

## Brief report

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Provenance research on human remains  
from German colonies in the Jena  
Anatomical Collection

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In the project, the provenances, identities and individual biographies of 13 human remains identified in the Jena Anatomical Collection with presumed origins from the former colonies of "German Southwest Africa" (today Namibia) or from Africa and from "German New Guinea" (today part of Papua New Guinea) were to be researched. Also, recommendations were to be made for further handling of the remains. Moreover, research interest was directed towards the donors of some of these human remains, the zoologist and anthropologist Leonhard Schultze-Jena (1872-1955) and Dr. med. Eilers, as well as their networks including the transport and trade routes used. Furthermore, the history of the Anatomical Collection and the Anatomical Institute, including its staff, was investigated with a focus on their colonial heritage. In addition to extensive research (internet, museum databases, online archives, specialist literature, historical printed materials, archival records, etc.), including oral interviews, the project used non-invasive anthropological research methods.

The following findings were established for the individual human remains:

**1) Incomplete mounted skeleton of a black man with massive pathological bone changes (inventory number OSP 054), collection entry in 1807.**

It was confirmed morphologically that the remains were from a male individual with an origin or ancestors from Sub-Saharan Africa. The localisation as well as the morphological expression of the bone changes on his skeleton are most probably due to a severe tuberculosis. At the beginning of the 19th century, tuberculosis led to death in up to 50% of cases. The path of infection is usually via the respiratory tract and via the circulatory system. Gradually, the skeleton becomes affected, where the infection has a predominantly bone-degrading effect and can lead to severe destruction. After initial symptoms, such as fatigue, loss of appetite, weight loss and mild fever or cough, a bloody cough, severe weight loss and anaemia later develops in severe cases, until the patient finally succumbs to the disease. The age at death was found to be between 24 and 32 years and the body height about 165 cm. There was also evidence of a healed injury on the left clavicle, indicative of a tear or rupture of the deltoid muscle.

With regard to provenance, it was possible to substantiate the assumption that the individual was prepared in 1807 at the Jena Anatomical Institute by the anatomy professor and collection curator Johann Friedrich Fuchs (1771-1828) and the prosecutor Carl Ludwig Homburg (d. 1833). The reliable assignment to entries in the collection directories was possible via inscriptions on the skeleton and the pathologies. In close temporal proximity to the skeleton of the Black man, the heart, the scalp, the penis, a flesh ulcer from the groin, a piece of skin, two male breasts, the skin of the foot with the nails, the rectum, the skin of a forearm and a hand with the nails, as well as the entire facial skin of at least one (male) Black person entered the Anatomical Collection. This coincidence makes it very likely that the remains were from a single Black man who must have died in 1806 or 1807 in Jena or the surrounding area. His identity could not be established with certainty. Domain La Fortune was identified as the most likely candidate. He was employed at the Weimar court under Duke Carl August of Saxe-Weimar as one of two so-called "court moors", i.e. a Black servant who symbolised the (alleged) non-European relations and influence of the ducal house. La Fortune died of tuberculosis in Jena on 10 July 1806, aged 24. Nothing has been found out about his origins and biography. Alternatively, the pathological findings and the young age at death would also be consistent with a Black French or Prussian soldier who died in the Battle of Jena and Auerstedt in

October 1806. Unlike for the Battle of Leipzig, however, there is no evidence of Black people participating in the Battle of Jena. Alternatively, other broad scenarios of origin are also conceivable for the individual, as the history of the African diaspora in Germany (Brandenburg-Prussia) goes back to the 17th century.

The skeleton is the only preserved specimen of the Black man's body in the Anatomical Collection. The Black man was of interest to contemporaries because of his perceived otherness, as the skeleton was not inventoried among the pathological specimens despite its conspicuous bone changes. Until the 1920s, it was used several times for anthropological examinations and demonstrations in the context of scientific racialisation attempts, as could be proven by means of historical specialist publications. However, the fact that the supposed otherness of the individual fell into the background and then into oblivion in the course of time is shown by an apparently changed use of its skeleton: there are traces of at least three (re)mountings. Apparently, parts of the skeleton were destroyed during a fall to the right side, because several bones and the sternum have been replaced by partly and suitably trimmed "replacements" of one or more very probably Central European individuals. When the skeleton was repaired, it was apparently important to complete it again primarily for anatomical instructions, whereas the biogeographical origin was no longer important. Currently missing skeletal parts (skull, coccyx) cannot be identified in the collection.

