

With his landmark 1543 publication *[De humani corporis fabrica](#)*, Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) laid the foundation of modern anatomy. He died on the Greek island of Zakynthos, where he was buried, but the exact location of his grave has remained unknown—until now. Tracing and studying it is one of the main objectives of the international interdisciplinary platform [Vesalius Continuum](#).

‘About ten years ago, we first used a digital Geographical Information System to identify the likely site of the former burial church. This indication was later confirmed through ground-penetrating radar surveys. Once changes occur in the physical environment, as new constructions are common in the area, further archeological investigation may become possible. Collaboration with both the academic community and local authorities remains essential for the success of this project,’ says Prof. Dr. Ann Van de Velde ([University of Antwerp](#)).

Burial location

“The search for Vesalius’s grave is more than an archaeological mission. It is a new interdisciplinary effort that brings together art, science, and technology. Our goal is not only to identify Vesalius’s final resting place, but also to reconstruct his face. Should human remains be discovered, a detailed forensic-anatomical study will follow. Through DNA analysis and skull shape measurements, in cooperation with paleopathologists and bioarchaeologists, we will be able to confirm his identity.”



In 2014, the board of Vesalius Continuum offered this bronze statue of an anatomical figure (sculptors: Pascale Pollier and Richard Neave) to the people of Zakynthos. © Guy Cobolet

“This project also reintroduces the history of anatomy in a fresh way. We want to excavate the past and bring it to life for the future. The results will feed into innovative educational methods designed to inspire future generations of medical students. For this, we work closely with international partners.”

Digital guide

The reconstruction of Vesalius’s face will serve as the starting point for an educational app. Through augmented and virtual reality, students will be able to explore human anatomy with Vesalius as their digital guide. The app will combine medical expertise with historical context and the richness of medical art, offering a unique and immersive learning experience.



Vesalius's 1543 book was a milestone in medical research. © Smithsonian

International collaboration

The Vesalius initiative, with its focus on the visual representation of the human body, already built an international network through [ARSIC](#), connecting medical artists and scientists worldwide. The University of Antwerp, with its strong tradition in medical history, anatomy, and forensic science, is leading the project. Within the university, the Faculty of Medicine and Healthcare and the History of Healthcare research group are at the forefront, supported by the [BIOMAB](#) research group, which fosters collaboration between art and science.

The [Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp \(KASKA\)](#) also contributes, especially through its digital expertise centre [MAXlab](#). This centre develops immersive technologies such as VR and AR, which are central to the educational app. Meanwhile, **medical artist Pascale Pollier in collaboration with** the [Face Lab at Liverpool John Moores University](#) is responsible for the digital craniofacial reconstruction.

“Our project is not only of scientific and educational importance, but also of societal significance,” Van De Velde emphasizes. “The discovery of Vesalius’s tomb could position Zakynthos as a scientific and cultural hub. It could also open new market opportunities for technology companies specializing in AR/VR applications for heritage and education.”

Vesalian Landscapes and Theatres of Anatomy

While awaiting the green light for further archaeological research on Zakynthos, the Vesalius Continuum continues to advance knowledge. Since 2014, the platform has organized a triennial conference on the long-term development of anatomical education in Europe. These gatherings explore how anatomical knowledge has been created, performed, and communicated across material, philosophical, and cultural frameworks.

[The 5th Edition on 7-9 May 2026 at the University of Antwerp’s city campus](#), has a central theme: *the concept of anatomical theatres*.



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Universiteit
Antwerpen

Vesalius Continuum

Faculteit Geneeskunde en Gezondheidswetenschappen

Universiteit Antwerpen

Campus Drie Eiken, Gebouw S

Universiteitsplein 1

B-2610 Wilrijk

E: ann.vandavelde2@uantwerpen.be

W: [Vesalius Continuum](#)