" was found.



**Figure 3.** General view of the exhibit of recovered models during the XXXIV National Congress of Dermatology held in Madrid, Spain, May 24-27, 2006.

In 2006, during the XXXIV National Congress of the AEDV (Madrid, May 24-27), there was an exhibit of the 40 most characteristic of the models recovered and restored to date. The exhibit was a great success, and served to make the project to recover this treasure of our professional heritage known to Spanish dermatologists (Figure 3).



At present more than 100 crates remain to be opened, and their contents are as yet unknown. We believe that one or more of them may contain the museum's archives, which would give us more information and lay to rest many questions concerning its operation. In that case, it is not outside the realm of possibility that in a few years we may have to revise the information in this article.

We believe that the recovery of these models is not only of sentimental and historical value, but should also serve to help us understand how much effort and care our predecessors invested in teaching at a time when current advances were still far in the future.

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