“Anang” and “Andreas”  Provenance research on human remains in Germany as a lens on inter-colonial History

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Human remains occupy a very delicate position in the discussion over the future of ethnographic collections. Provenance research on the skull of a presumed Borneo rebel and murderer, whose skull was donated to Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Gotha in 1862 by a German officer in Dutch services, leads to the story of the rebel’s alleged victim. This victim was the first known casualty of the Banjar war in 1859 and Borneo’s first Christian martyr. Reduced to a “zoological object,” the rebel’s individual destiny is forgotten in the museum trajectory, much as that of the victim, who as a non-European was accorded a marginal role at best. The example can serve to provide insight into the types of questions and issues involved in researching the provenance of human remains.

Long forgotten by the general public and specialists alike, the Baroque Palace of Friedenstein in Gotha (Thuringia, Germany) houses notable Indonesian collections in its art, oriental, ethnographic, and naturalistic departments. Some Javanese weapons date back to the very beginnings of the collection as a “chamber of miracles” founded by Duke Friedrich I in the mid-17th century. Donations increased dramatically from the mid-19th century. In this period, German traders, missionaries, administrators, doctors, and military men began to participate in large numbers in the colonial expansion of the Dutch in “East India” – today’s Indonesia – in particular, in the colonization of its “outer islands” such as Sumatra, Borneo, and Sulawesi.

Among the large collections – which include ethnographic objects, oriental art, weapons, and remains of exotic animals – are 33 human skulls. After lying forgotten in museum storage for a century and a half, the provenance and history of these skulls is being studied by a multi-disciplinary, international team partly funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. One of the earliest collectors to be found in the museum inventory was the “Royal Dutch Captain Ullmann,” who played a key role in sending the skulls to Friedenstein. Captain Ullmann spent close to 25 years in Sumatra, Borneo, and Java. During a home leave from his service in the Banjar War (1859-1863) in Borneo, he donated 48 items to the Duke, which entered the latter’s “Art Cabinet” on 19 March 1860.

The Focus

The Banjar War

The expressions “murder of the Europeans” and “murder in the Banjarasins area,” without any further explanation, suggest that the events referred to were known to the recipients. In fact, the news about the dreadful “Massacre of Europeans in Borneo,” which occurred in late April and early May 1859, spread far beyond the Indies’ and Dutch world. Every important German- and English-language newspaper reported about it. For instance, the Welsh newspaper Illustrated Observer and Raglan Herald reported the following Intelligence on July 40

Fig. 1: Final section of Ullmann’s donation list, dealing with “zoological objects” (Photo by Kerstin Vollen-Baeds).
In Sumatra and was involved in important cartographic endeavors both in Sumatra and Borneo. After being on “leave,” in the knighthood of the Military Willemsoorde, he got married at the end of 1852. He produced two children, a daughter and a son, and later married and made military commander of the Zuid- en Oostel- Alleoand of Borneo, based in Banjarmasin.

In 1865 Ullmann took part in the “castigation” (tuchting) or “punitive expedition” under the new military commander Major G.J. Verspuijck, which was undertaken in revenge for the humiliating death of three Europeans who had been killed in=back back (which translates as ‘Unrest,’ an exceptional expedition” under the new military command. The danger was minimized by the Civil Resident, another German, resulting in severe conflict, asking for military reinforcement. The danger was minimized by the Civil Resident, another German, resulting in severe conflict, asking for military reinforcement.

**Anang.** Let us now have a closer look at one of the killed persons, No. 43 on Ullmann’s list. The entry reads in German, “Anang, Malajier geboren zu Tjeboel (Bandjermansing) hatte knappemommen am Morad der Europäer.” (Anang, Malay born at Tjeboel (Banjarmasin), had participated in the attack on the ship of the Europeans.)

According to osteoanthropological research, he was male, 30-45 years old, and had lived for some time in the tropics, indicating an insufficient, probably hostile preparation. There are various skeletal alterations probably associated with a weakened immune system due to nutritional deficiencies or chronic infections. The most interesting information is found in Dutch handwriting on a piece of old paper glued on top of the skull. “Anang, born at Gunung Cubul above Sungai Raya, murderer of Andreas Jacob and participant in two attacks on Pangeran, faithful follower of Pambakal Alkier, Branrewa” (Fig. 2). A similar label is found on a second skull. The modern Dutch language, content, and writing style all indicate that the label was written by a person habitually writing in Dutch. The skull was probably found at the European bank and associated with the local situation and events. A native woman would have written in Malay, the local language commonly used, and the Dutch colonial personnel. The handwriting is not Ullmann’s, and he would probably have used the label written by a German General at the Dutch inland police.

Anang or nanang was originally a title for nobility in the Hindu Kingdom of Dipa Negara and the subsequent Islamic Sultanate of Banjarmasin. Later it became a common nickname for boys among the Banjar people. In fact, several collectors referred to Anang as a title for a person of higher height, etc., and also to add some indications about the easiest way to recognize the person. Ullmann must have obtained his four skulls in 1865, since, finally having been granted his famous leave, he sailed for Java around December 19, 1860. Unless the skulls were sent by someone else after his departure or were obtained in Java rather than directly in Borneo, we can therefore take the month of December as the latest possible date for the death of these individuals.

**Notes**

1. Provenance and the history of the collection of European skulls (1800-1940) are on file at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Freiburg. For the Indonesian skulls of the Schloss Naturkabinett, Kultur und Geschichte des Menschen, no other report confirming the newspaper article has turned up. Again, it would be most helpful if some documents and contextualizations of these skulls.

2. To make the matter more complicated, another man said to be the killer of “Mr. Jacob” was caught together with five others in the wilderness near Sungai Raya on March 20, 1861, and sentenced to death by Ali Abkar’s “infamous brother.” A month later, on April 28, the “murderer” escaped, along with some other persons, whom a certain Kemis, watchman of Wijnmalen and murderer of Mr. Jacob, had tried to protect. It is possible that the other persons were the presumed perpetrators of the murder of Mr. Andreas [sic] at Pengaron. Whether any of the last-mentioned persons were identical with Andoens Jacobs [sic] will be determined; after all, 2 flies were involved in the killing of Andreas, also known as “Anang’s” skull, together with the three others, was transferred from the “Art Cabinet” to the “Nude History Cabinet.” There it was integrated in the Sammlung Vierfels (Collection of Four Fleas) of the Anthropological Institute, with the other mammals, in exchange for a number of ethnographic objects that did not fit into the four fleas.（European-Naturalenkabinett.）

3. Interestingly, the ethnic attribution thus have had time to get a hold of the collections in general, about repressions and extreme violence in a colonial context, about processes of forgetting and remembering, about changing meanings and contextualizations of these skulls. Finally, it reminds us of the presence of human remains and skull collections, not only in formerly colonizing countries and established anatomical collections, but also in other countries and collections.

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