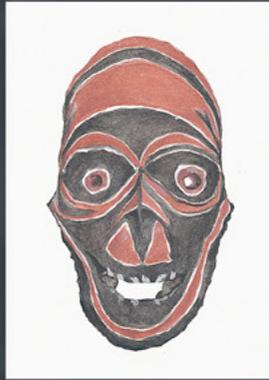


# GOLGOTHA





Golgotha

Gol gotha

Origin : Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word *gulgultha*

1. Skull
2. The place of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

In the Hebrew tradition, the skull of Adam is buried under the hill called Golgotha.

# GOLGOTHA

THE CULT OF SKULLS

THIS IS A LIMITED VERSION  
THE TEXTS AND ESSAYS ARE INCLUDED  
IN THE PRINTED BOOK ONLY

Edited by  
MARTIN DOUSTAR

With contributions by  
CHRISTIAN COIFFIER  
THOMAS SCHULTZE-WESTRUM



The human cranium has been the subject of various exhibitions and publications in the last few decades. As an allegory of death, an evocation of the macabre, or an exotic artefact, it continues to arouse the curiosity and interest of a broad audience. In the fields of anthropology and ethnology, the skull is a perennial topic and a study material. It is the memory of evolution, a remembrance of the past. In ancient cultures and tribal societies, it was a bridge between the living and the dead, a sign of social prestige and an object of religious veneration. These different aspects have been discussed before, often confining to the purely scholar perspective of a scientific or historical context, neglecting the artistic dimension of the objects.

My aim with this book was to gather a comprehensive collection of these ritual skulls and heads, representative of the most authentic styles encountered in different civilizations around the world, and selected both for their cultural significance and aesthetic qualities. As human remains these objects were sacred for the people who kept them, and they deserve all our respect ; as works of art they earn our admiration because they are extraordinary creations, an homage to the ancestors, and a celebration of life. Isn't this the real purpose of art ?

Martin Doustar

# CATALOGUE



Display case with skulls in the Museum of the Koloniaal Instituut, Amsterdam, circa 1923-1940

## 1. AN EGYPTIAN MUMMY HEAD

Late Period, Egypt, 700-30 BC  
Mummified human head, linen, oils, natural resin  
Height : 27,5 cm with base

Provenance : The Robert de Rustafjaell collection, before 1906  
The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY (deaccessioned)

Robert de Rustafjaell (1876-1943) a.k.a. Robert Fawcus-Smith before changing his name in 1894, was a renowned British collector and an eccentric aristocrat, member of: the Royal Numismatical Society, the Zoological Society, the Royal Society of Arts, The Hellenic Society, The British School in Roma... and a scholar who worked in Egypt as a geologist and mining engineer. He is notably the author of "The Light of Egypt". After World War I, de Rustafjaell moved to the United States, where he lived under the name of Colonel Prince Roman Orbeliani. Many of the artifacts he collected were sold through various auctions between 1906 and 1915. This mummified woman head mounted on a Victorian era silver base was sold in one of these sales, probably at Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, London, on December 19-21 of 1906, the year it was accessioned by The Heckscher Museum of Art.



The discovery of new mummy tombs, after a drawing by Emile Brugsch, 1881





## 2. A RARE COPTIC HEAD

Late Antiquity, Egypt, 300 - 500 AD  
Mummified human head  
Height 17,2 cm

Provenance : Excavated in Médall near Fachn, Upper Egypt, in 1922  
Collection L. Gatineau, Cairo  
Michel Grandsard collection, acquired 30 April 1989 in Paris

Exhibition: *Egypte Onomwonden*, Egyptische Oudheden Van Het Museum Vleeshuis,  
Stad Antwerpen, Anvers, 13 oct. 1995 - 14 jan. 1996  
(illustrated in the booklet n°146)

The Coptic period began around the 3rd century and lasted until the arrival of Islam and the decline of Christianity in Egypt, between the 7th and the 9th centuries. Like their pagan predecessors, the Coptic Christians used to mummify their dead.

In 1922, His Excellency Daninos Pacha undertook excavations in the village of Médall, in collaboration with Dr. L. Gatineau, dental surgeon of the Sultanic Court and the French Hospital of Cairo. Around two hundred mummies of Copt martyrs were discovered and the results were illustrated in a small booklet to the attention of the dental world, "La Semaine Dentaire", on 22 January 1922.

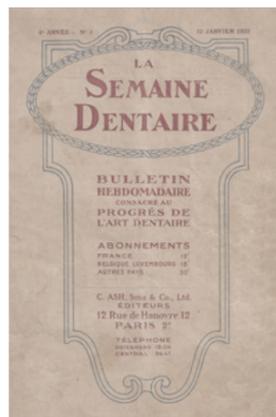




Fig. 2  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 3  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 4  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 5  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 6  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.

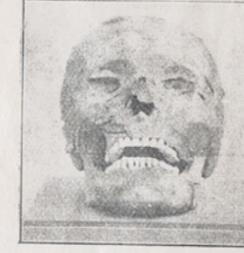


Fig. 7  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 8  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 9  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.



Fig. 10  
V<sup>e</sup> Siècle.

(1) M. L. Gatineau possède un grand nombre de ces crânes.



Outilles entreprises par Son Excellence Daninos Pacha,  
en collaboration avec M. L. Gatineau, Chirurgien-Den-  
tiste de la Cour Sultanienne et de l'Hôpital Français au  
Caire.



*The Scream*, 1895, Edvard Munch, pastel on cardboard, Private collection  
© 2014. Photo Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Scala, Florence



### 3. A RARE EKOI CREST

Cross-River region, Nigeria, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, animal skin (antelope), earth, kaolin, rattan, wood, nail  
Height : 20,5 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Spain  
Alain Bovis, Paris

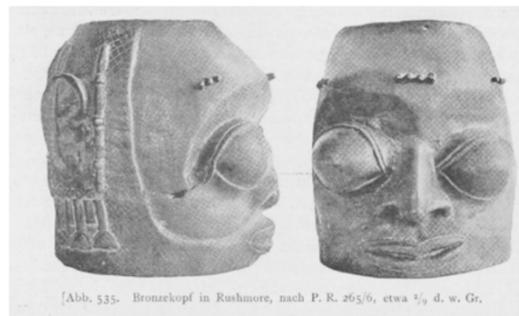
While the corpus of Ekoï crests made of a wood core is quite abundant, the numbers of those containing human skulls remains extremely limited. The first example was collected by Dr. Alfred Mansfeld in 1908 during his four-year stay in the Cross-River region. See *Urwald Dokumente*, Berlin, 1908, plates XVII-XVIII. At the turn of the 20th century the trophy skulls of newly slain enemies were eventually replaced with wooden heads covered in leather, as attested by Percy A. Talbot in his book *In the shadow of the Bush*, 1912.

The Ekoï skull we have here certainly stands among the most spectacular and well-preserved. The Quai Branly Museum also owns two notable examples in its collections.

*“ La force de cet objet est intense: la bouche largement ouverte semble émettre un cri de guerre ou de terreur, et les yeux cylindriques, armés de rondelles de fer, dardent des pupilles cruelles. Ce ne peut être qu’un crâne d’ennemi, ou d’esclave sacrifié à la manière des Ekoï...”*

(“ The strength of this object is intense, the mouth wide open seems to shout a war cry or a scream of terror, and the drilled eyes, armed with iron washers, dart cruel pupils. This could only be the skull of an enemy, or of a slave sacrificed in the way of the Ekoï...”)

Pierre Harter, *Arts anciens du Cameroun*, p.320



*Bulgy eyes*, bronze head, Yoruba Culture, Benin, circa 1500-1600 in *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Felix von Luschan, 1919. Abb. 535. As illustrated in the so-called masterpiece now in the George Ortiz collection, the bulging eyes suggest spiritual force and presence in African art conventions.

Right: “A *juju* of continence”, Ekoï tribe. Photo by P. Amaury Talbot.

Biblio. : TALBOT P. A., *In the shadow of the bush*, Heinemann, 1912. HARTER P., *Arts anciens du Cameroun*, Arts d’Afrique Noire, 1986. LE FUR (collectif), *La mort nèn saura rien*, Reliques d’Europe et d’Océanie, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1999. p. 17.



#### 4. A RARE VILI SKULL MASK

Vili, Southern Gabon, 1800-1900  
Human skull, wood, earth, natural gum, mirror  
Height : 22 cm

Provenance: Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Bruxelles  
Bernard de Grunne, Bruxelles

Exhibition: *Le crâne*, Musée Cantini, Marseille, 13 mars-15 mai 1972,  
n° 115 (illustrated in the catalogue)

The Vili are a people of Central Africa, settled between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the south of Gabon. Especially renowned for their impressive and extended corpus of sculptures, there is little information about the preservation and ritualization of skulls and only a handful of examples in public collections, however, some common features emerge. We observed that the skulls, all very ancient, were initially buried for a relatively short period, then exhumed to be decorated. Like the numerous Vili-Kongo *nkisi* fetishes, they bear magical charges in cavities modeled around the eyes and the forehead, and sealed with mirrors. The nose is generally sculpted in wood and fixed with a natural resin. On the present example, shaped like a mask, the skull was cut along the coronal suture.

Biblio. : GASTAUT Henri, *Le Crâne*, Musée Cantini, Marseille 1972, n°115.  
WIECZOREC-ROSENDAHL, *Schadelkult*, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, 2011, p. 369.





5. AN EXCEPTIONAL *VILI* HEAD

Vili, Southern Gabon, 1800-1900  
Human skull, mirror, earth, clay, gum, shell, kaolin, pigment, nails  
Height : 21,5 cm

Provenance: Collected by a member of the *Expédition Citroën*, oct. 1924-june 1925  
Collection Gérard Wahl-Boyer, Paris

Born from the desire of André Citroën to promote his firm, the *Croisière Noire* across Africa started on 28 October 1924 from Colomb-Béchar in Algeria and ended on 26 June 1925 in Madagascar. This exceptional *Vili* skull, possibly the most spectacular example to be found, was collected by a member of the crew during this expedition, and remained in the same family till recently.  
The head, adorned with several protruding magical receptacles and patinated with kaolin, contrasting with the emaciated jawbone and the eye sockets filled with nails, make this sculpture an object of sorcery of tremendous power and striking appearance.

Biblio. : GASTAUT Henri, *Le Crâne*, Musée Cantini, Marseille 1972, n°115.  
WIECZOREC-ROSENDAHL, *Schadelkult*, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, 2011, p. 369.



6. A RARE KOMO CULT OBJECT

Komo society, Bambara, Mali, 1900-1950  
Human skull, blood, earth, textile, brain remains  
Height : 14 cm

Provenance: Max Itzikovitz, Paris  
Stephane Mangin, Paris

The *Komo* is one, and the most important, of the six male institutions in the Bambara culture. The term refers to the concept formed in each village by its members, living and deceased, the shrine and the altars (*boli*), the leader of the cult, and the mask. Its essential purpose is to keep up the worship of God, the One Creator, and to ensure the preservation and spread of traditional knowledge in the fields of nature and culture. The entry is obligatory for all young boys who have undergone circumcision : the practice and the teaching received assure gradually their religious, cultural, social and political education.

The most important ceremony, called "Anniversary of the Komo", is held just before the rainy season. It includes some sacrifices performed for the cemetery in honour of the ancestors, and divinatory rites.

Furthermore, each Komo is depository of some immovable and movable goods : shrines, fields, mask, ritual objects, musical instruments, tools, etc.

This very rare and all the more mysterious object was part of this ritual material. Its abstract shape, dark crusty patina, and powerful properties, make it a condensed and fascinating testimony of ancient African cosmogonies.

Ref. : DIETERLEN Germaine, *Religions de l'Afrique noire*, Ecole pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses, Annuaire 1969-1970, Tome 77, page 132-138.



## 7. AN EXCEPTIONAL BEADED HEAD

Western Bamileke or Bangwa, Cameroon, 1800-1900  
Human skull, fiber, beads, glass  
Height : 18 cm

Provenance: Musée international du Golfe de Guinée, Lomé  
René David, Zurich

In his book *Arts Anciens du Cameroun*, 1986, Pierre Harter identified only half a dozen beaded heads, called *atwonzen*, originating from the Bamileke and Bangwa country. They were all invariably made of a wood core covered with woven fabric and threaded with rows of beads ; yet, all of them had a different aspect and expression. The most famous example is the head offered to Pierre Harter by the King *fon*, Feinboy N'Ketté, in 1957, and illustrated below.

These heads, dating back to the late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, are depictions of the skulls of enemies. They were worn by the rulers around the neck, attached by a thong of buffalo leather or by a cord of *wukari* fabric, on ceremonial occasions and during certain warrior dances such as the *tso* or *nzen*. We believe these heads coexisted with real beaded skulls, which Harter observed *in situ* in the villages of Foto and Fontem in the Bangwa country, but this particular corpus is extremely limited in public collections ; therefore it is a unique opportunity to illustrate one example in this volume.

Ref. Sotheby's Paris, 30 Nov. 2010, lot 90, for another Bamileke beaded head also from the Harter collection.



The *Fon* Feinboy N'Ketté, holding the *atwonzen* of his great-great-grand-father Kemtemelo, in 1957. Photo Pierre Harter.

Biblio. : HARTER, *Arts Anciens du Cameroun*, 1986, *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, Arnouville. Page 249, P. XXVI.



## 8. AN EXCEPTIONAL SAWOS RELIQUARY

Torembi village, Sawos people, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 1480-1660  
Human skull, hair, earth, vegetal paste, shell, pigment, rattan, cassowary feathers  
Height: 59,5 cm (figure), 32cm and 42 cm (masks)

Provenance: Collected by Wayne Heathcote in Torembi, circa 1960  
John A. Friede collection, Rye

Publication: FRIEDE John A. (collectif), *New Guinea Art : Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede*, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2005, illustrated p. 272-274

This unique and highly important group of objects, a female skull reliquary and its two masks, were displayed in a shrine in the ceremonial house interior of one of the Torembi hamlets. The figure has a basketry body surmounted by a female skull overmodeled with a thick encrusted patina, possibly sacrificial. It depicts a pregnant woman, representation of the founding female ancestor of the Sawos people. The two masks have a helmet shape made of woven rattan while the faces, adorned with cassowary feathers and human hair, are sculpted out of wood and painted. The whole group appears to be of the same period, and of great age. The wooden parts of the masks were tested by Carbon-14, and the dating, stated above, was conclusive at 95,4%.





9. A RARE IATMUL WOMAN HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, clay, vegetal oil, rattan, pigment, mother-of-pearl, shell  
Height : 20 cm

Provenance : Collected in German New Guinea before 1914  
Private collection, Germany  
Antonio Casanovas, Madrid

The overmodeled skulls of women are quite rare in proportion to those of men, although they have a primordial role in everyday life and culture.  
This particular head shows some very interesting features. The top of the cranium is pierced and a rattan strap used for hanging is fastened inside the frontal bone. The bright shell ornaments of the ears, nose and eyes, contrast with the monochromatic treatment of the face, and the large nose refer to physical attributes that are part of the ideal of beauty in the Sepik cultures. All these elements indicate this was the preserved skull of a woman of high rank and remarkable beauty.



