

Visual evidence: autopsy drawings and the making of forensic knowledge in Portugal

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Background

The 19th century was marked by profound transformations in medical knowledge, particularly in pathological anatomy and the consolidation of forensic medicine as a scientific discipline essential to the administration of justice.

Forensic Medicine in Portugal

In Portugal, these scientific developments led to the formal institutionalization of forensic medicine teaching in 1836 and, later, to the creation of organized medico-legal structures in 1899, including morgues associated with medical schools. Despite the material constraints of early forensic facilities, medico-legal practice evolved rapidly and adopted innovative methodologies.

Medical Illustration - Autopsy Drawings as Forensic Evidence

Throughout the 20th century, medical illustration played a central role in both anatomical teaching and forensic documentation.

**José Joaquim da Silva Amado
(1840–1925)**



Pioneer in the systematic use of anatomical drawings in autopsy reports.

Sole forensic practitioner at the Morgue of Lisbon and its first Director (1899–1911). Appointed to the chair of Forensic Medicine and Hygiene in 1879. Director of the Lisbon Medical-Surgical School, Director of the Hygiene Laboratory, President of the Society of Medical Sciences, President of the National League Against Tuberculosis. Deputy and Peer of the Realm.

**João Alberto Pereira de Azevedo Neves
(1877–1955)**



Expansion and improvement in the use of anatomical drawings in collaboration with specialized medical illustrators.

Director of the Morgue of Lisbon (1911-1918), Director of the Institute of Legal Medicine of Lisbon (1918-1947). Teacher of Forensic Medicine and Director of the Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon, first Rector of the Technical University of Lisbon, President of the Society of Medical Sciences of Lisbon, President of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. Secretary of State and Minister of Commerce.