**Recommendations:** It was not possible to identify a community of origin for possible repatriation. Further research on the identity and individual biography of the individual was recommended; any other use in research and teaching was discouraged for ethical reasons. An exhibition of the skeleton would be conceivable with appropriate scientific contextualisation. Disassembly and separate storage of the bones from different individuals is recommended.

## **2) Complete ligamentous skeleton of a black woman (inventory number OSP 056), collection entry in 1843.**

Here, too, it was confirmed morphologically that the remains were from a female individual with an origin or ancestors from Sub-Saharan Africa. An age at death of 20 to 24 years and a body height of about 149 cm were determined. The teeth are all present and, apart from some tartar and incipient fissure caries, in good condition. There are clear indications of permanently increased intracranial pressure (intracranial pressure symptoms, haemorrhagic-inflammatory processes). The young woman most probably suffered from persistent headaches. Her body was probably prepared immediately after death and, since ligamentous skeletons are very fragile and hardly transportable, this was probably done in or near Jena.

Provenance research did not yield any clues as to the identity or origin of the individual. If the same courtly context is assumed as for the Black man, Wilhelmina Eleonora Friederica Leveillé, daughter of the Weimar "court Moor" François Leveillé and a so-called "mulatto" named Maria Göckel might be a possibility. She died in Weimar in 1831 at the age of 25. There has been little research on female Black servants to date. Other possible biographies of the individual are analogous to those mentioned above for the Black man.

An almost certain identification of the skeleton in the historical inventory entries was possible through some indications on the skeleton. Certainty was then achieved by reconstructing historical skull measurements and comparing them with anatomical features that were documented in historical specialist publications. The scientific context of use is very similar to that of the Black man, right up to the disappearance of the Black identity from the collection lists.

**Recommendations:** It was not possible to name a community of origin for a possible repatriation. Accordingly, the above recommendations should be repeated. Hanging storage is recommended, but above all, unnecessary movements and transports should be avoided.

**3) Skull of an approximately 17-year-old youth with a presumed connection to the former colony of "German Southwest Africa", today Namibia (Nama) (inventory number OCP 301), collection entry in 1927, donor Dr. med. Eilers**

Morphologically, an origin or ancestry from sub-Saharan Africa and an age at death between 16 and 20 years was confirmed, but the sexual characteristics were not sufficiently pronounced for a determination of sex. Evidence of a diet probably high in meat and fibers was found on the dentition. The individual apparently suffered from a chronic middle ear infection, which could be due to a weakened immune system caused by vitamin C deficiency (scurvy), for which further evidence was also found on the skull. Bone changes due to scurvy indicate long-term extreme malnutrition and starvation. Comparable bone changes were observed in people who died in the concentration and internment camp on Shark Island near Swakopmund during the Nama War. There are also indications that the skull is an unprepared surface find (collection).

The skull could be reliably assigned to the entries in the collection register on the basis of inscriptions and historical glass plate negatives. It was not possible to clarify the identity and biography of the individual. A connection with the German genocidal war against Herero and Nama in 1904-1908 is considered to be likely due to the time of delivery and the pathological findings. Who the documented donor (Dr. med. Eilers) was remains a matter of speculation. Nothing was found out about the most suitable candidate, Dr. Hans Otto Werner Eilers, who was employed as an assistant at the Jena Anatomical Institute in 1926/27. The presumed deployment of his grandfather as a staff physician in "German Southwest Africa" at the time in question was not confirmed. A second skull of an allegedly female adolescent Herero girl, which was delivered at the same time by Dr. Eilers, was not found. However, glass plate negatives are also available for this skull. The glass plates were used by the Jena anatomist Friedrich Maurer as illustrations in his publication "Der Mensch und seine Ahnen" (Man and his ancestors, 1928).

**Recommendations:** The Namibian government issued a general request for the return of human remains. The repatriation of the skull is recommended. For ethical reasons, the skull should not be exhibited or used in research or teaching until it has been returned.