The monochrome modeling of the above skull is reminiscent of the canonical forms of another very important object of the Iatmul culture : the *Samban* hook depicting a pregnant woman from the Barbier-Mueller collection, now in the Quai Branly Museum. Here also, the facial features sculpted from a mixture of clay and tree sap are those of the mother, and her ancestral face.



*Samban* hook, Iatmul culture, Papua New Guinea  
© 2014. Musée du Quai Branly, photo Claude Germain/Scala, Florence



10. A MAGNIFICENT IATMUL HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, clay, vegetal oil, natural pigments, shell, cauris, Abrus seeds  
Height : 20,5 cm

Provenance : Collected in the village of Kaulagu by lieutenant Jess,  
during the voyage of the SMS *Kormoran* in August 1911  
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam  
Acher Eskenasy collection, Paris

Exhibition : *La Mort n'en saura rien, Reliques d'Europe et d'Océanie*, Musée national des  
Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, 12 oct. 1999-24 jan. 2000

Publication: LE FUR (collectif), *La Mort n'en saura rien, Reliques d'Europe et d'Océanie*,  
Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 2000, Paris, illustrated p. 238  
mounted on a skull rack for the occasion (see cat. page 58)

This complex pattern of lines, whirls and leaves, painted on a white face, is characteristic of a male skull. It is illustrated for instance in Felix Luschan, *Zur Ethnographie des Kaiserin-Augusta-Flusses*, Baessler-Archiv I.2, 1911, p. 116-117 ; but very few examples achieve the quality and refinement of this particular head.



## 11. AN EXCEPTIONAL IATMUL HEAD

Yentchenmengua village, Iatmul region, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, clay, vegetal oil, natural pigments  
Height : 21,5 cm

Provenance: Collected from the ceremonial house of Yentchenmengua before 1914  
Tristan Tzara, Paris  
Patricia Withofs, London  
Jacques Kerchache, Paris

Publication: RECHE, *Der Kaizerin-Augusta-Fluss*, Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910  
Band 1 vol. II, Otto Reche, Hamburg 1913. Taf. XXXVIII, 2 (n° 10 from left)

This spectacular overmodeled skull, ranking among the finest example ever collected, transcends its corpus to become a universal work of art. A death mask and a sculpture at the same time, the artist and the Iatmul warrior both frozen in time merge in an ideal of strength and beauty.

Photographed *in situ* by Friedrich Fülleborn during the 1908-1910 *Hamburger Südsee-Expedition*, this head originally topped a monumental skull rack displayed in the ceremonial house of Yentchenmengua, at km 375 along the Sepik River. In the diary of *Der Kaizerin-Augusta-Fluss*, Franz Emil Hellwig who was part of the expedition commented that at km 375 they arrived in a large and densely populated village where they were attacked from both sides of the channel (Reche, 1913 : 40). He is not sure about the name of the village. Yet, they were able to photograph the ceremonial house of the village and the skull rack which was inside. We know from a later published photograph (Behrmann, 1922 : 181) this was the village of Yentchenmengua.

Nevertheless, "A certain aura of mystery surrounds the feats of the expedition" as suggests Alexandra Aikhenvald, quoting the anthropologists Bragge, Claas and Roscoe (2006), who report that some of the scientific men from the museums took to stealing skulls from the spirit houses. There are even rumours that some Germans had "commissioned head-hunting and even hunted heads themselves" ! In particular, Adolf Roessicke is reported to have accompanied a Korogo war party against Malu villagers, "shot a woman and brought her head back to the camp to celebrate the kill" (Bragge, Claas, Roscoe, 2006 : 103-4).

These claims are difficult to substantiate, and with the lack of information surrounding the Yentchenmengua skull rack it remains impossible to determine precisely the circumstances in which these skulls were collected.

Biblio.: RECHE, Otto, *Der Kaizerin-Augusta-Fluss*, Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910, Hamburg 1913, Band 1 vol. II,  
BEHRMANN Walter, *Im Stromgebiet des Sepik*, Berlin, 1922, p.181.  
BRAGGE-CLAAS-ROSCOE, *On the edge of the Empire : Military brokers in the Sepik "tribal zone"*, American Ethnologist Vol. 33, No. 1 (Feb., 2006), p. 100-113.  
AIKHENVALD Alexandra, *The Manambu language of East Sepik, Papua New Guinea*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.18.



Detail of the Yentchenmengua skull rack photographed by F. Fülleborn in 1909. (Reche, 1913, Plate XXXVIII, 2 .



## 12. A SUPERB IATMUL HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, clay, vegetal oil, pigments, cauris, seeds (*Coix lacryma-jobi*)  
Height : 19 cm

Provenance : Collected from the ceremonial house of Yentchenmengua, before 1914  
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam  
Acher Eskenasy, Paris

Exhibition : *La Mort n'en saura rien, Reliques d'Europe et d'Océanie*, Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, 12 oct. 1999-24 jan. 2000

Publication: "*Der Kaizerin-Augusta-Fluss*", Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910, Band 1 vol. II, Otto Reche, Hamburg 1913. Taf. XXXVIII, 2 (n° 8 from left)

LE FUR (collectif), *La Mort n'en saura rien*, Reliques d'Europe et d'Océanie, Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 2000, Paris, illustrated p. 239, mounted on a skull rack for the occasion (see cat. page 61)

Photographed *in situ* by Friedrich Fülleborn during the 1908-1910 *Hamburger Südsee-Expedition*, this head originally topped a monumental skull rack displayed in the ceremonial house of Yentchenmengua, at km 375 along the Sepik River. In the diary of *Der Kaizerin-Augusta-Fluss*, Franz Emil Hellwig who was part of the expedition commented that at km 375 they arrived in a large and densely populated village where they were attacked from both sides of the channel (Reche, 1913 : 40). He is not sure about the name of the village. Yet, they were able to photograph the ceremonial house of the village and the skull rack which was inside. We know from a later published photograph (Behrmann, 1922 : 181) this was the village of Yentchenmengua. Nevertheless, "A certain aura of mystery surrounds the feats of the expedition" as suggests Alexandra Aikhenvald, quoting the anthropologists Bragge, Claas and Roscoe (2006), who report that some of the scientific men from the museums took to stealing skulls from the spirit houses. There are even rumours that some Germans had "commissioned head-hunting and even hunted heads themselves" ! In particular, Adolf Roessicke is reported to have accompanied a Korogo war party against Malu villagers, "shot a woman and brought her head back to the camp to celebrate the kill" (Bragge, Claas, Roscoe, 2006 : 103-4). These claims are difficult to substantiate, and with the lack of information surrounding the Yentchenmengua skull rack it remains impossible to determine precisely the circumstances in which these skulls were collected.

Biblio.: RECHE, op. cit. 1913, Band 1 vol. II,  
BEHRMANN, op. cit. 1922, p.181.  
BRAGGE-CLAAS-ROSCOE, op. cit. Vol. 33, No. 1 (Feb., 2006), p. 100-113.  
AIKHENVALD, op. cit. 2008, p.18.



Detail of the Yentchenmengua skull rack photographed by F. Fülleborn in 1909. (Reche, 1913, Plate XXXVIII, 2.



### 13. AN EXCEPTIONAL SKULL HOOK

Kaningara people, Blackwater River, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 18th/19th century  
Human skull, wood, clay, vegetal oil, shell, mother-of-pearl, cane, pigments  
Height : 57 cm

Provenance : Walter Bondy, Berlin, circa 1920  
Madeleine Rousseau, Paris  
Raymond and Laura Wielgus, Chicago, 1957  
Arthur Barth, Los Angeles, 1968  
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam  
John A. Friede, Rye

Exhibition : *Sculpture from Africa and Oceania*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo,  
17 Nov. 1990 - 20 Jan. 1991  
*Oceania Kunst Fra Melanesien*, Louisiana Museet, Kopenhague,  
14 Sept. 1991 - 12 jan. 1992

Publication : *L' Art Océanien, sa présence*, Madeleine Rousseau, le Musée Vivant, 1951, fig. 38  
*Les oubliés du Pacifique*, Philippe Diolé, 1976, p. 56  
*Sculpture from Africa and Oceania*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, cat.101  
*Oceania Kunst Fra Melanesien*, Louisiana Museet, Kopenhague, 1991, cat. 198

This highly important ceremonial hook holds two overmodeled skulls, that of a man and a woman symbolizing the founding couple of a clan. It is surmounted by a head, embodiment of a mythological ancestor which was consulted during rituals associated with hunting and warfare. It has a brace behind this head for suspension. The central section of the hook is carved identically on the reverse side, and it shows an open work band of rings along the vertical axis for attaching decorations like the tufts of sago palm fibre. The skulls appear to be of considerable age and relatively small scale for adults. The hypothesis of a less protein-rich diet in remote times is probably not the only explanation. The Kaningara people live along the Blackwater River near the Murder Mountain, in the shadow of the Central Mountain Range, where indigenous people tend to be of shorter stature. Stylistically, the iconography of the hook also recalls some sculptures from the Karawari mountains and the Hunstein Highlands ; while the extremely fine modeling of the skulls brings to mind another head collected by the *Korrigane* expedition in the village of Kaningara, that of a man from the nearby mountains with similar aquiline nose, now in the Quai Branly Museum (see Coiffier, *Le voyage de la Korrigane dans les Mers du sud*, 2001, p.196).

The skull hook from the Walter Bondy collection has been associated for over a century with the most prestigious collectors of Oceanic art, and through its cultural importance, aesthetic qualities and visual force, it is undoubtedly an emblematic object of the Sepik cultures and an icon of the art of Papua New Guinea ; with very few, if any, equivalent on the market.



Born in Prague in 1880, Walter Bondy was a painter, photographer, author, and a notable collector of Chinese porcelain and primitive art. His collection of Oceanic art, comprising rare and important objets, was particularly remarkable and reveals a great eye.

From 1904, he shared his time between Berlin and Paris where he attended the Académie Holosoï. Among the "Mitteleuropa" circle of artists, critics and dealers, he took part in the effervescence of Montparnasse. He dealt with the impressionists, met Van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse, and probably came into contact with African and Oceanic art at that time.

At the outbreak of the first world war he returned to Berlin. In 1923, he published a large monography about Chinese porcelains of the Kang-hsi period, and a year later he founded an art magazine, *Kunstauktion*.

In the early 1930's, with the rise of National Socialism in Germany, he decided to leave and settled in Sanary-sur-mer, in the southeast of France. He met his second wife Camille there, and they ran a photo studio together till his death in 1940.



Walter Bondy at the easel in Saint-Cloud, 1908



In the Café du Dôme, from left : Wilhelm Uhde, Walter Bondy, Rudolf Levy, Jules Pascin, circa 1910.



In 1951, Madeleine Rousseau published the Walter Bondy hook (then in her private collection) in the catalogue "L'art océanien, Sa présence" (fig. 38), where it appears with added hair plaits on both skulls. This tendency to embellish tribal objects existed since the early times of collections.

The skulls were eventually restored to their original condition, as visible on the photo of the Bondy apartment.

We know of only one other suspension hook with two skulls, from the Menil collection, it is now housed in Houston (Gastaut, 1971 : 157)

© Courtesy of The Menil Collection, Houston/  
PhotographerHickey-Robertson, Houston (CA 64072a-c)



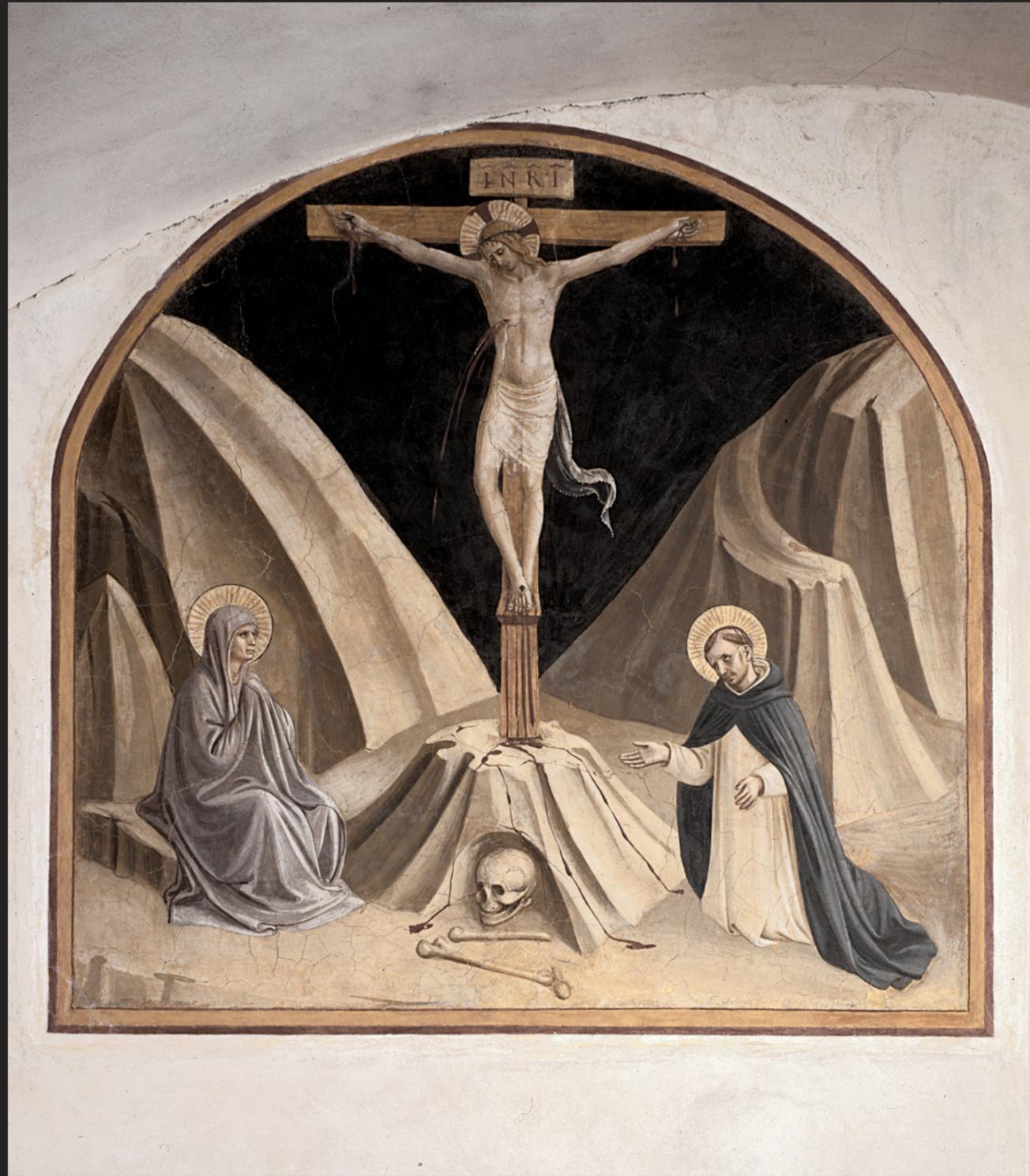
Views from the apartment of Camille and Walter Bondy, circa 1930.