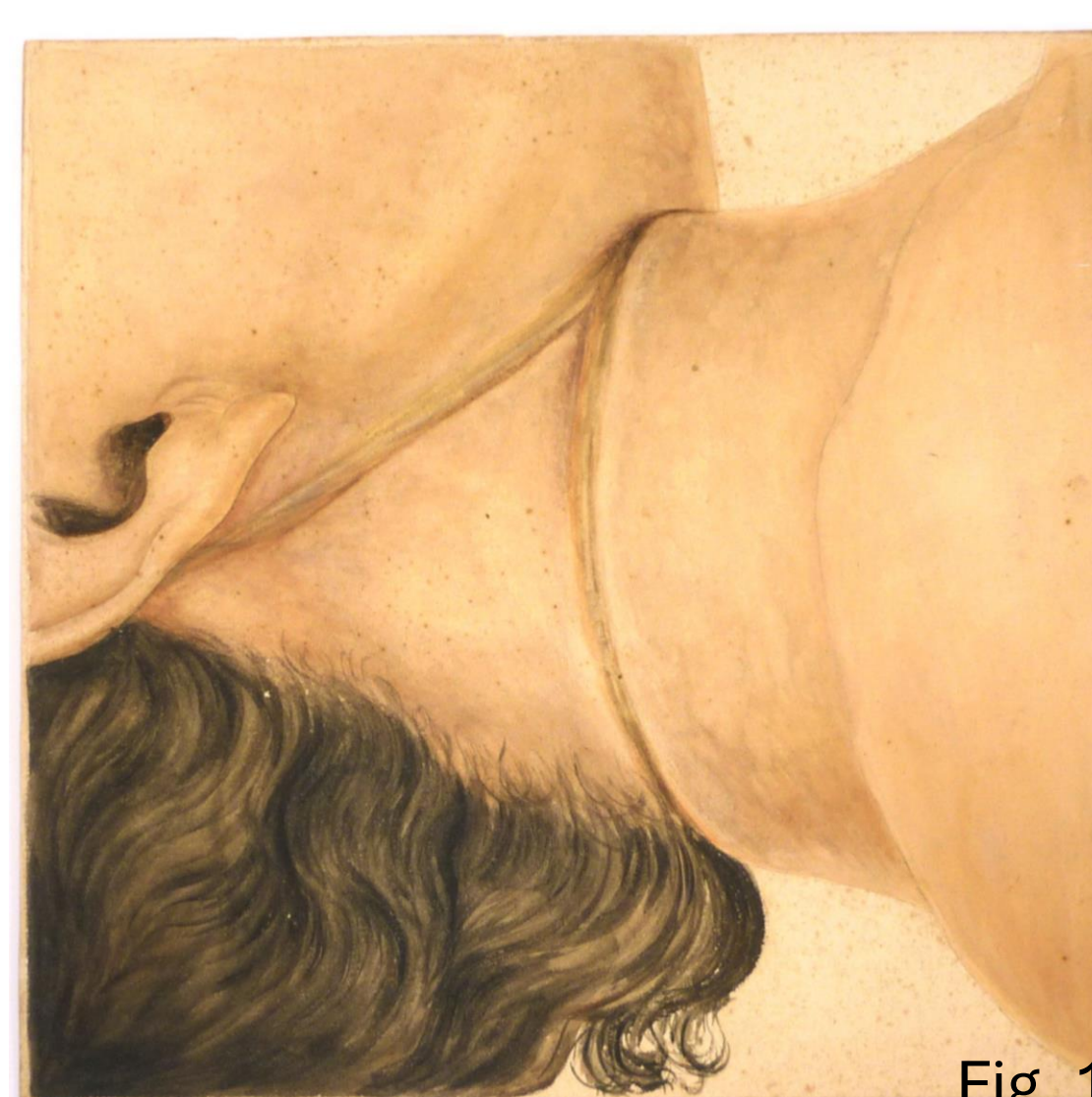


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