**4) Skull of a woman with a presumed reference to the former colony "German South-West Africa", today Namibia (Herero), with tooth sign (without inventory number).**

It was confirmed morphologically that the remains were from a female individual with an origin or ancestors in Sub-Saharan Africa. The dental sign with the two upper central incisors filed obliquely and the four lower incisors removed in adolescence, which was present with an overall good dental health, was assigned to Herero traditions. An age at death of 20 to 25 years was determined for the individual. An already advanced arthrosis of the upper cervical joint despite the young age at death is possibly due to carrying loads on the head. In addition, there was evidence of anaemia and a chronic nasal cavity and middle ear infection. It can be assumed that the young woman's immune system was permanently weakened, for example, due to malnutrition or chronic diseases.

In the registers of the Anatomical Collection, remains of four Herero individuals are registered. Apart from the skull mentioned above with Eilers as the donor, all were delivered to the institute by Leonhard Schultze-Jena. Historical photo negatives on glass plates, probably from the end of the 1920s, show a smaller and a larger mounted skeleton of adult humans, with a morphology that is consistent with an origin from Sub-Saharan Africa and the described dental signs. It is almost certain that these are two Herero skeletons given to the Jena Anatomical Collection by Leonhard Schultze-Jena in 1912 at the latest. The skull of the smaller skeleton is identical to the skull examined here, which, however, was mounted on the skeleton of another individual when it was identified in the collection. The associated skeleton and the skeleton of the male Herero were not found.

The identity and biography of the female individual remain unclear. As a context of origin, the war against the Herero and Nama in 1904-1908 is almost certain: Leonhard Schultze-Jena was on a research trip to "German South-West Africa" at the time. He was in part an official escort of the German troops, demonstrably conducted anatomical and anthropological research on living and dead people there and sent human remains in at least double-digit numbers to Berlin. From there, the remains were transferred to Jena, among other places. Contemporary specialist publications provide evidence that the human remains of at least eight individuals from "German South-West Africa" from the Schultze-Jena Collection were given to the Jena Anatomical Institute, some of which were used for research work until the early 1920s: the preserved heads of three male and one female adult Herero, the preserved corpses of a Herero girl aged about 17 months and a newborn Nama girl, as well as the two skeletons of a male and a female Herero that arrived at the Anatomy in 1912. The published papers on tissue examinations of these human remains apparently had rarity value and may have attracted some attention among contemporaries. The mounted skeletons of the two Herero were used for anthropological demonstration purposes.

**Other finds** that are very probably related to this set of human remains were a paraffin block and 52 microscopic sectional preparations of the skin of a Herero from the teaching collection. The other human remains were not found. In Göttingen, there is a plaster cast of the skull of a male Herero aged about 40, which can be proven to have come from the Jena Anatomical Collection.

**Recommendations:** Repatriation of the skull of the female Herero as well as of the microscopic preparations and the paraffin block to Namibia. Analogous to the previous case, it is recommended that these human remains are excluded from presentation, research and teaching.

**5) Double trepanated skull of a man with a presumed connection to present-day Namibia or South Africa, without mandible (inventory number OCP 342), presumed collection entry in 1839.**

For this skull, it was suspected that it could be the skull of a male Nama received in 1839, i.e. before German colonialism, on the basis of some circumstantial evidence. The sex and an origin or ancestors from Sub-Saharan Africa could be confirmed morphologically. An age at death of 20 to 25 years was determined. There is evidence of haemorrhage and permanently increased internal pressure on the skull. It is conceivable that the young man was trepanated to relieve the pressure due to severe headaches or symptoms of failure, such as seizures or vomiting. The two trepanations, one round and one keyhole-shaped, could have led to death, but could also have been done shortly after death, for example for exercise purposes. There are also traces of anatomical dissection.

The presumed assignment of the skull to the historical inventory entries was reliably confirmed by checking historical measurements from a specialist publication. No information was found on the

provenance and identity of the individual. Thus, various biographical scenarios, such as that of a Black (court) servant, soldier, citizen, merchant, etc. are possible.

**Recommendations:** Repatriation to Namibia is only conditionally recommended. Due to the skull's early period of entry into the collection, further research seems appropriate to determine whether the historical designation handed down actually refers to the biogeographical or to the ethnic origin of the individual, and not solely to its being Black and/or its status. The exclusion of the skull from presentation, research and teaching is recommended.