Biblio. : FLÜGGE Manfred, *Das flüchtige Paradies. Künstler an der Côte d'Azur*, Berlin, 2008.

Catalogue, *Arts Primitifs de la collection de Walter Bondy et à divers amateurs*, Enchères Rive Gauche, Paris, 6 Dec. 2008

Photos courtesy of Madame Camille Bondy / Enchères Rive Gauche, Paris



Left page : Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion with Mary and St. Dominic, Golgotha and the skull of Adam*, c. 1437-1446. Courtesy of Museo di San Marco, Firenze.

14. AN IMPORTANT IATMUL HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, clay, vegetal oil, pigment, shell  
Height : 21,5 cm

Provenance : Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam  
Kevin Conru, Bruxelles

This impressive overmodeled skull of considerable age has a thick crusty patina resulting from the multiple layers of pigments received over the years, and of its continuous use in a ceremonial context.



15. A RARE CHILD SKULL

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, circa 1900  
Human skull, clay, vegetal oil, natural pigments, hair, shell  
Height : 17 cm

Provenance: Allen Wardwell collection, New York  
Bruce Frank, New York

Publication: WARDWELL Allen, *The Art of the Sepik River*, n°174, p. 81

The overmodeled skulls of children are extremely scarce. The aesthetic qualities of this example suggest it was probably the child of a prominent figure, or a particularly beautiful young adult. The head was modeled with great care then painted with ochre and white pigments. The eyelids are delicately sculpted and two fragments of haliotis shell make the eyes. The overall aspect of the face is very gentle and serene.

For several decades and until recently, this skull was part of the collection of Allen Wardwell, a noted scholar, curator, and an authority on non-Western arts and cultures.

Another remarkable Iatmul child skull, a gift of Marcia and John A. Friede to the De Young Museum, is now on view in San Francisco. See *New Guinea Art: Masterpieces from The Jolika Collection*, n° 164.



Tony Saulnier, *Les papous coupeurs de têtes*, 1960, p. 180



16 A SUPERB IATMUL HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, clay, vegetal oil, shell, mother-of-pearl, beads, straw  
Height : 18 cm

Provenance: François Coppens, Bruxelles  
Karim Grusenmeyer collection, Ghent

A very comparable skull of small size, with a tight mouth, a slightly aquiline nose and a similar nose ornament is in the collection of the Musée Barbier-Mueller (cf. NEWTON, *Arts des Mers du Sud*, 1998, p. 201, n° 20)



17. AN IMPORTANT IATMUL HEAD

Iatmul, Middle Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, hair, clay, vegetal oil, natural pigments, cartridge bases  
Height : 22 cm

Provenance : Collected in German New Guinea before 1914  
Private collection Germany  
Arte y Ritual, Madrid

Exhibition: *Krankas*, Galeria Cyprus Art, Girona, June 11-july 14  
(ill. on the cover of the catalog)

An impressive head, modeled with powerful features characterizing masculinity : bulging cheekbones and brows, prominent nose, squarish jaw, and a unique feature to complete the fearsome outfit of the warrior : bloodshot eyes filled with two german cartridge bases.

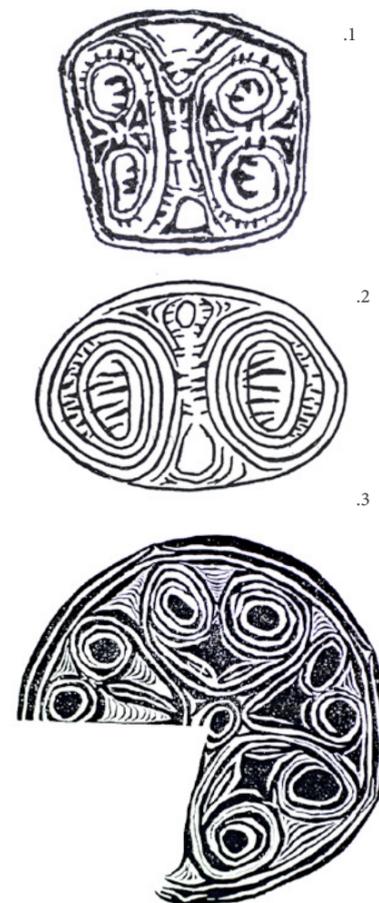


18. A RARE WOSERA SKULL

Wosera people, Eastern Sepik, Papua-New-Guinea, 1900-1950  
Human skull, pigments  
Height : 14,5 cm

Provenance: Ulrich Kortmann, Dortmund  
Steffen Patzwahl, Belgium

This rare calabash-skull, of which we only know this unique example, was collected along with a *bilum* string bag and a small stone pestle in the Wosera region, Southern Abelam. We know the Wosera people preserved the skulls of their ancestors on some occasions, but while this fact has been commented in the literature, it has not been illustrated yet. The stylized heart-shape face is a common motif along the Sepik river, as illustrated below, on both skulls and vessels.



1. Incised motif on a skull (Reche, 1913 : 370, abb. 392)  
2. Incised motif on a skull, (Reche, 1913 : 370, abb. 389)  
3. Decoration on a bowl (Reche, 1913 : 190, abb. 149)



19. A SUPERB MALAKULA ELONGATED HEAD

Malakula Island, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), circa 1900  
Human skull, vegetal paste, tree fern, pigments  
Length : 21,5 cm

Provenance : Acquired in Australia at auction, ca. 1968-1969  
Nikolai Michoutouchkine collection, Nouméa  
The N. Michoutouchkine-A. Pilioko Foundation, inventory n° 340

Exhibition: *Ethnography and Art of Oceania*, of Michoutouchkine-Pilioko Foundation,  
Moscow, Fukuoka, 1989, n° 342

Publication : Michoutouchkine-Ivanovna, *Ethnography and Art of Oceania*,  
Michoutouchkine-Pilioko Foundation, Ministry of Culture of the USSR,  
Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, 1999, n° 3

A couple of very similar overmodeled skulls, consisting of dry craniums painted with red and blue pigments over a double triangle motif joining between the eyes, and stripes of white dots (or lines) around the nose, were collected by Edgar Aubert de la Rue during his mission in the New Hebrides, in the early 1920's. They are now part of the collections of the Quai Branly Museum.



20. AN EXCEPTIONAL MALAKULA ELONGATED HEAD

Tomman Islet, Southern Malekula, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), 1800-1900  
Human skull, vegetal paste, tree fern, fiber, pigments. wood  
Height : 26 cm

Provenance : Bought by Jean Ratisbonne in a Men's House on Tomman Islet, during the expedition of *La Korrigane* in the South Seas, at the end of May 1935.  
*Océanie, provenance La Korrigane et à divers*, Etude Audap-Godeau-Solanet, Paris, Drouot, 10 Nov. 1989, lot 147 (ill. on the cover)  
Philippe Hiquily collection, Paris (acquired at the above sale)  
Tara Hiquily, Tahiti

Exhibition : *Le voyage de La Korrigane dans les Mers du Sud*, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, 5 Dec. 2001-3 June 2002, n° 52

Publication : COIFFIER Christian, *Le voyage de La Korrigane dans les Mers du Sud*, 2002, p.129  
GUIART Jean, *Malekula l'explosion culturelle*, Le Rocher-à-la-Voile, 2011, p. 37, 43

As attested by the unusual presence of a neck and three small arrows stuck inside, this overmodeled skull once adorned a *rambaramp* funerary dummy. With its spectacular cranial deformation, bright colors and intense expression, this iconic object from the *La Korrigane* expedition ranks among man's finest interpretations of the human head. Timeless and fragile at the same time, it certainly is also a masterpiece of Oceanic art.



21. AN EXTREMELY RARE MALAKULA CHILD HEAD

Malekula Island, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), 1800-1900  
Human skull, vegetal paste, tree fern, fiber, pigments  
Length : 21,5 cm

Provenance : Acher Eskenasy collection, Paris

This exceptional head is quite unique in the large corpus of overmodeled skulls from the New Hebrides. First because it is the skull of an immature child, we can observe it with the presence of milk teeth, confirmed by the scanography, which suggests the age of the subject was not exceeding ten and a half at the time of death. Then, it is remarkable because of the graceful treatment of the face. The subtle modeling of the features and the delicately painted arabesque around the eyes indicate a great attention has been devoted to render the charisma of the child ; in the manner of the ancient Egyptians who made portrayals of their rulers for the hereafter, it reminds us the face of a young pharaoh, serene, facing eternity.

N. b. : In Ancient Egypt, evidence of elongated skulls appears in all the members of the royal family during the Armana period, including King Akhenaten, Queen Nefertiti, their six female children and Tutankhamun.





22. A MALAKULA OVERMODELED HEAD WITH SPIDER-WEB HEADDRESS

Malekula Island, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), circa 1900  
Human skull, vegetal paste, tree fern, pigments, fiber, spider-web  
Height : 33 cm with the headdress

Provenance : Collected by Governor Hébert in office in Vanuatu, circa 1960  
Anne Hébert, Paris (by descent)

Headdresses consisting of a wig made of spider-web were the privilege of the men who reached a very high grade. To make this type of headdress, the men of Malakula would breed giant spiders (*Nephila pilipes*), whose large webs provided natural shields to prevent intruders from approaching the Men's House. (Huffman, op. cit. 2009b : 49).

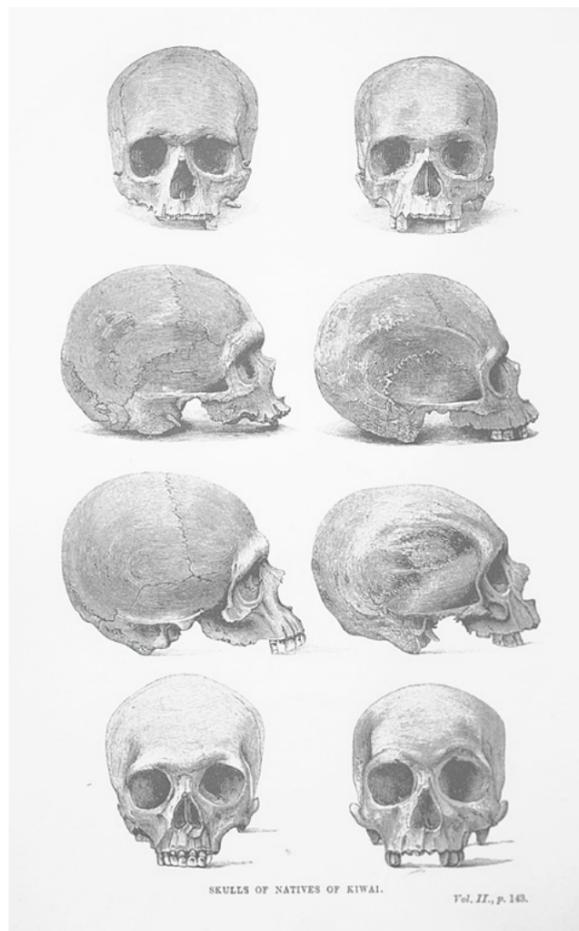


23. A RARE UPPER FLY RIVER TROPHY HEAD

Upper Fly River, Gulf of Papua, Papua-New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, fiber, rattan  
Height : 15,3 cm

Provenance: Probably collected by English missionaries, circa 1900  
Monica Wengraf-Hewitt, Arcade Gallery, London  
Bob Ziering, New York

The distinctive proportions of this skull, narrow, with a prognathic jawbone and a slightly dolichocephalic parietal bone, typical of the Fly River region, are well illustrated in the schematic drawings below. The forehead is decorated with an important ancestral motif of zoomorphic inspiration, deeply carved into the frontal bone.



After Luigi D'Albertis, *New Guinea, What I did and what I saw*, London, 1880. Vol. II, p. 143.



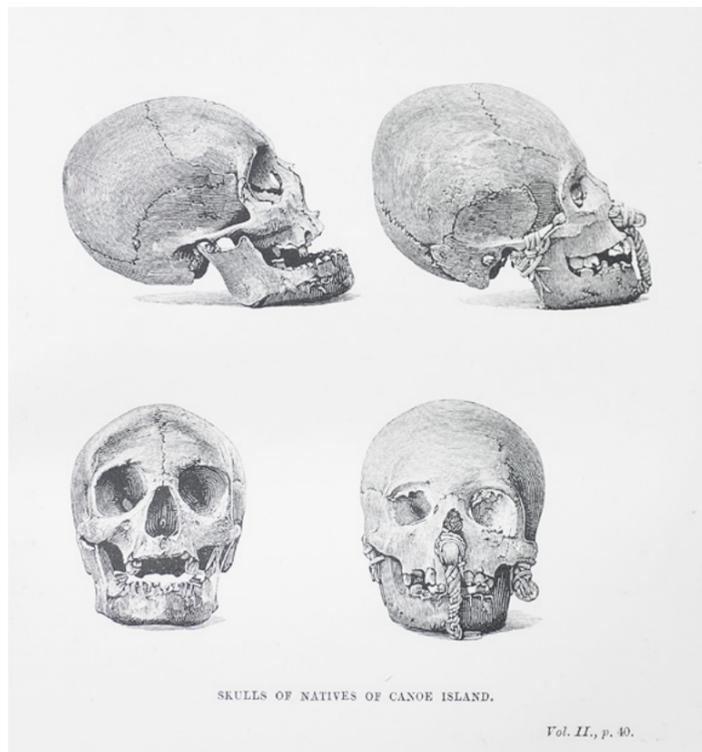
24. AN IMPORTANT FLY RIVER TROPHY HEAD

Upper Fly River, Gulf of Papua, Papua New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, fiber, rattan  
Height : 16,2 cm

Provenance: Arte y Ritual, Madrid

Under the pressure of the Australian administration and the local missionaries in the course of the 20th century, the natives of the Gulf Province abandoned progressively their ancient practices and beliefs, and got rid of the cultural material related to head-hunting, firstly the trophy heads. Like the previous example, this impressive skull was probably collected at the turn of the 20th century, well before the ban on head-hunting and the spread of Christianity. It has a smoky patina due to its long stay in the Men's House, and has kept its bindings intact. Similar skulls can be seen in the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford.

Cf. GASTAUT, op. cit., 1972, n° 81.



After Luigi D'Albertis, *New Guinea, What I did and what I saw*, London, 1880, vol. II, p. 40.