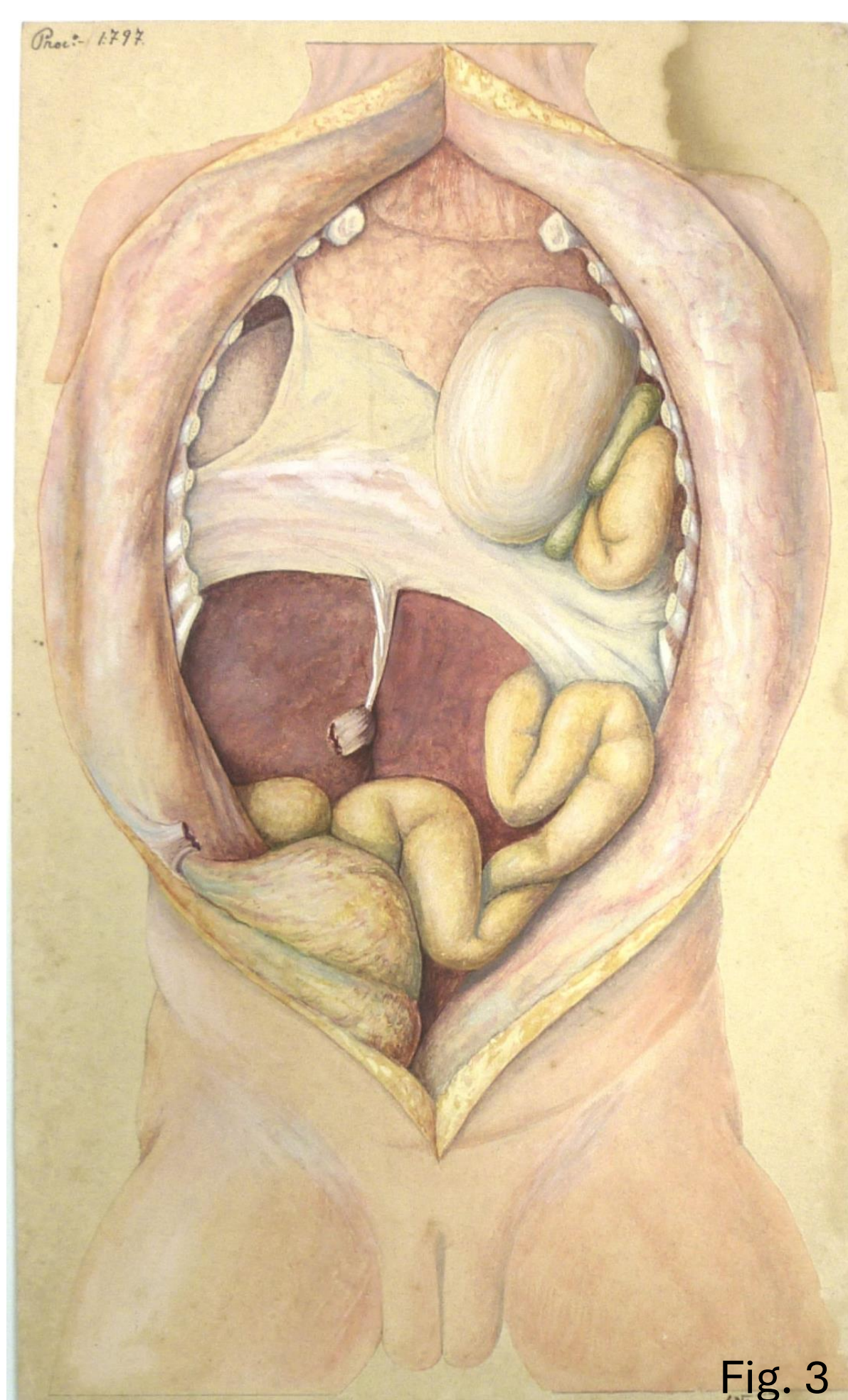


Fig. 3

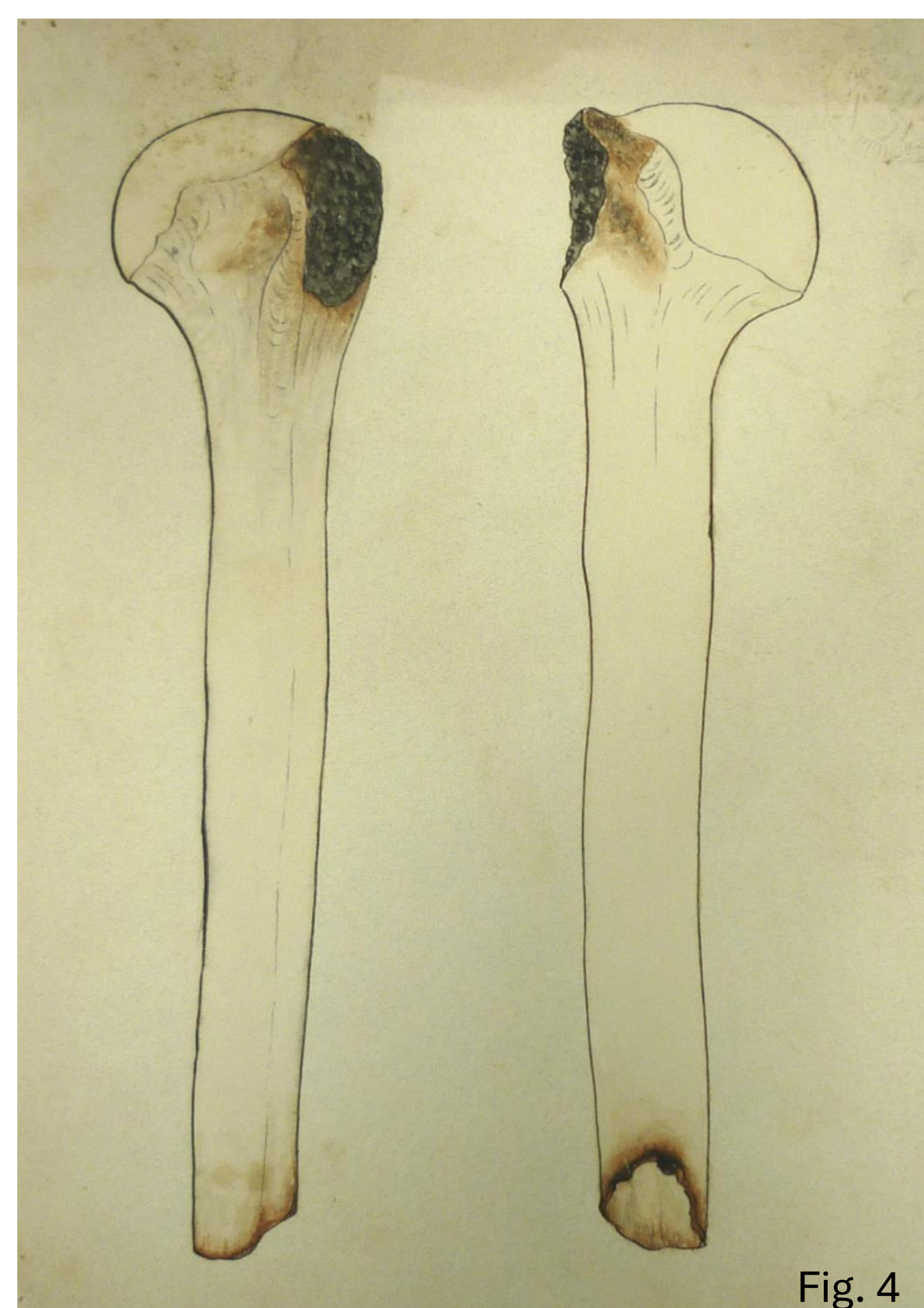
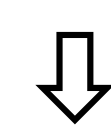


