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Guide to the Alexander Spitzer Collection 1928-1969



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.SPITZERA

Title Spitzer, Alexander. Collection

Date 1928-1969

Size .25 linear feet (1 box)

Repository Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract Dr. Alexander Spitzer (b. October 22, 1868, d. January 16, 1943) was a scientist and physician who specialized in several fields, including anatomy, neurology, and pathology, and developed a phylogenetic theory of the abnormal development of human hearts. In the final years of his scientific career, he worked on a book that presents his theory in detail and responds to its critics. Due to his dismissal by the Nazi regime from his position at the University of Vienna and his deportation to a concentration camp, Spitzer's book remained unpublished. The collection includes the entire manuscript of the book, the manuscript of another book that grew out of the second part of the former, corrections for certain sections, and correspondence documenting the subsequent possessors of Spitzer's manuscripts.

Acknowledgments

The Alexander Spitzer Collection was processed and preserved with the generous support of the Klotz Endowment.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Spitzer, Alexander. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Biographical Note

Dr. Alexander Spitzer was born on October 22, 1868 in Miskolc, Hungary. He studied medicine at the University of Vienna and graduated in 1892 with a doctor of medicine degree.

Following graduation, he worked in affiliation to Richard von Krafft-Ebing's psychiatry clinic, H. Obersteiner's Neurology Institute, and S. Exner's Physiology Institute. While he preferred to pursue his scientific investigations independently, relying on a moderate inherited fortune, the inflation of World War I forced him to assume teaching positions. In 1914, Spitzer became an assistant to Julius Tandler at the University of Vienna's Anatomy Institute. In 1919, he earned his habilitation in anatomy and became an assistant under Otto Marburg at the Neurology Institute of the University of Vienna, which he continued until 1933. During this position, in 1924, he was named Extraordinary Professor for the Anatomy and Pathology of the Nervous System.

In the early stages of his career, Spitzer's interests were focused on neurology and psychiatry. After the time he spent with Tandler, he developed an interest in circulation, which guided him towards investigating the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of the human heart. From there, Spitzer researched in more detail the abnormal development of the heart in transposition of the arterial trunks. He published numerous articles on the subject throughout his later career.

He was persecuted by the Nazis and in 1938 expelled from his position at the University of Vienna. It must be around this time and under difficult conditions that he completed the manuscript of the monograph "Die Transposition und Inversion des Herzens im Lichte der phylogenetischen Theorie (The Transposition and Inversion of Hearts in Light of the Phylogenetic Theory)," presenting his whole theory, together with a separate manuscript that responds to his critics, "Beiträge zur Kritik der phylogenetischen und ontogenetischen Transpositionstheorie (Articles on the Critique of the Phylogenetic and Ontogenetic Transposition Theory)."

In 1942, Spitzer was deported by the Nazis to the concentration camp in Theresienstadt (Terezín, in today's Czechia). He had already been suffering from heart disease at that advanced age. He died on January 16, 1943. The cause of his death is identified by the physicians in the concentration camp as myocardial degeneration.

Spitzer's manuscript presents the fullest version of his theory and includes numerous illustrations (of which only a few are in the collection). The latest work he cites in the book is from 1937, thus enabling the dating of the manuscript from 1937-1942. The second part of the book responds to the critics of Spitzer's theory. Spitzer later decided to develop this part as a separate book, which is also included in the collection.

Spitzer's notes on the documents show that he created multiple copies of both books, prepared them for publication by adding guiding notes to typesetters, and associated the copies with certain places (such as USA and Switzerland). It is likely that he intended to send the works to different places for publication. The manuscripts seem to have entered the possession of Dr. Emil Schwarz (1865-1955) who had been a physician at the University of Vienna and later

immigrated to the U.S. to escape Nazi persecution. In Schwarz's words, the manuscript was committed to his care "after a complicated journey." Schwarz then entrusted the manuscript to the custody of Dr. Richard Langendorf, who also escaped Nazi persecution, immigrated to the U.S., and worked at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago together with Schwarz. Eventually, in 1969, Langendorf handed the manuscript to Dr. Maurice Lev (1909-1994), a prominent heart disease specialist.

Already in 1951, Maurice Lev, together with Dr. Aloysius Vass, had published a book that consists of an English translation of Spitzer's 1923 article on the phylogenetic theory of malformed hearts and an analysis of the theory (under the title "The Architecture of Normal and Malformed Hearts: a Phylogenetic Theory of Their Development"). In the introduction, Lev reveals the existence of "an unpublished manuscript summarizing [Spitzer's] whole theory" and informs that "[t]his is now being translated by the authors and will be published [...] in the near future." Apparently, this was not accomplished and Spitzer's final work remained in manuscript form.

Scope Note

The collection consists of two book manuscripts, illustrations to be inserted in the published book, separate copies of certain sections from the manuscripts intended for corrections, a print copy of an article to which Spitzer contributed, and a correspondence between the later possessors of the manuscripts Schwarz, Langendorf, and Lev. They are organized according to an estimated chronological order.

Folder 2 consists of the complete manuscript of Spitzer's book that presents his theory. He labeled this copy as "f-Original" and as publishable, and noted that a copy of this version (Kopie f) is in the USA but not corrected, thus not ready for publication. Folders 3-7 contain documents related to this book, such as a limited number of the illustrations to be inserted in the book, and separate sections to be used for corrections. Spitzer attached notes to each of these sections as to where they should be used. Folder 8 consists of the second book that was, as Spitzer noted, originally intended as the second part of the first book. Folder 9 contains a copy of the introduction to the second book, intended for "control" and not "publication."

Related Resources

Subject Headings

- Spitzer, Alexander
- Medicine
- History of Medicine
- Congenital heart disease
- World War II

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Print copy of the article “Eine abnorme Wulstbildung in der linken Herzkammer,” published in 1928

Box 1

Folder 2

The manuscript of the book “Die Transposition und Inversion des Herzens im Lichte der phylogenetischen Theorie,” labeled as “F-Original,” written ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 3

Table of contents and introduction to “Die Transposition und Inversion des Herzens im Lichte der phylogenetischen Theorie,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 4

Illustrations, numbered as 17, 18, 19, 19a, ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 5

Corrections for “F-Original,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 6

Corrections for “F-Kopie,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 7

Corrections from “G-Version,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 8

The manuscript of the book “Beiträge zur Kritik der phylogenetischen und ontogenetischen Transpositionstheories,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 9

Introduction to “Beiträge zur Kritik der phylogenetischen und ontogenetischen Transpositionstheories,” ca. 1937-1942

Box 1

Folder 10

Undated letter from Emil Schwarz to Richard Langendorf, letter from Richard Langendorf to Maurice Lev dated 1969