25. A TROPHY SKULL WITH UNIQUE MOTIF

Ubuo village, Gope district, Gulf of Papua, Papua New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Height : 15,3 cm

Provenance: Collected by Thomas Schlutze-Westrum in 1966  
John A. Friede collection, Rye

In a personal correspondance concerning this skull, incised with a unique motif, and the photo below, Thomas Schultze-Westrum states : "The man in the picture with the trophies of a former skull shrine (*áwae*) at Ubuo village (Gope ethnic district) is a close relative of Aumari Moiopu, a native pastor of the United Church Mission who had more knowledge of the old times than anyone else I met there. He kept the skulls of his clan in his house... there was no communal building any longer." (Jan. 2014)



A native from Ubuo village picking up the skull above, among other skulls from his clan kept in his house.  
© Photo by Thomas Schultze-Westrum, 1966



26. A RARE TROPHY SKULL MOUNTED ON A GARE STICK

Omaumere village, Urama Island, Gulf of Papua, Papua New Guinea, ca. 1900  
Human skull, wood, clay, rattan, fiber, cauris, natural pigments, lime  
Height : 152 cm

Provenance: Collected by Thomas Schultze-Westrum in 1966  
John A. Friede collection, Rye

In his essay about the head cult in the Gulf Province, Thomas Schultze-Westrum recounts : in Urama and Gope villages, "I was told that newly remodelled and decorated skulls were carried in a dance up and down the main corridor of the *dúbu wéneh/mére* longhouses on the decorated *gáre* or *gáre kúku* sticks. (footnote : when asking if only recently obtained heads or also other, older head trophies from the *áwae* shrine were carried on *gáre* sticks during this dance performance, the answer was : no, only new ones. However, the worn condition with most of the clay already fallen off their faces may be an indication that also the older skull trophies were taken down from the shrine for (other) ritual performances - end of footnote). The song which informants mentioned first in relation to this ceremony of head trophies is called *Obína*."



Skulls mounted on *gáre kúku* sticks, inside the Mina Goiravi longhouse, Gope district © Photo by Thomas Schultze-Westrum, 1966



27. A PURARI DELTA TROPHY SKULL

Purari Delta, Gulf of Papua, Papua New Guinea, circa 1900  
Human skull, red ochre. Inscribed "Purari Delta 18/2/67 DH04".  
Height : 14,3 cm

Provenance: Collected in the Purari Delta on Feb.18, 1967  
Roger Spencer Tarlton, Moolooba, Queensland, Australia  
Jean Adamowicz, Paris

This skull of relatively small scale has an incised strip of eccentric arrows and a smooth and nuanced leather-like patina. There are remnants of red ochre paint on the front, inside the nasal cavity and the eye sockets.



28. AN EXCEPTIONAL TROPHY HEAD

Urama or Gope districts, Gulf Province, Papua New-Guinea, 1800-1900  
Human skull, clay, fiber, shell, pigments, beads, twine  
Height : 36,2 cm with the ornaments

Provenance: Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam (Inv. n° ZM028)  
John A. Friede collection, Rye

In his study on a large group of trophy skulls collected in the Urama and Gope districts, Thomas Schultze-Western notes that : "Only a few of the trophies (*eëpu*) (...) show an incision on the forehead that represents an anthropomorphous face." Even though this type of ornament recalls instantly the wooden *bioma* figures, he adds that "the design of both the face and the complete figure are distinct from any other decorated objects. No relationship can be established between these skull *titi* (ornaments) and the designs on *gópe* boards and other related wooden effigies."

About the decorations, he specifies : "The fiber tassels attached to the trophy were termed *húo* at Wowobo (Gope ethnic district). At Kinomere (Urama) the term for the inlaid small disk shaped conus snail eyes on the *e-épu* is *matána idomai*." (*The head cult in the Papuan Gulf*, chap. 5)



29. AN ASMAT TROPHY HEAD

Asmat, West Papua, Indonesia, circa 1900  
Human skull, feathers, seeds, fiber, rattan, beeswax  
Height : 18 cm without the headdress

Provenance: Galerie Témoin, Geneva

The Asmat homeland has been rightly associated with the most ferocious headhunters of Papua New Guinea. In 1961, they came to fame when the son of the then governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller, disappeared during an expedition in the Asmat region of Dutch New Guinea. Source of much speculation and fantasy, this event reinforced their reputation as cannibals and headhunters. Until 1953, and the establishment of an outpost by Catholic missionaries, these practices were still widespread. The *ndambirkus*, skulls of enemies taken during inter-tribal warfares, are the most eloquent expression of these ancient traditions. In view of their success and the high demand from western collectors, a whole market of counterfeit skulls has appeared in Indonesia in the last decades, and authentic examples are now very scarce.

The trophy head we have here has all the typical features we can expect from an old Asmat skull : a glossy honey-like patina, the lower jawbone tightly attached with a woven rattan band, the nose filled with beeswax and red seeds (*abrus precatorius*), and a headdress consisting of grey seeds of Job's Tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*) threaded on string and decorated with feathers.

Biblio.: KONRAD & SOWADA, *Asmat, Perception of Life in Art*, The Collection of the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress, 2002.



30. AN EXCEPTIONAL SKULL KORWAR FROM GEELVINK BAY

Geelvink Bay, West Papua, Indonesia, 1800-1900  
 Human skull, wood, pigment, glass beads, fabric  
 Height : 48 cm

Provenance: Probably collected in Geelvink Bay in 1939  
 Private collection, Berlin

While the style of the sculpture, a squatting figure with an enlarged head serving as a receptacle for the skull, is documented in early publications and museum collections (cf. F. S. A. De Clercq, 1893, XXVI; E. Fuhrmann, 1922 : 80-83), the simultaneous presence of a snake-headed figure held as a shield in front of the korwar seems to be an innovation. A scroll, a typical motif in the art of the Geelvink Bay, is incised on the smaller figure, and a disc made of a calabash fragment is attached by a piece of precious fabric around the neck of the korwar, probably as a protective amulet. There is a label on the back of the head, inscribed "Nieuw Guinea, ..39" in Dutch, possibly suggesting a collection date.

The carving of korwars, and korwar related material, persisted till the middle of the 20th century, but the sculptures containing a human skull are believed to be an earlier tradition, prior to the 18th century. One of the earliest and most dramatic skull korwars was collected by Admiral Duperrey in 1824 ; it has been one of the highlights of the Musée de l'Homme since then, and now sits imposingly in the rooms of the The Pavillon des Sessions, at the Louvre (Inv. 76.1934.87.3).

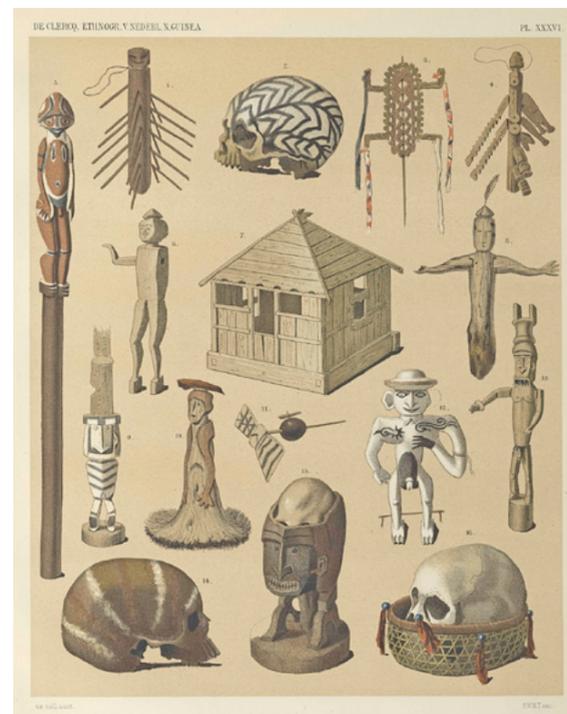
This highly important skull korwar is therefore a major rediscovery that will enrich a corpus which is reputed to be very limited.



Orn. 40



Above : Different motifs and patterns used in Geelvink Bay, in E. Fuhrmann, *Nieu Guinea*, 1922.



Right : DE CLERCQ, *Ethnographische Beschrijving van de West- en Noordkust van Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea*, Leiden, 1893. Plate XXVI.

In his reference book, *Korwars and Korwar style*, Van Baaren resumes : “The word *Korwar* denotes in the first place the spirit of the dead and is by extension used for the skull and the wooden ancestor figure.

Korwars are ancestor figures which serve as a medium between the living and the dead. The making of a korwar is subject to various ritual prescriptions (infra). The korwars are as a rule placed in the house and kept there till they have lost their usefulness by not properly answering and helping their descendants. Then they may be thrown away or sold, they may even be damaged intentionally. As long as a korwar is held in honour, it receives some form of cult, from time to time, because it represents the ancestor to whom offerings are due. The consulting of a korwar is in most cases, but not always, done by the *mon*, the shaman. Apart from the usual kind of korwars, some of which belong to each family, there are a few figures which represent clan ancestors and which are venerated by the whole community.” (Van Baaren, 1968 : 85)

A. J. De Neef gives us more details about the context of the making of a korwar : “ We start with an expedition in the bush, led by the carver who shows the piece of wood he needs. Sago supplies are ready for the numerous feasts. The shaman’s house is silent, the old wood carver is alone. Bent over his work, he is talking to himself in a low voice. He is talking to his father’s spirit, which teaches him the magic syllables and introduces him to the sources of power which made him a great shaman. He also learned the art of making Korwar from his father when he was still a young boy... Shapes appear as chips and fragments are gradually taken off : the unusually big head, the small body and the snake shield on which the head is lying. (...) The necromancer holds the Korwar in his hand and screams and uses his knife many times to correct the figure’s face features. And suddenly he shakes and falls down to the ground – a sign that the spirit of the dead has entered the image. All the assistants shake too. From this moment the soul of the dead person does not wander anymore - it is enthralled by the family. The Korwar becomes an object of worship. ”



“Pile described as *heathen attributes and ancestor figures*, in Kurudu, Yapen, north coast of Netherlands New Guinea, on 16 October 1930, ready to be burned on the occasion of the solemn baptism of 648 individuals from the surrounding villages (De Neef 1937 : 77). Protestant missionaries are known to have destroyed much in this region, but sometimes saved selected wood-carvings, in some cases handpicking them from the piles.” ( Corbey, 2003 : 13, fig. 7)



Below : Korwars from the Schouten Islands, Manokwari, 1909, photo by Jean Demmeni. Courtesy of the National Museum of World Cultures. Col. Nr. TM-10006136

Biblio. : DENEEF, A. J., *koeroedoe, schetsen uit Papoealand*, Den Haag, 1937.  
*Papoealand, het arbeidsveld van de Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging*, 1938.  
 VAN BAAREN T., *Korwars and korwar style, Art and ancestor worship in North-West New Guinea*, Mouton & Co., 1965.  
 BOUNOURE, Vincent, *Les korwars de Nouvelle-Guinée hollandaise*, L’Oeil, mai 1972, p. 8-15i.  
 CORBEY, *Destroying the graven image Religious iconoclasm on the Christian frontier. Anthropology Today*, 19(4), 10-14. (2003)