Fig. 4

Fig. 1 – Fig. 4: autopsy drawing records from the first half of 20th century

Visual records
particularly effective in judicial contexts



**Easier communication of
complex anatomical findings to
magistrates and juries**



Autopsy drawings:

Reliable evidentiary tools

Positive appraisal in international
medico-legal circles

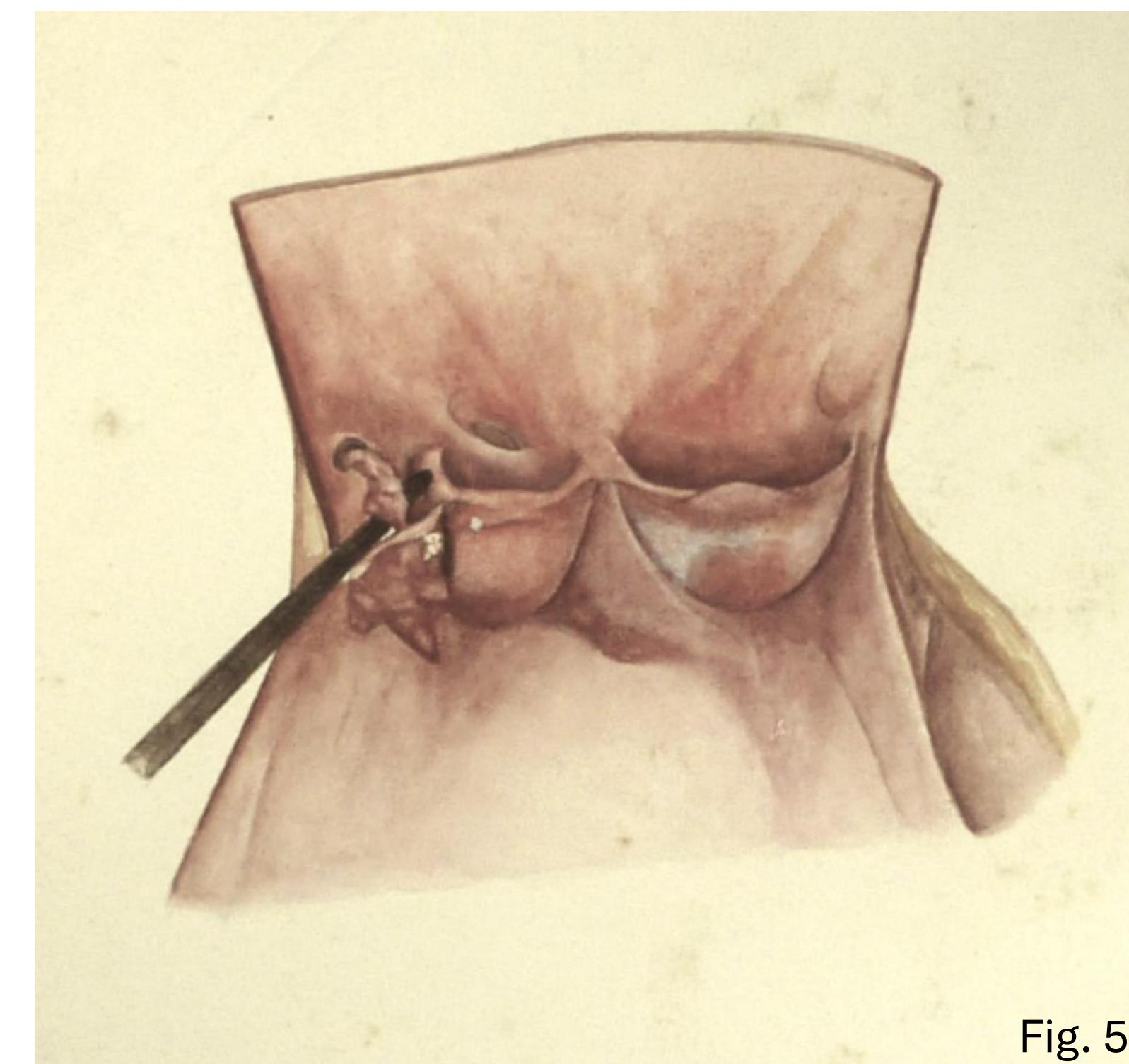


Fig. 5

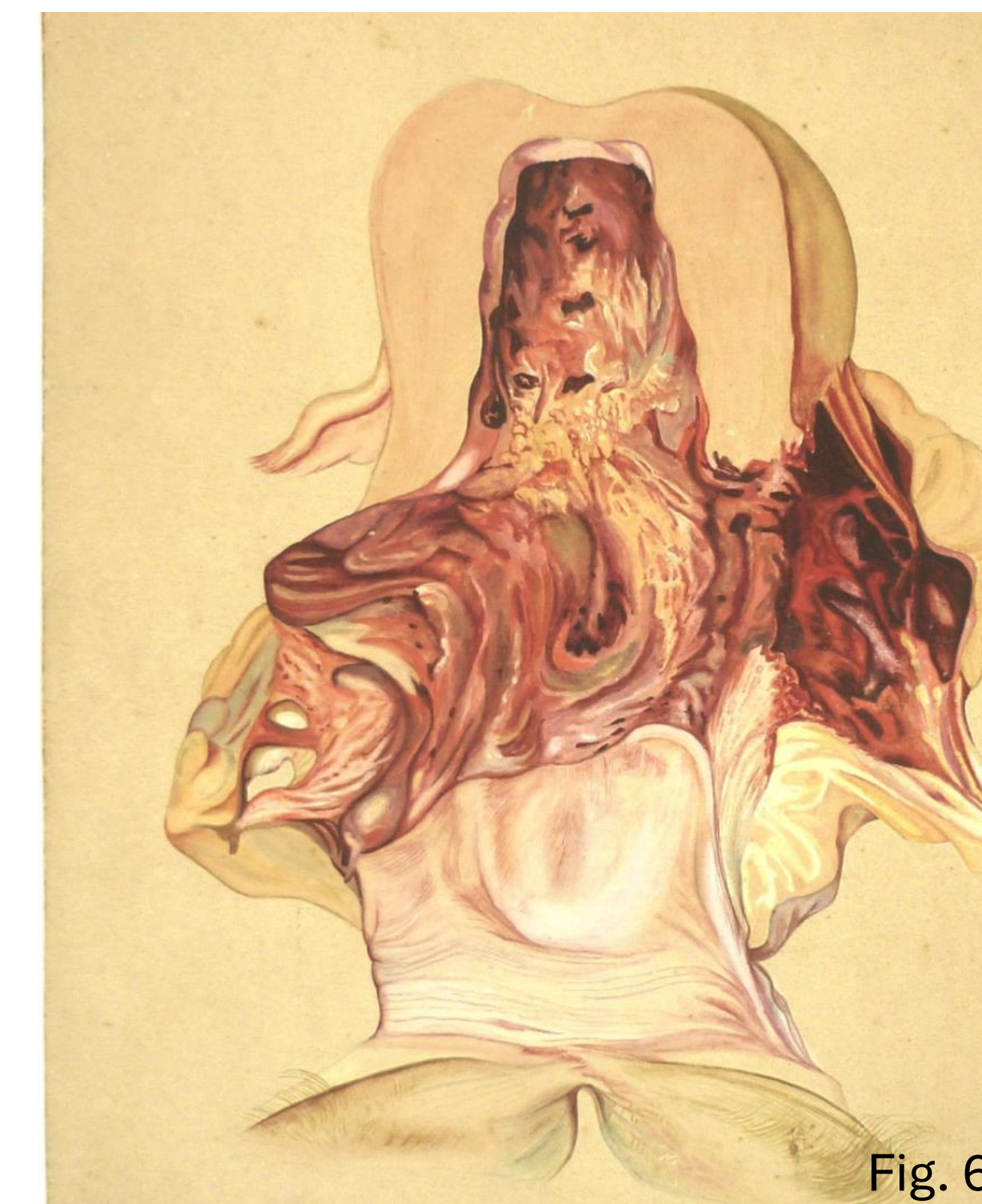


Fig. 6

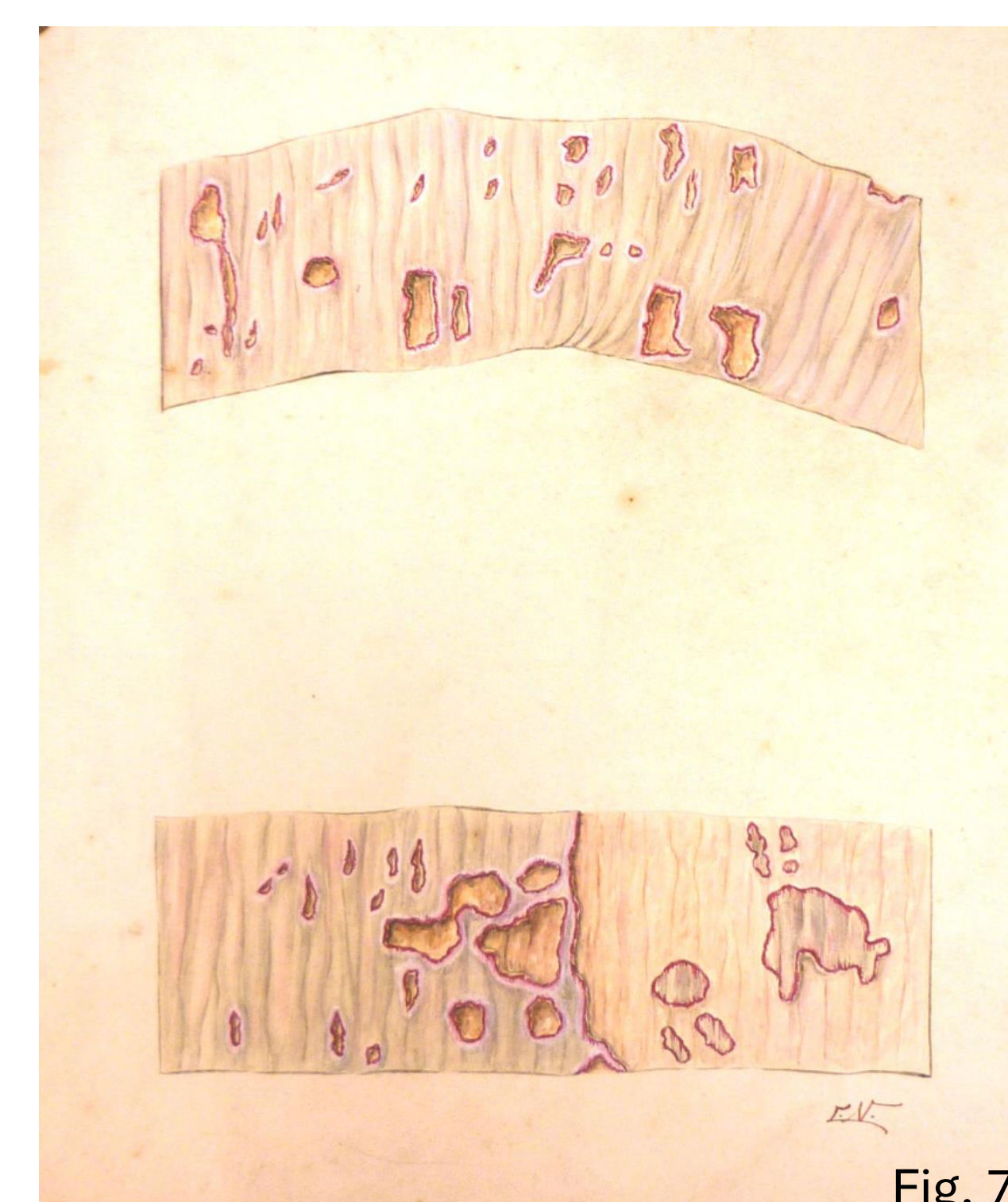


Fig. 7

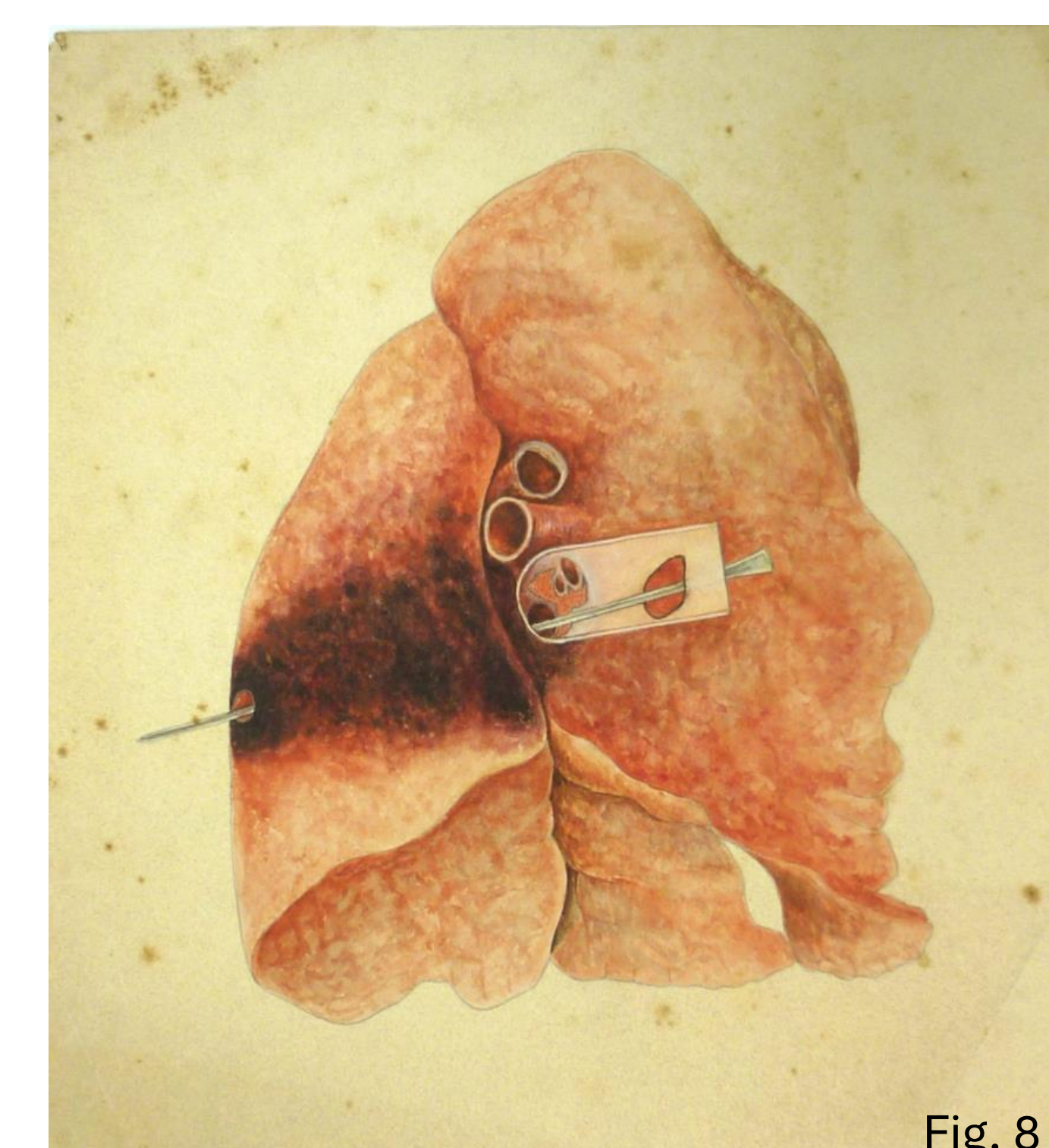


Fig. 8

Fig. 5 – Fig. 8: autopsy drawing records from the first half of 20th century

This preliminary research shows the importance of visual evidence in the construction and transmission of forensic knowledge. Despite the partial exploration of archival materials from the Morgue of Lisbon, the autopsy reports produced by Silva Amado remain largely unknown. Moreover, the motivations underlying his early adoption of graphic documentation as a forensic tool have not yet been systematically studied.

This project aims to examine the role of autopsy drawings in Portuguese forensic practice, to analyse the contribution of Silva Amado to the visual culture of forensic medicine and to understand the value of graphic documentation in medico-legal contexts.