

# Professor Jürgen Koebke (1945-2012): a life dedicated to clinical anatomy

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Jürgen Koebke, Professor emeritus and former head of the Anatomical Institute of the University of Cologne, Germany, Honored Member of Turkish Society of Anatomy and Clinical Anatomy (TSACA), Scientific Advisory Board Member of our journal Anatomy, my master and close friend tragically passed away at the age of 66 on February 23, 2012 in Cologne, Germany. He was an eminent figure in the areas of anatomy and biomechanics, and one of the latest world-renowned representatives of the German school of gross and clinical anatomy.

Jürgen Koebke (Figures 1 and 2) was born on 3rd November 1945 in Cologne. He was one of four children of a general practitioner. Because the children could see their father only Sundays, they decided to never study medicine. Therefore, Jürgen began to study biology at the University of Cologne in 1965. In 1973, he received the degree “Dr. rer. nat.”, which is a German Doctor’s degree in natural sciences and equivalent to PhD.

In that period he was interested in embryology and comparative anatomy. Therefore, he was appointed to the Institute of Anatomy of the University of Cologne as a research assistant of both Professors Ortmann and Kummer. Three years later, following his colleague Dr. Tillman, he moved to the Institute of Anatomy at the University of Kiel. Besides his job in Anatomy Jürgen received the basic medical education at the Medical Faculty of Kiel.

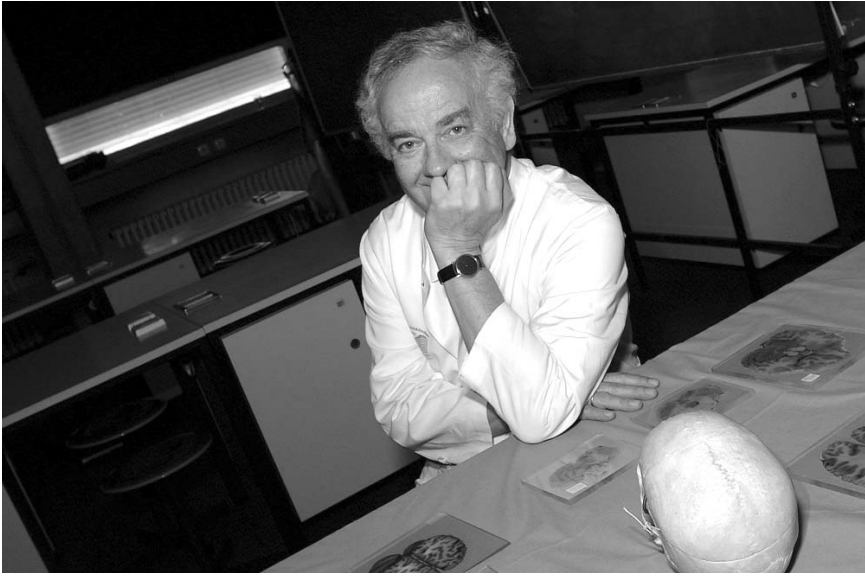
He returned to the Institute of Anatomy at Cologne as a University Professor in 1983 and was appointed as Chief of the Study Group of Functional Anatomy and Biomechanics. His research areas were clinical and topographic anatomy of the locomotor apparatus, implantology and endoprostheses. In the meantime Jürgen had contact with the German-Speaking Society for Hand



**Figure 1.** Em. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Prof. h.c. (Rus) Dr. h.c. (Gr.) J. Koebke (1945-2012).

Surgery and studied mainly the clinical anatomy of hand and upper extremity.

Jürgen served as the Student Dean of the Medical Faculty of Cologne between 1990 and 2002. He was the head of the Institute of Anatomy and the Chief of the Office of International Academic Relations of the University from 2002 until his retirement in 2011. He was chosen and awarded as the best teacher of the medical faculty in the traditionally elections by the students at the University of Cologne several times. Along with



**Figure 2.** J. Koebe, the head of the Anatomical Institute of the University of Cologne between 2002 and 2011 (photo from 2004).

his contributions to the development of undergraduate medical education he constructed fruitful bridges between anatomy and surgical disciplines such as hand surgery and orthopedics, plastic and maxillofacial surgery. He also organized postgraduate courses for many years. I had the opportunity to co-organize regularly workshops on fresh cadavers in collaboration with various surgical societies in the last ten years.

Jürgen received the title of Honorary Professor from the Medical University of Rostov, Russia, in 2001, and an Honorary Doctorate from Aristoteles University in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 2005. He also received honorary memberships from various scientific societies including the Turkish Society of Anatomy and Clinical Anatomy (TSACA).

He published over 250 high-quality scientific papers and more than 30 books or book chapters and translated books from French to German as well. One of his excellent contributions was the paper on the relationships between structure and stresses upon the human hand joints published in 1983.<sup>[1]</sup> This and his subsequent studies on this topic allowed him to become famous. He was placed as one of few anatomists in the book “A Life for Hand Surgery” which consists of 100 portraits of leading

personalities in hand surgery and was published by Buck-Gramcko in 2007.<sup>[2]</sup>

Jürgen had married Veronika Newinger in 1970. They had four daughters and three grandchildren.

Jürgen was an open-access colleague and teacher, an open-handed friend and an open-hearted man. His heart has always been open to friendship of people from all over the world. Besides a perfect anatomist he was known as a beloved teacher, an encouraging co-worker, a humoristic scholar and an exemplary humanist. He always enjoyed where the human exists, except the protocol meetings and ceremonies...

The unexpected death of Jürgen is a heavy loss to his family, to his friends, and to the entire community of anatomical research. He should be remembered as a great clinical anatomist and as a modern age philosopher as well, who friendly balanced the trilogy of science-human-god in his heart.

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