## Korwar

*Tu tiens comme pas un*

*Tu as été pris comme tu sortais de la vie*

*Pour y rentrer*

*Je ne sais pas si c'est dans un sens ou dans l'autre*

*que tu ébranles la grille du parc*

*Tu as relevé contre ton cœur l'herbe serpentine*

*Et à jamais bouclé les paradisiers du ciel rauque*

*Ton regard est extra-lucide*

*Tu es assis*

*Et nous aussi nous sommes assis*

*Le crâne encore pour quelques jours*

*Dans la cuvette de nos traits*

*Tous nos actes sont devant nous*

*À bout de bras*

*Dans la vrille de la vigne de nos petits*

*Tu nous la baïlles belle sur l'existentialisme*

*Tu n'es pas piqué des vers*

*You hold like no other*

*You were caught as you came out of life*

*To re-enter it*

*I don't know if it's in one direction or in another*

*That you shake the garden gate*

*You have raised up to your heart the serpentine grass*

*And forever curled the birds of paradise in the hoarse sky*

*Your gaze is clairvoyant*

*You are seated*

*And we too are seated*

*The skull for a few more days*

*In the dip of our features*

*All our acts are before us*

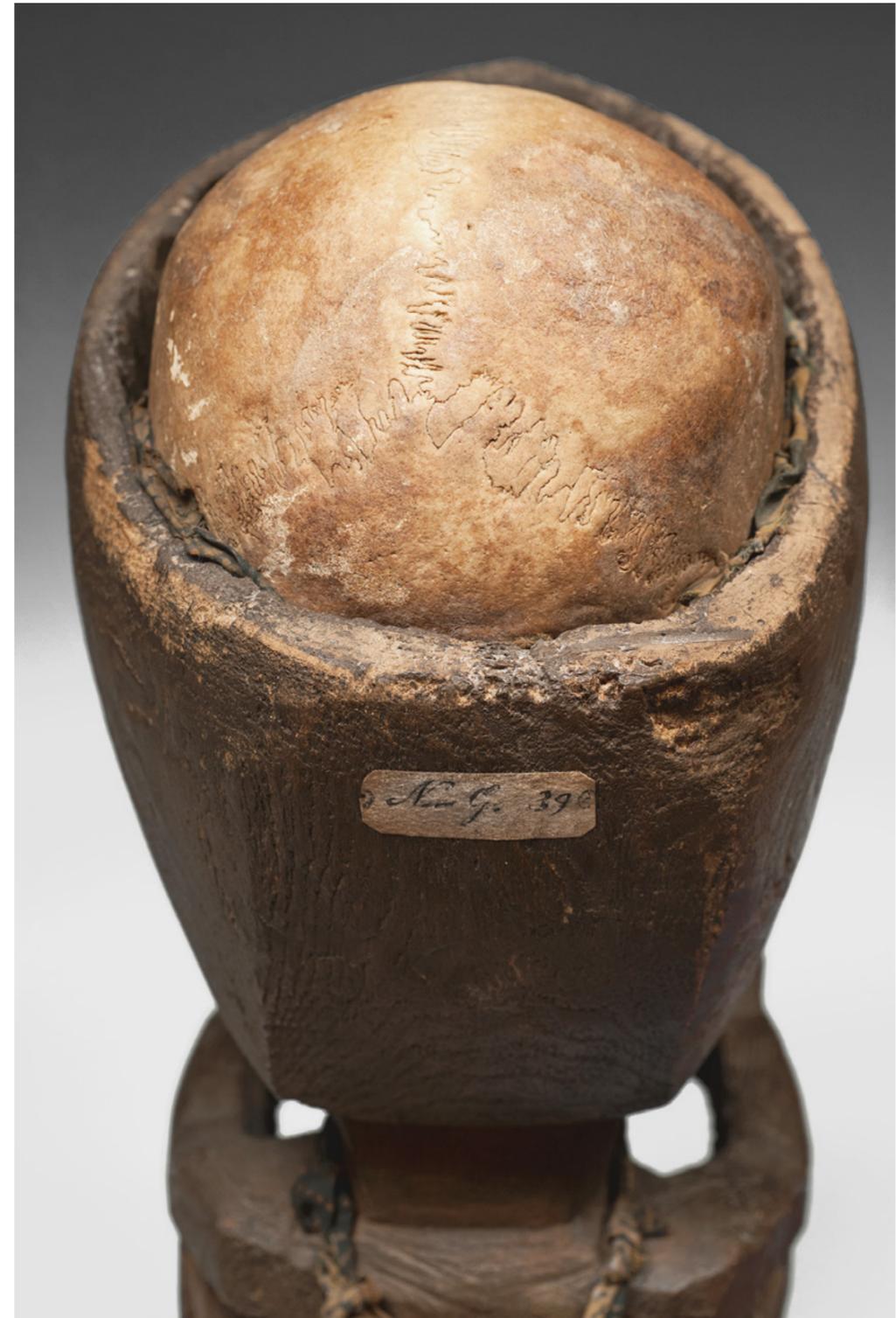
*At arm's length*

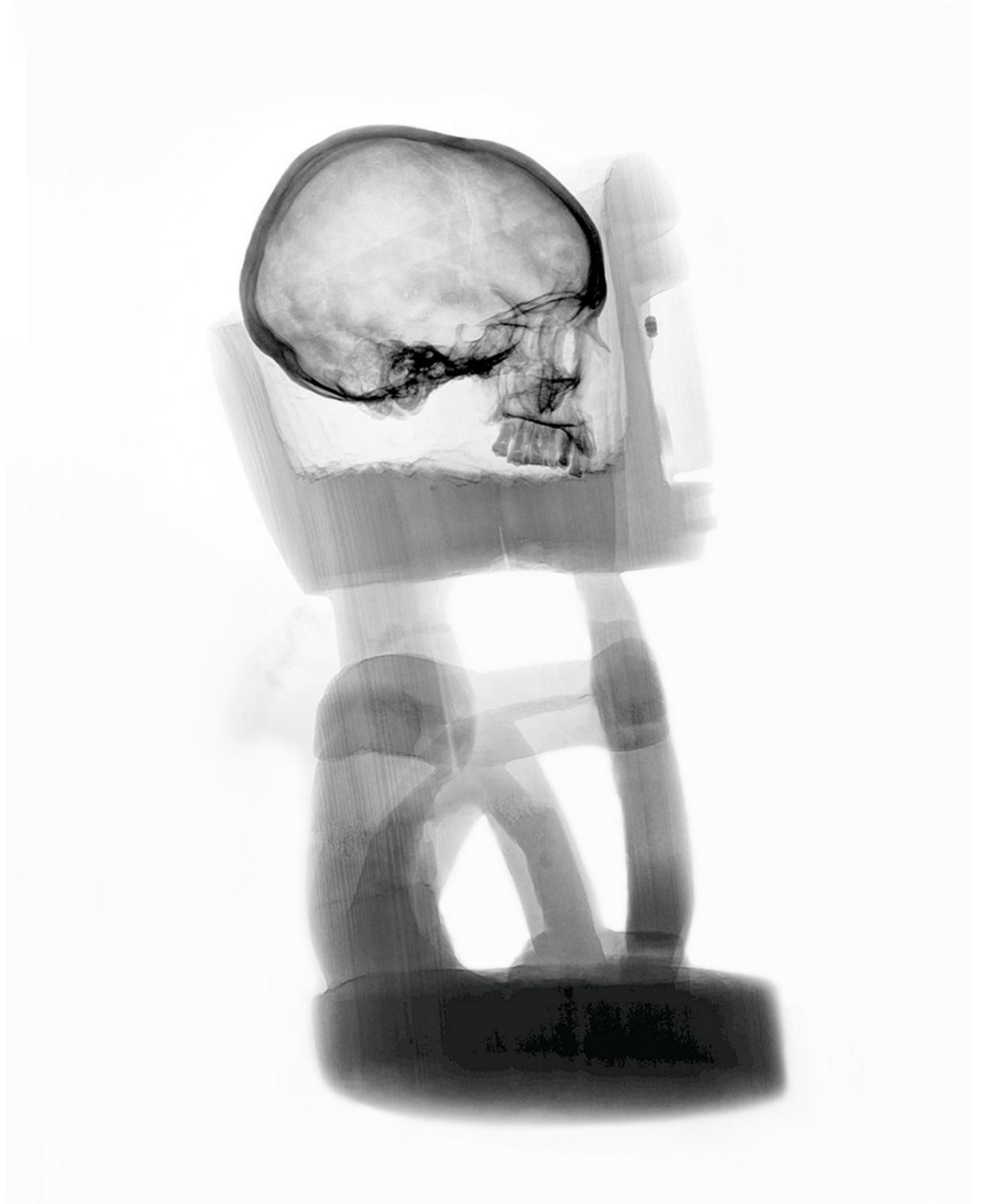
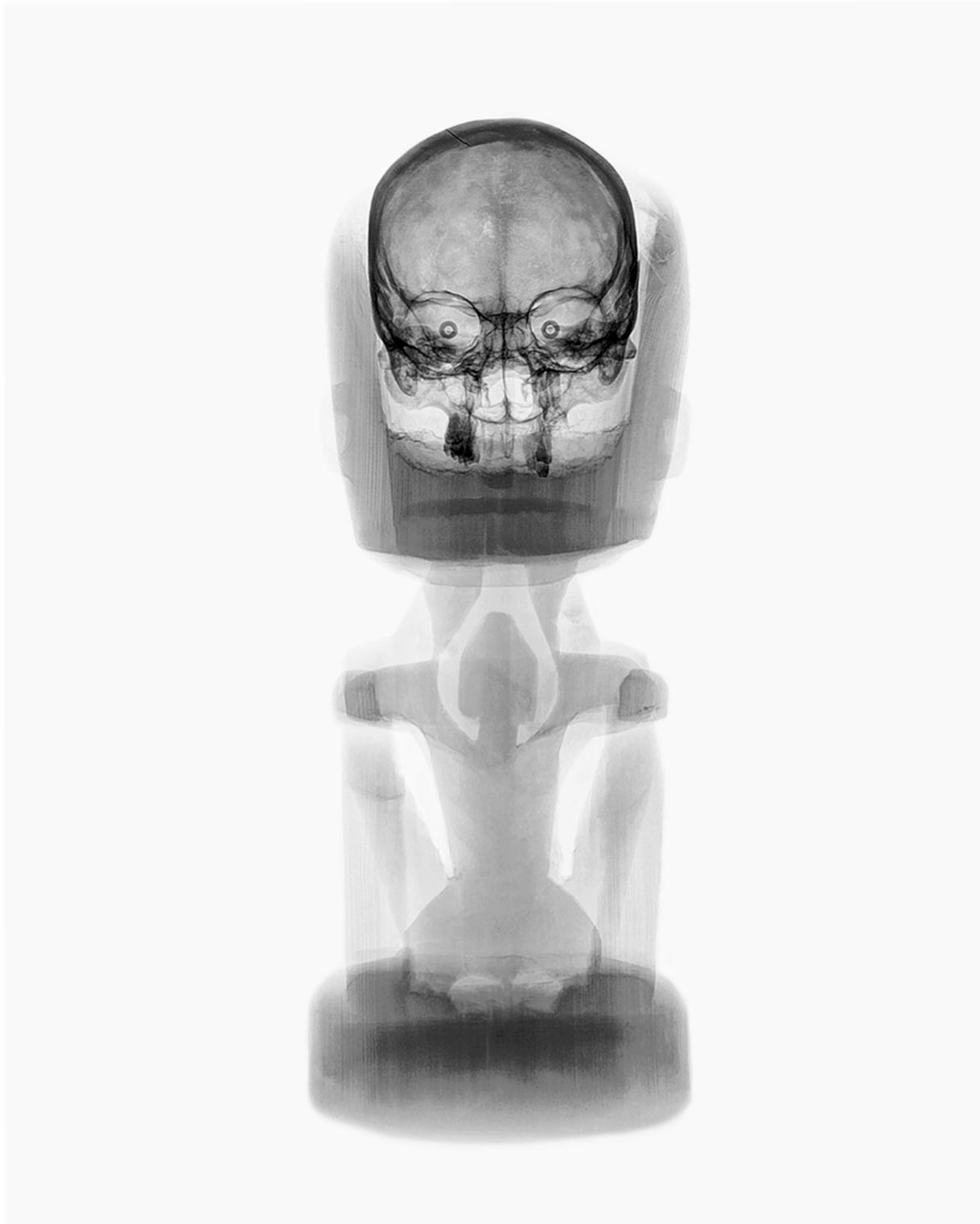
*In the little ones' vine tendril*

*You are feeding us a line of existentialism*

*There are no flies on you*

André Breton, *Poèmes*, 1948.





31. AN EXCEPTIONAL SOLOMON ISLANDS HEAD

Solomon Islands, Vella Lavella Island, 19th century  
 Human skull, wood, parinarium-nut paste, fiber, nautilus shell, nails  
 Height : 23 cm

Provenance : Collected on Vella Lavella by an Australian expedition in the 19th century  
 Jacques Kerchache, Paris  
 Antonio Casanovas, Madrid

Exhibition : *Chemins de la Création-Formes rituelles*-Chateau d'Ancy-le-Franc,  
 6 June - 20 September 1981 (illustrated cat. page 5)

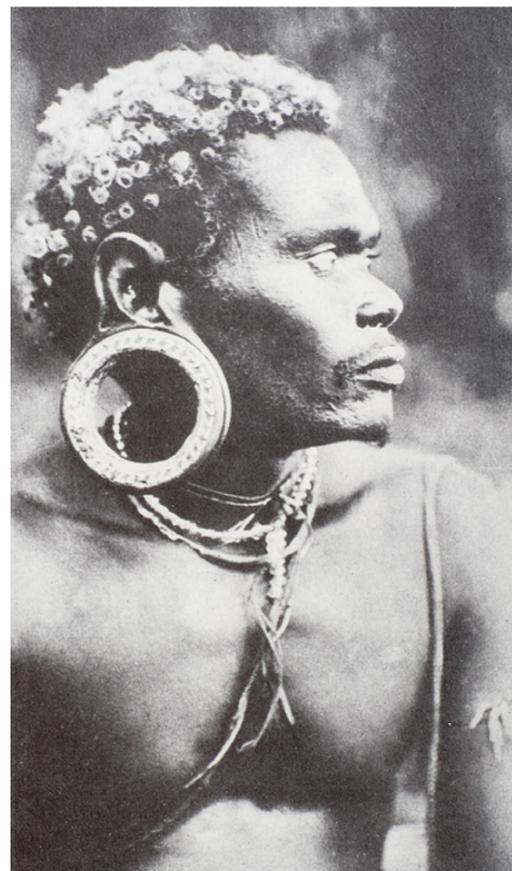
*Origenes. Artes Primarias, Colecciones de la Peninsula Iberica, Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid 2005 ( illustrated cat. n°46)*

The head-hunting and the cult of ancestors were important institutions in the Solomon Islands, yet the corpus of overmodeled skulls remains very limited. The first record of an overmodeled skull comes from the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, it was acquired in 1835 (n°E5023) and originates from Vella Lavella Island. The superlative example above, with its hyperrealistic features, delicate inlays and spectacular ornaments, could be considered as the masterpiece of the relevant genre.



“In the Island of Vella Lavella, the corpse is wrapped in a shroud and attached to the branches of a tree, where it is left for a predetermined amount of days. Once the decay has begun and is well under way, the following operation is applied. The head is taken off and carefully cleaned while the rest of the corpse is abandoned where it was, as it is considered worthless. When the head belongs to an important chief, the features are remodelled with mastic obtained from *tita* nut while the eyes and tattoo marks (actually face paint) are reproduced with mother of pearl. If the hair cannot be used, it is replaced with natural fiber. The head, whether it has been decorated or not, is then placed in the family reliquary, which may be a small house on a large pole set about 120 cm above the ground, or a small recess dug into a cliff.”

Ref. KNIBBS S., *The Savage Solomons as they Were and Are*, London : Seely Service, 1929, pages 31-32.



Man from New Georgia, ca. 1884-1889, Photo by C. M. Woodford (Amherst of Hackney and B. Thomson, 1901 : 352)

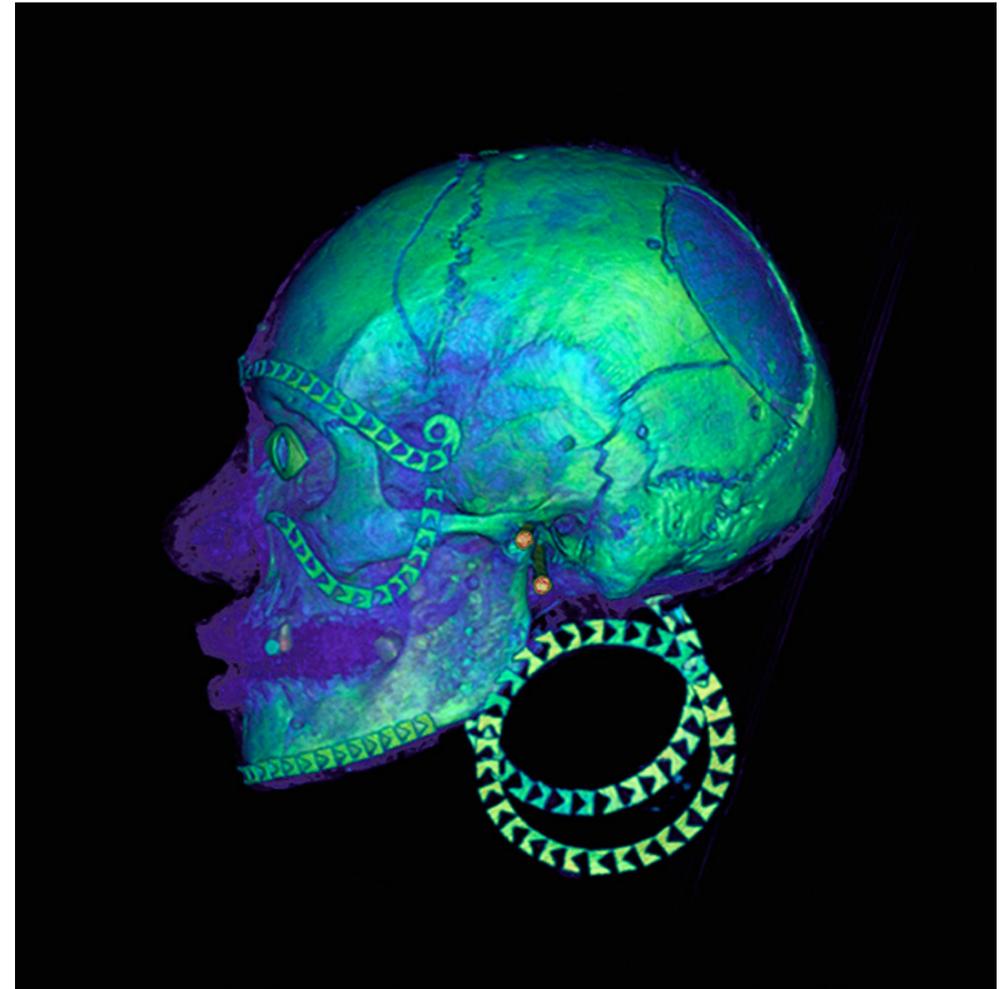
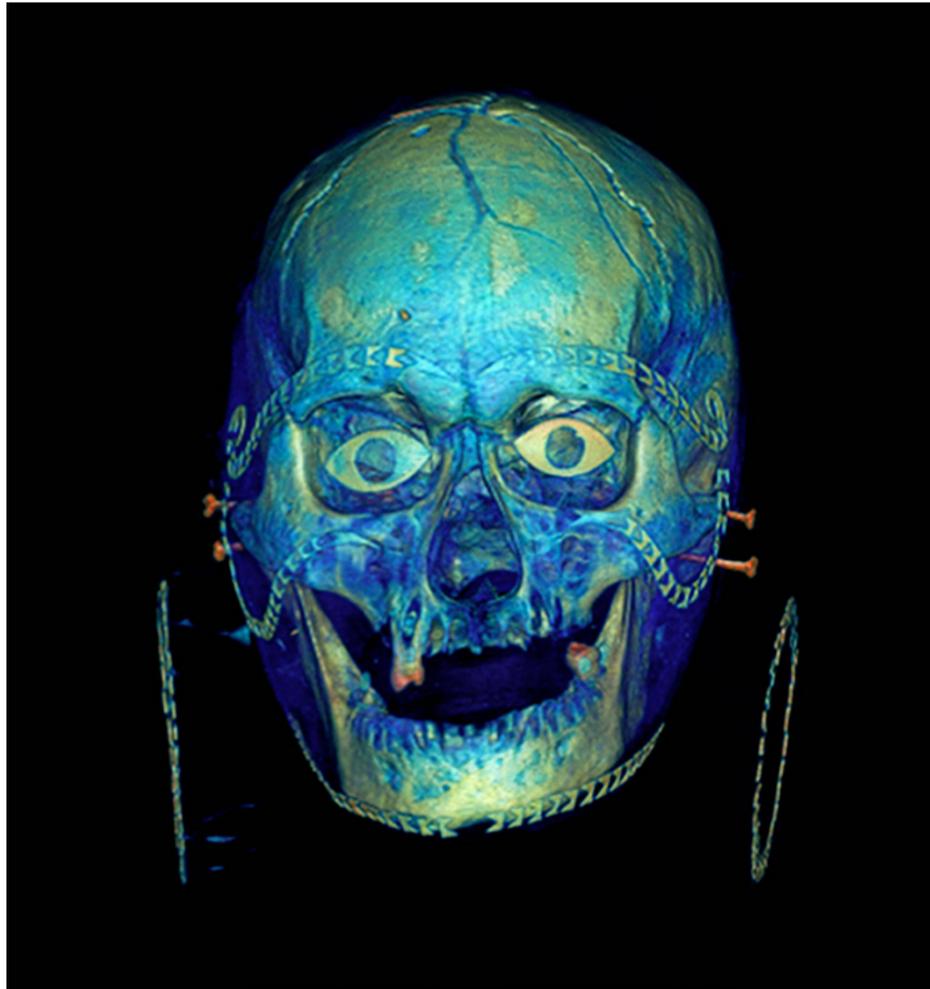
The scanography of the head reveals the presence of peri-mortem traumatic lesions by stab wounds, which may be the cause of death in a context of inter-tribal conflicts (impact mark on the vertex with bone avulsion and large circular fracture from the temporal bone down to the external hearing canal).