- 6) Eight skulls with modelled and painted faces made of clay, some with cowries, hair and ear ornaments, with a presumed connection to the former colony "German New Guinea" in today's Papua New Guinea (inventory numbers OCP 379 to OCP 386), collection received 1997, donor Horst Bruchhaus, Institute of Human Genetics and Anthropology of the University of Jena**

The anthropological examination yielded the following findings:

- a) Skull of a man aged 20 to 25 years with evidence of anaemia (inventory number OCP 379).
- b) Skull of a man aged 30 to 40 years, cut mark and defects in the area of the occipital hole (probably headhunting trophy), tooth discolouration due to betel chewing (inventory number OCP 380)
- c) Skull of a child aged 11 to 14 years (inventory number OCP 381)
- d) Skull of a man aged 30 to 35 years with evidence of anaemia, cut mark in the area of the occipital hole (probably headhunting trophy), teeth discoloured by betel chewing (inventory number OCP 382)
- e) Skull of an adult of indeterminate sex aged 20 to 25 years (inventory number OCP 383)
- f) Skull of a probable woman, aged 40 to 60 years, with evidence of anaemia, all teeth lost postmortem (inventory number OCP 384)
- g) Skull of a man aged 40 to 55 years, all teeth lost postmortem (inventory number OCP 385)
- h) Skull of a child aged 4 to 6 years with visible torticollis and evidence of anaemia, its lower jaw has been replaced by a wooden replica (inventory number OCP 386).

The anaemia that is evident in four of the individuals was probably due to malnutrition and/or parasite infestation (malaria, worms); even today, the burden of anaemia on New Guinea is among the highest in the world. In seven individuals there is evidence of recovery from meningitis or encephalitis. Nothing was learned about the identities and biographies of the individuals. Although the painting on the modelled faces is individual, it does not provide any information about the individual and his or her origin according to the current state of knowledge.

Most of the knowledge about the skulls was gained through intensive contextual research, including at other German institutions that have stocks of over-modelled skulls. The Iatmul and Sawos on the middle Sepik river in New Guinea were identified as the communities of origin; precise information on the village or clan was not possible in this way. The processing and design of the skulls with only a very small number of cowries make a production before the First World War plausible. In six cases,

the skulls are so-called ancestor skulls, which were excavated after burial, decorated and often placed on hooks or large wooden boards in the men's houses or hung on walls, houses or in trees. Brood cells and egg packets of insects found on some skulls as well as visible traces of smoke (soot) fit these practices. The two remaining skulls are with some probability primary head-hunting trophies, as they show slash marks and defects at the occipital hole, indicating forcible perimortem severance and opening for brain extraction. However, the transitions between ancestral skulls and trophy skulls are fluid. The skulls of the probably female individual and the younger child show a design that stands out from the other skulls, which could indicate a deviating context of origin or use.

Over-modelled skulls can still be found on the art market today. Until the 1950s, hundreds of them were sold or exchanged by the local communities of origin to participants in European expeditions. But there is also evidence of unauthorised and sometimes violent removal. The skull of the 4- to 6-year-old child could be a specimen made especially for the trade, as the lower jaw was replaced by a wooden replica. However, it is also conceivable that the child held a special position within its community. The fact that at least three of the skulls are from women and children is a finding that can be considered rare, although earlier assumptions about an exclusively male decoration of skulls have since been refuted.

The acquisition routes of the eight over-modelled skulls could not be clarified. The origin from the Osteological Collection at the Institute of Anthropology of the University of Jena, as stated in the handover records of 1997, could not be proven based on its historical inventories. Older inventories may have come to the present State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony with collections from Jena around 1969 and could still turn up there in the course of the reappraisal. The aforementioned Leonhard Schultze-Jena was considered as a possible donor of the skulls, as he was also the leader of the German-Dutch border expedition in New Guinea in 1910/11. As the research revealed, the collected ethnographics from this expedition took their predetermined route to the then Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, for the most part via Jena. Here they were stored until the summer of 1914 in the workshop of the Jena lithographer Adolf Giltisch and his two sons, who died in 1911 and had worked for Ernst Haeckel for decades. Schultze-Jena's publication about the expedition reveals that he personally collected or acquired human remains in New Guinea and had some of them photographed in Jena by the Carl Zeiss company. It would therefore be a plausible hypothesis that the eight over-modelled skulls were collected by Schultze-Jena, reached Jena and found their way into a Jena collection with or without Schultze-Jena's knowledge. It is clear that Schultze-Jena himself retained ethnographic objects from his New Guinea expedition, which he later sold or gave away to dealers.

