

Johann Friedrich Meckel

Few families have had an impact on medicine to equal that of the Meckel family. Johann Friedrich Meckel the Elder is of special interest to the neurosciences, given that his dissertation on the [fifth cranial nerve](#) included the first description of the arachnoid space investing the [trigeminal nerve](#) into the middle fossa. He was interested in neuroanatomy, along with botany and pathology of the inguinal hernia and the lymphatic system. His mentors included the eminent Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777) and August Buddaeus (1695-1753), and he extended his own influence on the work of Giovanni Morgagni and Alexander Monro II. He spent the latter part of his life in Berlin as professor of anatomy, botany, and obstetrics. His son, Philipp Friedrich Theodor Meckel (1755-1803), was one of the founders of the current collection of anatomic specimens at the University of Halle and provided important groundwork for the practice of obstetrics. Meckel the Elder's grandson, Johann Friedrich Meckel the Younger (1781-1833), was a more prolific investigator and founder of the science of teratology. Many anatomic structures, such as Meckel's diverticulum, bear his name, and he vastly expanded the university's anatomic collection. August Albrecht Meckel (1789-1829), Meckel the Younger's brother, practiced legal medicine and investigated avian anatomy but died prematurely from tuberculosis. August's son, Johann Heinrich Meckel (1821-1856), took the instructor's position in pathologic anatomy at the University of Berlin that his great-grandfather had held at the Charité. After his untimely death from pulmonary disease, his position was filled by Rudolf Virchow. The history of this family is discussed in detail in an article of Janjua et al. ¹⁾.

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Janjua RM, Schultka R, Goebbel L, Pait TG, Shields CB. The legacy of Johann Friedrich Meckel the Elder (1724-1774): a 4-generation dynasty of anatomists. *Neurosurgery*. 2010 Apr;66(4):758-70; discussion 770-1. doi: 10.1227/01.NEU.0000367997.45720.A6. PubMed PMID: 20305497.

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