Ref. Report from Dr Philippe Charlier, MCU-PH (APHP-UVSQ), HDR.

Biblio. : WAITE Deborah, *Art des Iles Salomon*, dans les collections du Musée Barbier-Mueller, Genève 1983, p. 121-123.

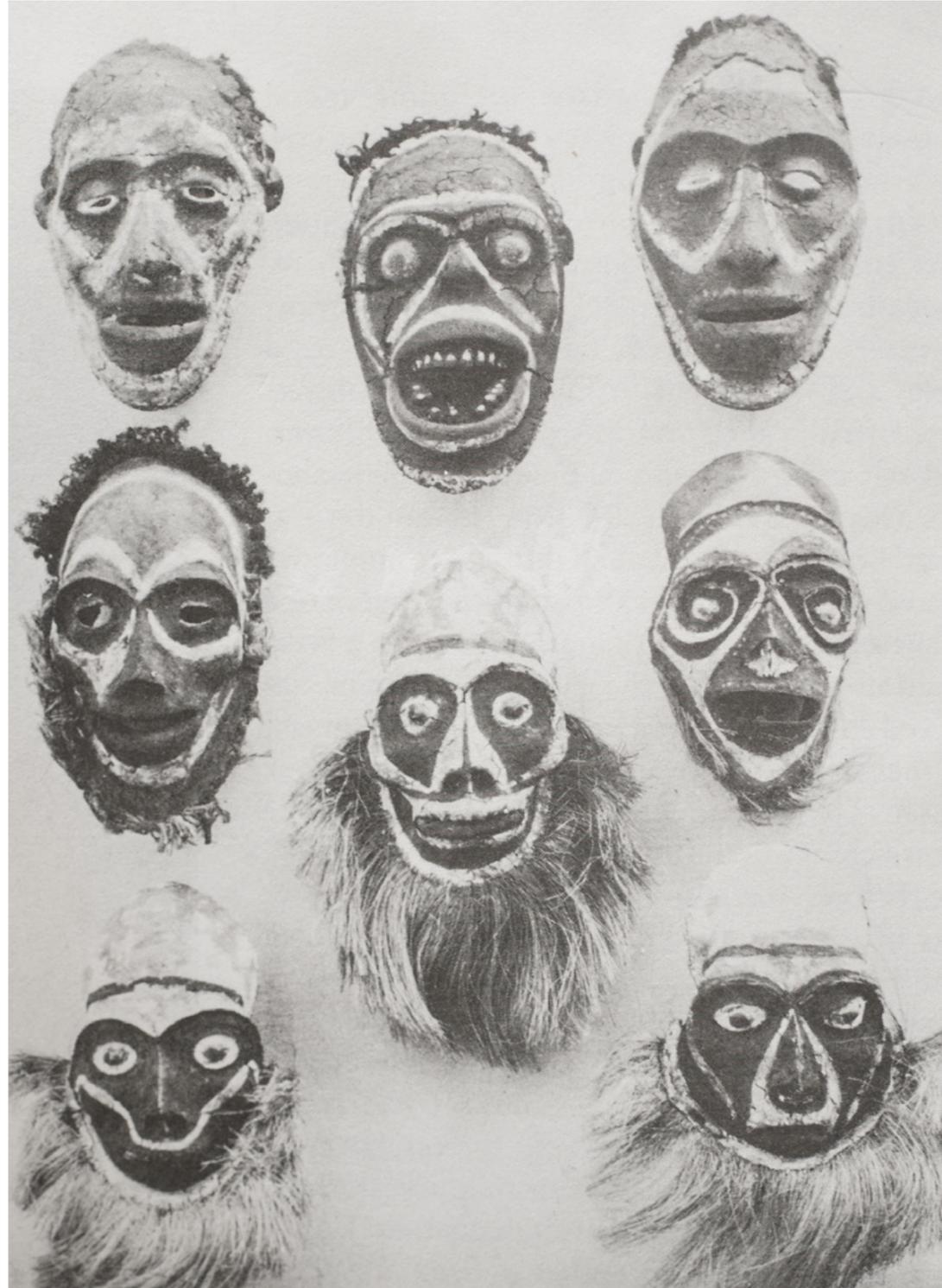
Left : Warriors from the Roviana Lagoon, circa 1900, postcard.





## THE SKULL MASKS

### FROM THE TOLAI OF NEW BRITAIN



The Tolai are a Melanesian people living in the Gazelle Peninsula, on the north of the Island of New Britain. Although the region has known a constant Western presence since the early 18th century, the Tolai have been able to preserve their lands and their traditions, notably the cultural rites associated with the secret societies. The Society of the Masks involving the use of decorated skulls called *Lor* (a word that means both skull and ancestor) in ceremonial dances, is one of these.

The British explorer and consular official Wilfred Powell traveled in New Britain between 1877 and 1880, and witnessed this nocturnal ceremony ; he relates it in his book, *Wanderings in a Wild Country, Or Three Years Amongst the Cannibals of New Britain*, 1883 :



“I am afraid that short description is difficult to understand, but were I to attempt a fuller one I should get hopelessly confused.

There is one dance, however, I must try and describe - that is the *Toberran*, which is arranged by the same chief that has the management of the fish canoe.

It occurs about once in two seasons at the full moon, and is really a very impressive sight, and the men and women who take part in it are all picked dancers.

At about nine P.M. we were all seated round in a large semicircle, the other side of the circle being formed by heaps of firewood, all ready for lighting. As yet there was no appearance of any performers, but by-an-by and toms-toms commenced to play very slowly, and the women, who were seated in front as orchestra, began to sing a wierd kind of song, which I can only describe as a combined wailing of cats and dogs, which gradually got faster and faster. Presently one of the fires blazed up, and we saw some sort of creatures creeping out of the bush in all directions ; they did indeed look like devils, which the word *Toberran* signifies.

Some wore masks composed of skulls cut in half, and filled in with gum to represent a human face ; these are held in the teeth by a stick, fastened across at the back of the mouth of the skull ; on their heads they wore long black wigs composed of cocoa-nut fibre, and their bodies are covered with dead leaves. Some that had no masks had their faces painted an unearthly green color, and on their shoulers was fastened a kind of wings (on closer inspection I afterwards found these were actually fastened through the loose skin through the neck). On came these unearthly figures, creeping from the bush on every sides, some from tails, some with spikes all down their backs, all keeping step and beautiful time, no matter what position their bodies were in.

Suddenly the tom-toms stopped, and all the *Toberrans* rushed to the center of the open space with a fearful yell ; then the music strikes up again, and there begins a dance that defies all description ; heads there, arms here, legs one way, tails another, and yet in perfect unison, for if there was an arm one side there was a leg to correspond on the other. The shrieks and yells grew louder, and the singing became shouting, and as they dance, the fires are lighted and blaze up, throwing a lurid light on one of the most hideous scenes it has ever been my lot to witness. Demon faces showing here, smoothless skulls there, the air above them seeming full of arms smeared with blood, and below legs apparently in the last stages of mortification, and above all this a moon that sends a fitful light through the overhanging trees, whilst the huge fires alternately blazing up and dying down casting strange shadows which suggest things even more horrible than the frightful reality. Indeed, however terribly we might put a *Dance of Death* on one of our stages, we could never equal this in its diabolic and hideous effects.”



“Headhunters dance” in New Britain, circa 1900.

### 32. A RARE TOLAI SKULL MASK

Blanche Bay, Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain, 1800-1900  
Human skull, parinairum-nut paste, fiber, pigments, lime  
Height : 20 cm

Provenance: Acher Eskenasy collection, Paris

This *mask of death* of striking expressiveness, delicate modeling and great age, is one of the very rare and earliest testimonies about the cult of ancestors in New Britain.

In his 1969 study on a group of 41 skull masks in the collections of the museums of Dresden, Leipzig, Hamburg and Berlin, the German anthropologist Hans Damm identified two types of masks :

A. The most common; these masks measure between 22 and 27cm, they have a small wooden stick attached to the back (to be hold between the teeth while dancing), almond-shaped apertures for the eyes and a rather soft and serene expression.

B. Masks of this category measure around 21-22cm ; the eye sockets are overmodeled and the mouth is wide open. The overall expression is frightening and evokes a death's head.

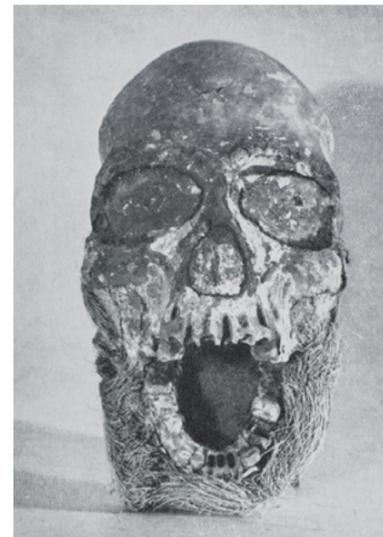
Captain Weisser, treasurer on board the S.M. Kanonenboot *Hyäne*, stayed in Blanche Bay from 1878 to 1882, he states that skulls of prominent chiefs or enemies were also preserved and prepared in the form of masks of the B type. These masks were kept preciously and honoured in sacred houses. He adds : "During religious ceremonies or dances which occur at nights of the full moon, the young chiefs wear the masks of old prominent chiefs as they believe it gives them strength, courage and power. They are used for the same purpose during wars."

In his remarkable essay about these skull masks, Philippe Bourgoïn continues : "on the occasion of conflicts, they were used to terrify the enemy, protect the warriors and ensure success during the battle. They were then worn on the chest as pendants - as suggested by the remains of rattan knot or string on the back of some of the masks- or in the hand." (Bourgoïn, 2002 : 69)

Biblio. : WEISSER, *Brief des Herrn Weisser an Bord S.M. Kanonenboot "Hyäne" an Herrn Bastian*, in. Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin, Berlin 1883, Band 10, pp. 289-296. :

DAMM Hans, *Bemerkungen zu den Schädelmasken aus Neu-britannien*, Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, vol. XXVI, Berlin, 1969, pp. 85-116

BOURGOÏN Philippe, *Mystérieux masques-crânes des Tolai de Nouvelle-Bretagne*, Art Tribal Hiver 2002, pages 58-71.