**Recommendations:** The repatriation of the skulls of all eight individuals of the Iatmul and Sawos to Papua New Guinea is recommended, as contexts of injustice cannot be excluded. Besides communication with the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, contact to representatives of the Iatmul and Sawos are desirable in order to clarify possible requests of the communities of origin with regard to the human remains of their ancestors. Until their return, the skulls should not be exhibited or used in research and teaching.

The present research project on the **colonial legacy of the Anatomical Collection and the Anatomical Institute** exemplifies colonial practices in academic collecting, research and teaching at the University of Jena. With few exceptions, professors and staff of the Institute took part in the scientific networks around Ernst Haeckel and his students and maintained memberships in the

*Medicinish-naturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zu Jena*, founded in 1853; the Jena local group of the *Deutsche Anthropologische Gesellschaft*, founded in 1877; and the *Geographische Gesellschaft (für Thüringen) zu Jena*, founded in 1880. These societies were platforms for oral and written exchange on questions of anthropology and racialisation in German-speaking countries and beyond; scientific articles were published in the society's own periodicals. The Geographical Society organised one of the first German colonial exhibitions in Jena in 1900.

As a teaching and research centre for comparative anatomy, the Jena Institute sometimes developed activities that can be described as targeted colonial collecting; in just under two centuries, about 100 human remains and about 50 casts and busts of non-European individuals entered the Anatomical Collection. This does not include large stocks of non-European zoological specimens, which today are almost completely housed at the Jena Institute of Zoology with Phyletic Museum. Institute director Emil Huschke (1797-1858) set up a so-called "Raçenschädel" (racial skulls) collection in the middle of the 19th century and in 1854 published the work "Schädel, Hirn und Seele des Menschen ... nach Alter, Geschlecht und Raçe" (Human skull, brain and soul ... according to age, sex and race). The Grand Duke Carl Alexander of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach (1818-1901), who was enthusiastic about colonialism, donated human remains and casts from Dutch colonial areas. In German colonial times, the Jena anatomy assistant Richard Semon (1859-1918) undertook a research trip to Australia, New Guinea and Indonesia. Institute director Max Fürbringer (1846-1920) was subsequently involved with his zoological collections for years. Under his successor Friedrich Maurer (1859-1936), the human remains sent by Schultze-Jena from "German South West Africa" became research material for the prosecutor Heinrich von Eggeling (1869-1954) and others. Maurer himself published the monograph "Der Mensch und seine Ahnen" (Man and his ancestors) in 1928. Also, institute director Hans Böker (1886-1938) went on a zoological research trip to Brazil.

So far, about 40 human remains have been identified in the Anatomical Collection that certainly or probably originate from colonial contexts; in addition, the casts and busts mentioned above are still existent, with a few exceptions. Until a few years ago, some of these specimens and objects were used in anatomical teaching and presented to specialist audiences; recently, however, an awareness of the colonial provenances and a correspondingly sensitive approach to them have developed at the Institute.

All objectives of the project were achieved, that is, performing research on the provenances of the human remains, the donors and their networks as well as the institutional history and making recommendations on how to further deal with the human remains and their possible return with contacting the communities of origin. The financial budget provided by the Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste (*German Lost Art Foundation*) was not exceeded. The project duration was extended once without any additional costs. All the research, investigations and discussions conducted within the framework of the project as well as their results were documented in detail in a final report.

Transparency measures were a preliminary report to the Foreign Office and initiation of contact with the Namibian Embassy in Berlin, and the *Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery* (NMAG) in Waigani, Port Moresby. There is contact with Ambassador Martin Andjaba from Namibia as well as with the anthropological curator Tiko Waundu from the NMAG. During the project, there

was also an oral exchange with Herero activists and scientists from Namibia in Freiburg. Information about the project and its results was provided internally at the university. Further possibilities to report the findings of the study are presently being explored with the public relations departments of the university and of the university hospital. Some specialist lectures have already taken place or are planned. Various publications, also for the public, are in preparation.

The detailed final report of the project with all research evidence can be requested in German or English from the staff of the Anatomical Collection upon documented legitimate interest.

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