Damm, 1969, Tafel XLVI Abb. 6a



33. AN EXCEPTIONAL TOLAI SKULL MASK

Blanche Bay, Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain, 1800-1900  
Human skull, parinarium-nut paste, fiber, pigments  
Height : 22 cm

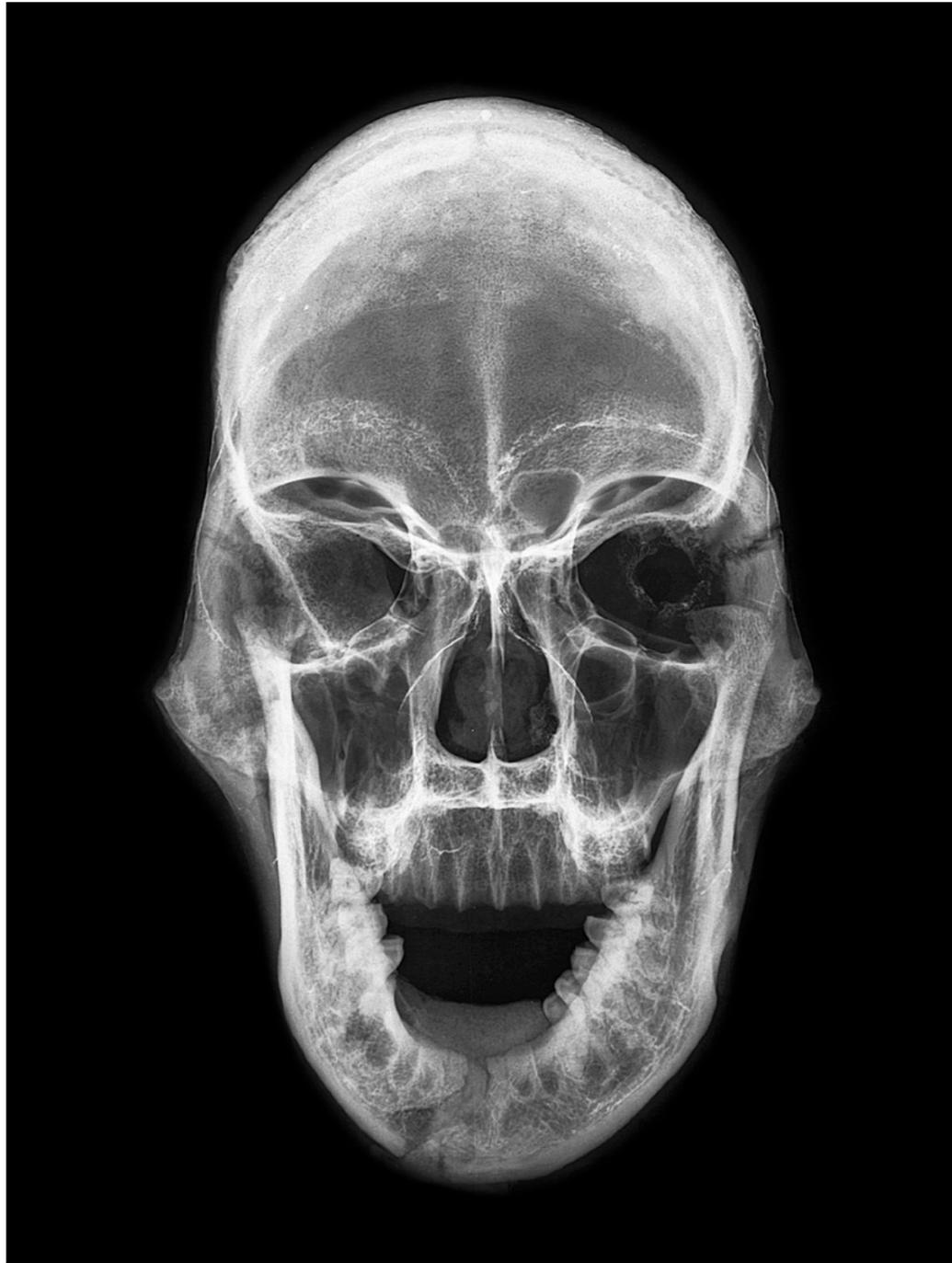
Provenance: Collected by the Colonial administration officer Höhne before 1914  
Dr. Manfred Höhne, Naumburg (by descent)  
Frank Reiter collection, Berlin (inventory n° 443)

This spectacular skull mask is both a graphical masterpiece and a deeply evocative expression of primitivism and death, from those which notably fascinated the expressionist painters like Kirchner, Nolde or Schmidt-Rottluff, at the turn of the 20th century. Originally conceived as a death mask, it was worn on the chest like a pendant, and intended to instill fear in the enemy during the combat.



*Maskenstilleben III (Masks)*, 1911, Emil Nolde.  
© Nolde Stiftung Seebüll, Germany / Courtesy of  
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.







34. A NEW IRELAND OVERMODELED SKULL

New Ireland, central island, 1800-1900

Human skull, resin (*Parinariium laurinum*), wood, chalk, shell, fiber, opercula (*Turbo Petholatus*)

Height : 26 cm

Provenance: Arte y ritual, Madrid  
Private collection, Spain

Exhibition: *Krankas*, Galeria Cyprus Art, Girona, june 11-july 14  
(illustrated in the catalog)

The overmodeling and decoration of skulls were practiced in the center of the island of New Ireland and in the Tabar islands. According to Krämer (1925, p. 49), the skull of the deceased was exhumed two months after its burial. It was preserved in a basket and suspended to the ridge beam afterwards. Months and even a year might go by before the overmodeling process. A man was appointed at this stage. The skull was covered with a wax coating or with parinariium nut paste blended with earth. The eyes were made of turbo opercula and shell. The face could be painted with lime and natural pigments. The headdress, resembling the mourning wigs, was carefully crafted from twine, seeds, small snails or wood, and covered with lime. Some small spikes modeled in the lime adorn the outline of the face on certain skulls, depicting the facial hair or a beard.

We believe these heads appeared in connection with the funerary ceremonies (*malangan*), the cult of the *Uli* figures, and ceremonies related to the natural elements. Because of their hazardous essence, they were eventually abandoned, destroyed, or traded with foreigners. (LE FUR : 1999, 162)

Biblio. : KRÄMER Augustin, *Die Malangane von Tombara*, München, 1925.

HELFRICH Klaus, *Zeremonialschadel aus Mittel-Neuirland*, Baessler-Archiv, Neue Folge, Band XXXIII (1985)

LE FUR, op. cit. 1999, p.162



Right : Native from New Ireland, circa 1890  
Photo by Richard Parkinson. Collection of the author.



35. AN IMPORTANT NEW IRELAND HEAD

New Ireland, central island, 1800-1900  
Human skull, resin (*Parinarium laurinum*), wood, chalk, shell, opercula (*Turbo Petholatus*)  
Height : 21 cm

Provenance: Arthur Speyer, Berlin  
Ernst Heinrich, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt  
Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, Oct. 21. 1967, lot 41

Publication: *Archipel Bismarck*, Voyageurs et Curieux, Paris, 2012, cat. 79

This archetypal and well preserved overmodeled skull appears on a photograph of the “Kannibalen Haus” of Ernst Heinrich, sitting on a table beneath a New Britain shield, circa 1960.



Courtesy of the Heinrich Estate, Bad Cannstatt



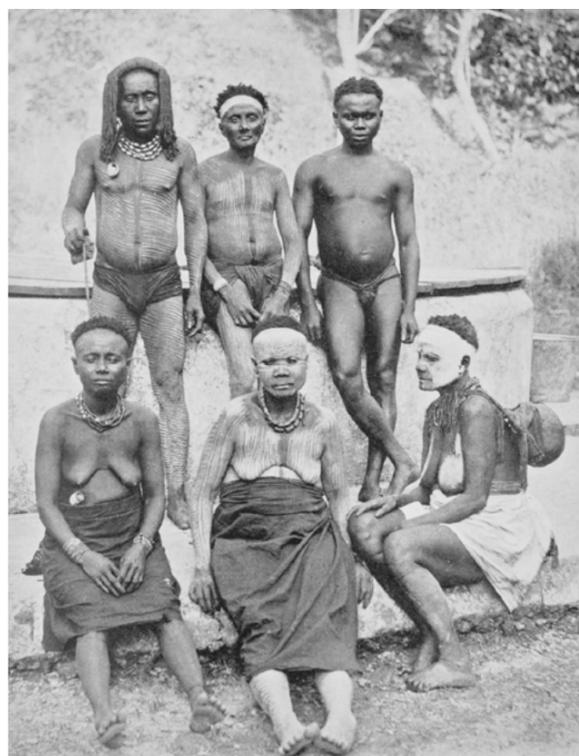
36. AN EXTREMELY RARE ANDAMAN ISLANDS SKULL

Andaman Islands, central island, 1800-1880  
Human skull, pigments  
Height : 15 cm

Provenance: Collected by a British officer from a funerary cave in 1881  
Acquired by Carl von Borg, Cologne, in 1927 (n° A210)  
Finch & Co., London

The Andaman Islands form an archipelago of more than 200 small tropical islands stretching at the east of the Bay of Bengal. Anthropologists believe they may have been inhabited for several thousands of years at least, and possibly from the Middle Paleolithic. According to the "Out of Africa Hypothesis", the Andamanese people would be part of the first groups of modern humans (*homo Sapiens*) who migrated out of the African continent, around 100.000-50.000 BC, and a key stepping stone in the great early migration along the coastal regions of the Indian subcontinent, towards Southeast Asia and Oceania.

As many other indigenous people from ancient tribal societies they practiced the cult of the ancestors, and used to exhume the bones of their dead to wear them as mementos. The skulls particularly were painted with abstract lines, dots or stripes, and worn around the neck with a fringe of dentalium shells, as a sign of mourning and as a protection against disease and pain.



*Natives in Mourning, Andaman Islands, 1900.*

By way of mourning costume the body is painted with yellow ochre and olive-green clay, parents being decorated with vertical stripes, and the skull and other bones of the deceased are worn as mementoes. In the illustration one woman has a skull hanging down her back and another in the centre is wearing necklaces of hand and foot bones (The clothing shown has been put on for the photograph).

Photo by Lady Eardley-Wilmot, ill. in *Customs of the World*, Hutchinson & Co. London, 1913.

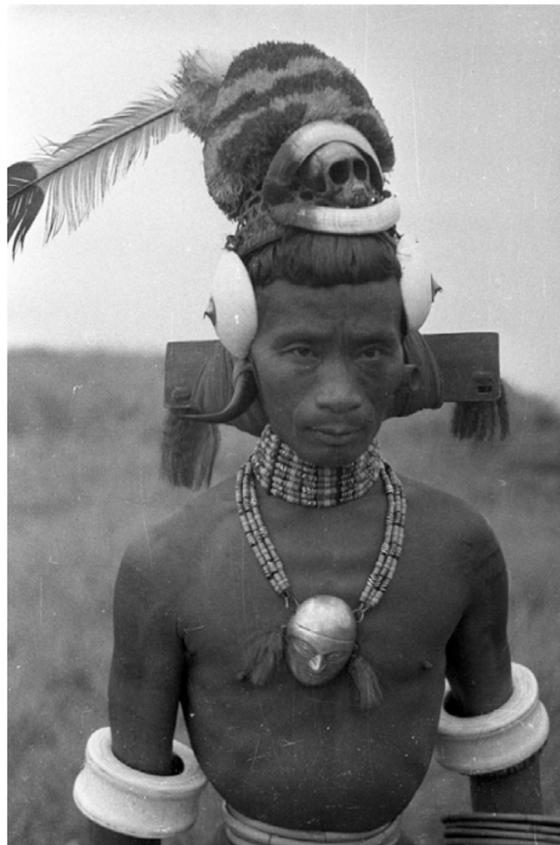


37. A NAGA HEADHUNTER NECKLACE

Naga people, North-Eastern India or Northwest Burma, circa 1900  
Monkey skull (macaque), red coral, rattan, cord  
Height : 43 cm ( with necklace)

Provenance: Private collection Paris.

The Naga tribes live in the north-eastern part of India and the northwest of Burma. They practised head-hunting and preserved the heads of their enemies taken during combat as trophies. The Naga Hills, in the southeast of Himalayas along the border between India and Burma were known as a “headhunter’s paradise” till the end of the 19th century and the spread of Christianity.



**To-Ang, the famous Ang of Sheangha**

Wearing a fine hat, ivory armllets and rattan leg and arm bands. (The Ang are an aristocratic group from which are originating the hereditary chiefs)

Wakching, Sheangha, Nagaland, Mon District. 1936.  
© SOAS, Nicholas Haimendorf



38. A SUPERB DAYAK SKULL

Melawi tribe, Kalimantan Barat, Borneo, Indonesia, 1800-1900  
Human skull, rattan, iron  
Height : 17 cm

Provenance: François Coppens, Bruxelles  
Karim Grusenmeyer collection, Ghent

This beautiful trophy skull has a glossy honey-yellow patina and floral motifs deeply carved in the parietal bone, on the back of the head.  
See Jan B. Ave, *Woodcarvers & Headhunters. Vanishing Dayak Cultures from Borneo*. Museon Den Haag, 2000, p. 58, for a group of comparable trophy skulls from the Dayak tribes living along the Melawi river.



*Skull of a Dayak*, Apo Kayan, (East Kalimantan), Indonesia, ca. 1880.  
Legacy of M. Piers, Nusantara Museum collection, Delft.





39. A RARE DAYAK TROPHY SKULL

Kayan Dayak, Kalimantan province, Borneo, Indonesia, 1800-1900  
Human skull, iron  
Height : 14 cm

Provenance: Karim Grusenmeyer collection, Ghent



40. A MAGNIFICENT DAYAK SKULL

Kayan Dayak, Kalimantan province, Borneo, Indonesia, 1800-1900  
Human skull, rattan  
Height : 21 cm

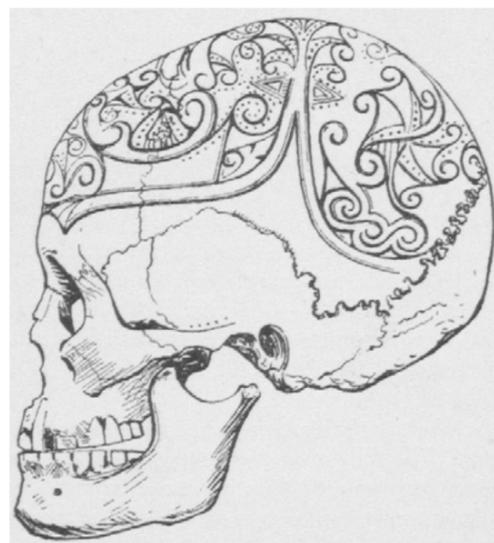
Provenance: François Coppens, Bruxelles  
Karim Grusenmeyer collection, Ghent

Exhibition: *Borneo. The Dayaks in the François Coppens collection*, Musée Départemental de Préhistoire de Solutré, 21 June-15 October 1996, Solutré, France.

*Woodcarvers & Headhunters. Vanishing Dayak Cultures from Borneo.*  
Museum Den Haag, 5 february-9 April 2000, Den Haag, Holland.

Publication: AVE Jan B., *Borneo. The Dayaks in the François Coppens collection*, Musée Départemental de Préhistoire de Solutré, 1996, p. 37.  
COPPENS F. (collectif), *Woodcarvers & Headhunters. Vanishing Dayak Cultures from Borneo.* Museum Den Haag, 2000 (ill. on the front cover)

This old patinated skull is decorated with a stylized pattern of flowers and leaves deeply carved in the bone, on the whole upper part of the cranium. The intricate motifs are different on each side of the skull evincing great artistry, rarely seen on any comparable examples .



Profil of an incised Dayak skull, in Henry Ling Roth, in *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, 1896.





41. A SHAMAN NECKLACE

Dayak, Borneo, Indonesia, circa 1900  
Rodent skull, snake skeleton, bone, fabric, feather, iron, fiber  
Height : 56,5 cm with the snake skeleton

Provenance: Le cabinet des curieux, Paris



42. A RARE KAPALA FROM NEPAL

Northern Nepal, 1600-1700  
Human skull, bronze, gilt  
Height : 12 cm ; length : 16,2 cm

Provenance: Karim Grusenmeyer Antiquair, Bruxelles

The word *kapala* comes from the Sanskrit term meaning skull, and by implication the ritual item, the “skullcup”, crafted from the human cranium. In both Hindu and Buddhist Tantra it is used as a ritual implement. They were often intricately carved and mounted with precious metals and gemstones. The kapalas were usually made from skulls collected at sky burial sites, an ancient Tibetan burial custom in which the bodies of the dead are dismembered and scattered over open ground to “give alms to the birds”. It is a ritual that has a great religious meaning in the ascent of the soul to be reincarnated into another circle of life.

Kapalas were notably used in high tantric meditation to achieve a transcendental state of thought and mind ; or for libations in honour of the gods and deities, to win their favor. The skulls are also considered as “karmic vessels” which contain the good and bad qualities of the deceased person. Depending on the purpose they would receive different substances, such as divine or vital nectars, alcohol, ritual cakes, even fresh blood or human organs, in more demonic cults.

Many of the Vajrayana and Hindu deities, like Bairava in the example shown opposite, are depicted on paintings and thangkas as carrying a kapala filled with blood.



The *Citipati*, or “Lords of the Cemetery”, are two mythological Buddhist ascetics, who were so deep in their meditation, they were caught unaware by a thief and beheaded even before they knew they were dead. As a symbol, the Citipati represent the eternal dance of death, and perfect awareness. They are usually depicted as a male and female pair of intertwined skeletons with demonic appearance caught up in an ecstatic dance.



43. A NAZCA MUMMY HEAD

Nazca culture, Southwestern Peru, 100 BC-800 AD  
Human head, hair, fabric, fiber, twine, feathers  
Height : 127 cm with the hair plaits

Provenance: Dr Gottfried Eysank collection, Bad Schoenau, Austria

The Nazca civilization flourished on the southern coast of Peru between 200 BCE and 600 CE. They settled in the Nazca and other surrounding valleys, with their principal religious and urban sites being Cahuachi and Ventilla, respectively. They are especially known for the extraordinary geoglyphs they drawn in the desert, the Nazca lines. But they also practiced the mummification of their dead, for which the cemetery of Chauchilla is equally famous.

“ Carefully wrapped in textiles and placed in a seated position. The skulls sometimes display deliberate elongation, and we know the Nazca wore tattoos. Tombs, especially shaft ones lined with mud bricks, could be re-opened and more mummies added, perhaps indicating ancestor worship.

Caches of trophy-heads often accompany the mummy, many showing signs of trephination which allowed several to be strung on a single cord as illustrated in pottery designs. Trophy-heads are also frequently incorporated into textile designs, especially in miniature and as border decoration. There were also burials of what appear to be sacrificial victims. These have the eyes blocked and excrement was placed in the mouth which was then pinned shut with cactus needles. Alternatively, the tongue was removed and kept in a cloth pouch.” (Mark Cartwright, 2014)





*The ghost of Kohada Koheiji, Katsushika Hokusai, woodblock, ca.1830*

“Murdered by his wife’s lover, Koheiji returned from the grave to avenge himself. His haunting led to his killers’ unnatural and untimely ends... In the image, Kohada Koheiji is seen peering in through the curtains of a mosquito net, presumably at his assassins who sleep under its cover. His hands, skeletal and clawlike, inch the netting open to reveal his face—little more than bone and sinew. Around his neck are the remnants of his earthly attire, and upon his head are random strands of his now decaying hair. Koheiji grins with the grim delight of a skeleton at his murderers, who are not shown. The scene is colorful but still dark, with the central figure of Kohada Koheiji shrouded and enclosed by a deep blue-blackness. Koheiji seems to glow with the passion of his vengeance.” (Sumpter, 2006 : 64)

Ref. : SUMPTER Sara, *Katsushika Hokusai’s Ghost of Kohada Koheiji: Image from a Falling Era*, 2006, p. 64.



44. THE TATTOOED FOREARM OF A PERUVIAN MUMMY

Chimú culture, Peru, 1100-1400 AD  
Mummified human forearm, pigment (genipap)  
Length : 25 cm

Provenance: Geoffrey Metz collection, Curator at The Victoria Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Uppsala University Museum, Sweden

“The Chimú of pre-Columbian Peru applied tattoo pigments with various types of needles (fishbone, parrot quill, spiny conch) which have been found in mummy burials. The technical application of tattooing was a form of skin-stitching, and it has been suggested that women were the primary tattoo artists. Paleopathological studies of Chimú mummies (1100-1470 A.D.) indicate that the practice of tattooing was quite common among both males and females. In some coastal settlements, it has been estimated that at least thirty percent of the population may have been tattooed. Interestingly, the Chimú seemed to have used the juices of the genipap (*genipa americana L.*) as tattoo pigment. Juices of the green, immature fruits of the genipap have and continue to be used as black body paint and tattoo pigment by historic and contemporary indigenes of South America. Among some groups, the coloring substance was highly esteemed because it was believed to repel incorporeal spirits. This was especially true of the headhunting Jívaro and Mundurucú who painted themselves and their trophy heads with genipap to protect the victor from the spirit of the deceased.” (Lars Krutak, 2008)



45. A RARE PARACAS MUMMY HEAD

Ica region, Paracas culture, Peru, 800-100 BC  
Mummified human head, hair, fabric, fiber, twine, feathers  
Height : 19 cm

Provenance: Phillip H. Douglas Palmer collection, Gloucester

The artificial cranial deformation by head-flattening or head-binding was a common practice in several pre-Columbian cultures of the Andes. The red-haired mummies from the Paracas are one particularly evincive example, where the nobility was known to practice skull binding, resulting in an elongated and (in some cases) conical deformation.



*Flathead woman and child (Caw Wacham), 1848-53, Paul Kane.*



46. AN EXCEPTIONAL MIXTEQUE SKULL

Oaxaca region, Mixtec or Aztec culture, Southwestern Mexico, 1300-1521 AD  
Human skull, turquoise, pyrite, shell (spondylus, aragonite), clay, shellac (cochineal)  
Height : 21 cm, width : 16 cm, depth : 15,5 cm

Provenance: Private collection, Paris  
Maîtres Laurin-Guilloux-Buffetaux-Tailleur, Paris, 4 April 1984, lot 91.  
Private collection, Lyon (acquired at the above sale)

*"... I have more than fifty skulls, mainly Oceanic and South American ; from Mexico, I have only an engraved mandible, this is hardly anything ! Owning a complete skull, Mexican, and especially a mosaic skull, that would be my dream ..."*

These were the words of Professor Henri Gastaut, an eminent neurophysiologist, a specialist of the human brain, and the most renowned collector of skulls in the world. He thought this object was essential to complete his collection, it would be the high point of his ensemble. In 1964, after much reluctance, he eventually agreed to pay an astronomical sum to acquire it. His collection was then complete ; and a decade later it was displayed in a spectacular and well noticed exhibition in the city of Marseille. In 1989 he donated the entire collection, including the Mixtec skull, to the *Musée d'Arts Africains-Océaniens-Amérindiens*.

In 2011, a group of scientists led by Marianne Pourtal Sourrieu, director of the museum, identified six other complete skulls decorated with a mosaic of turquoise, all scattered in museums across the world. We know of at least two more in the National Museum of Anthropology of Mexico, which makes a total of less than a dozen... Precisely ten with the example opposite.

In this very restricted corpus, only the latter one, plus the "Gastaut" skull, and two other mosaic skulls in the Dumbarton Oaks pre-Columbian collection show a cranial deformation. In all these cases it appears to be a deformation by head-flattening, an ancient and common practice among pre-Hispanic elites of Mesoamerica and western Mexico which consisted in compressing the infant's cranium between two wooden boards. Then there is the turquoise inlay covering the whole front of the skull...

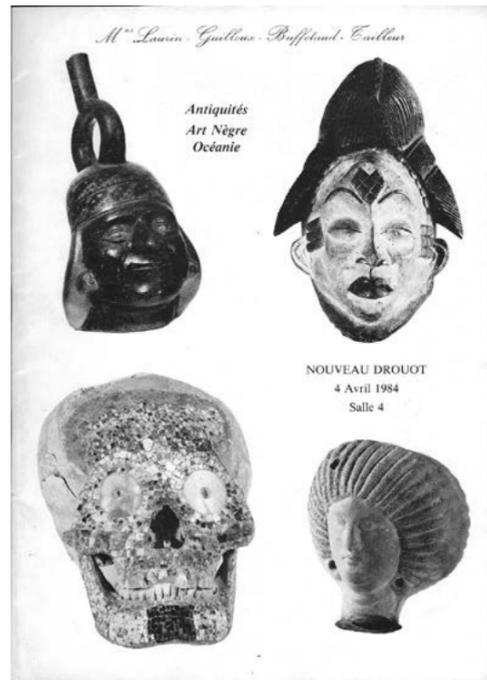


The Codex Zouche-Nuttall is an important pictographic document from the Mixtec culture, one of the very few predating the Spanish conquest.

On the detail above, a ruler is depicted wearing a costume adorned with a skull which closely resembles the famous mosaic skull of the British Museum. It is thought that both the codex and the skull reached Europe in the 16th century, after the expulsion of the Spaniards in 1579.

Detail of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (folio 39).  
Courtesy of the British Museum BM Add. MS 39671





Turquoise was a highly important stone in various pre-Columbian cultures ; reserved for the elite, it was used to decorate a great variety of ritual objects.

The Mixtecs of Oaxaca were renowned craftsmen excelling at this type of art, and we know the tribute list of *Mexica* Emperor Moctezuma II included demands that the Mixtecs deliver 10 turquoise mosaic skull masks each year. In 1519, when the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortés reached the outskirts of the Aztec empire, he was presented with some of these objects. In his account of the Conquest of Mexico, the priest Bernardino de Sahagun (ca. 1499-1590) described one of these turquoise mosaic masks given by Moctezuma to Cortés. The inventories drafted at the time of their consignment to Europe mention these extraordinary objects as well. In 1520, the painter Albrecht Durer states that he admired these pieces on their arrival from Mexico, before they were dispersed throughout Europe...

The turquoise inlaid objects known as the “treasure of Moctezuma”, from the collections of the British Museum, are certainly among the most prestigious artistic creations of mankind. The eponymous exhibition held in 2014 was a phenomenal success and proved the power of fascination of these objects.

91. CRÂNE HUMAIN déformé, dont la face a été décorée d'une mosaïque de turquoise bleu-vertes. Des coquillages (spondyles) créent deux bandes rouges autour du nez. Les yeux sont également cerclés de coquillages blancs. Une mosaïque de pyrites forme les bandes noires du menton. Le crâne et cette mosaïque sont authentiques. Produit typique de la civilisation mixtèque et d'une période comprise entre le XIV<sup>e</sup> et le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Sont réputés avoir été détérrés aux environs de Oaxaca. Il est possible que la mosaïque ait été recollée sur ce crâne. L'argile dans laquelle les crânes sont généralement trouvés garde souvent les mosaïques en place, permettant de faire une restauration du dessin sans fantaisie. La machoire inférieure n'est pas reliée au reste du crâne.

Haut. : 22 cm. - Larg. : 22 cm. - Prof. : 15 cm.

Voir reproduction

In 1984, our skull appeared at an auction held on April 4th at the Hotel Drouot. Jean Roudillon, the expert for the auction house, described it then as originating from the Mixtec culture, reputedly from the Oaxaca region, with a dating comprised between the 14th and the 16th centuries.

He added prudently that the mosaic may have been glued again on the skull in the context of a possible restoration (Doubts were voiced about the mosaic skull of Gastaut after the discovery of two anachronical tessels, made of glass instead of turquoise).

This skull was scanned and examined by Dr. Philippe Charlier at the *Hôpital de la Salpêtrière* in Paris, and no traces of modern or metallic elements were detected.

Biblio. : POURTAL SOURRIEU, Marianne, *Xihuïtl, le bleu éternel, Enquête autour d'un crâne*, Musées de Marseille, 2011.

★ Mercredi 4 avril  
Salle 4  
Antiquités  
M<sup>me</sup> LAURIN, GUILLOUX  
BUFFETAUD, TAILLEUX  
M. Roudillon

Principales enchères :

Vase-portrait, crâne surmonté d'une anse en pont avec goulot, décor peint de motifs géométriques, Mochica IV, 500-600 apr. J.-C., H. 29 : 7 000 F — Vase figurant un oiseau tête tournée, corps surmonté d'une anse en pont à col figurant une tête humaine, noir graphité : 2 300 F — Pacha figurant un singe, céramique fine rouge, orangé et jaune, Côte Nord Inca (Tallan), 1470-1532, L. 34 : 2 400 F — Statue figurant une femme assise les jambes repliées vêtue d'une jupe, terre cuite creuse peinte de couleur rouge, Mexico Jalisco, proto-classique, 100 av-200 apr. J.-C. : 6 800 F — Crâne humain déformé, face décorée d'une mosaïque de turquoise bleu-vert, yeux cerclés de coquillage blancs, H. 22 : 34 000 F — Figurine en terre cuite de couleur beige rosé, reste d'un décor peint rouge figurant une jeune femme debout portant une coiffure en turban, Equateur, San Isidoro, Jama Coaque 500 av. J.-C. : 800 apr. H. 21,5 : 820 F — Torse d'une statue en andésite Mexique, Etat de Guerrero, Rio Mezcala, 100 av. J.-C. 200 apr., H. 31 : 15 500 F — Figurine figurant un serviteur marchant, bois sculpté à décor peint en



47. A MAGNIFICENT *TSANTSAS*

Jivaro tribes, 1800-1900  
Human shrunken head, feathers, beads  
Height : 52 cm

Provenance: Collected by Uruguayan Ranchero B. E. Fiesel in 1912  
Phillip H. Douglas Palmer collection, Gloucester  
Museum of Curios, Newquay , Cornwall

The cultural practice which consisted of taking the head of an enemy as a war trophy and then shrinking it was a custom of the Jivaro Indians who lived in the mountainous border between Ecuador and Peru, in Western Amazonia. The authentic shrunken heads, referred to as *tsantsas*, were produced in a ceremonial context and for particular reasons, they were an integral part of Jivaro life, as were the headhunting raids on which they were acquired. (CASTNER : 2002)

In the mid 19th century, the outside world became aware of this practice, and both museums and collectors, fascinated, began to actively procure them. To supply this growing demand, non-ceremonial and counterfeit shrunken heads appeared progressively on the market. Nowadays, the authentic *tsantsas* have become extremely rare. The above example, a particularly old and fine one has all the characteristics we can expect from an authentic ceremonial shrunken head : narrow face, dark skin, almost vertical nostrils, original lip strings and ear ornaments with plumes of toucan feathers.

Biblio. : CASTNER James L., *Shrunken Heads, Tsantsa Trophies and Human Exotica*, 2002.



Photo from *Amazon head-hunters*, Lewis Cotlow, 1954



48. THE PAINTED SKULL OF ANNA MARIA PRISTLIN

Central or Bavarian Alps, Austria, 1800-1900  
Human skull, lime, pigments  
Height : 13,8 cm

Provenance: Kunstammer Georg Laue, München

Publication: *Memento Mori*, Kunstammer Georg Laue, München, 2002, n° 36

The skull was first painted with lime, then a wreath of leaves and flowers was added along the inscription : “Anna Maria Pristlin, Schneiderin von Meinesberg” (seamstress of Meinesberg).

The practice of engraving and painting exhumed skulls spread throughout Europe, from Brittany to the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece. It is closely associated with the distribution of charnel houses. The custom possibly originated from the cloisters and later extended to the villages. The geographical allocation of these charnel houses is difficult to establish, but we observed a greater concentration in central Austria, especially around the city of Salzburg, and in Bavaria, up to the lakes surrounding München. The most famous charnel house is located in Saint Michael's chapel in Hallstat, Austria. (LE FUR : 1999, 124)

The skulls with more elaborated decoration seem to be made to reflect the personality of the deceased.

Biblio. : Le Fur (Collectif), op. cit.1999, p. 124.

