

Bodies of the Weak:
The Circulation of the Indigenous Dead in the
British World, 1780-1880

By

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Cover illustration: "Group of Officers in command of Streatfield's Fingoes and Kafir trophies" From: F.N. Streatfeild, *Kafirland: A Ten Months' Campaign* (London: 1879), frontis piece.

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To my mom (1959-2011), who fell ill and passed away when I had just begun this journey:
Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To my wife, Sofie, and our two children, Jack and Olivia:
Thank you for never doubting me and for being tough on me when I did.

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Like the indigenous bodies that circulate through its pages, this dissertation has traveled a long way. It came into its own only during the final three years of graduate school, when a bout of self-doubt compelled me to question whether I was “made” for historical research. There were then, and still are, good reasons to doubt myself. I started graduate school at the University of Michigan in 2011. The first two years of course work exposed me to the methods and potential of historical research that my earlier training in linguistics and American Studies had only begun to broach. Part of being “new” to history meant that my curiosity was easily swayed. I applied to the Rackham School for Graduate Studies at Michigan with a plan to study the religious history of the American colonies. Now, seven years later, I am submitting a dissertation that can best be read as a history of scientific collecting in the British World of the nineteenth century. In a way, this move from the spiritual to the secular, from faith to science, reflects the journey of the indigenous bodies I describe in these pages. But the switch remains a latent source of discomfort and insecurity.

Despite these doubts, the result of that journey appears in the following pages. And, I owe a debt of gratitude to the many teachers, colleagues and friends I have encountered along the way. First and foremost, I thank my committee chair Professor Susan Juster. She has been with me since the very beginning, challenging me as a new graduate student and guiding me as a doctoral candidate. She has, for better or worse, accommodated my capacious interests and stuck with me when I decided to change course. I also thank the members of my dissertation

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APL	Auckland Public Library, Auckland, New Zealand.
NHM	Natural History Museum, London, England.
RCS	Royal College of Surgeons, London, England.
WL	Wellcome Library, London, England.
N. a., <i>Catalogue</i>	N. a., <i>Catalogue of Preparations, &c. in Morbid, Natural, and Comparative Anatomy, contained in the Museum of the Army Medical Department, Fort Pitt, Chatham</i> (London: Printed by Richard Taylor, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1833).
Owen, <i>Catalogue</i>	Richard Owen, <i>Descriptive Catalogue of the Osteological Series Contained in the Museum</i> , 2 vols. (London: Taylor and Francis, 1853).
Flower, <i>Catalogue</i>	William H. Flower, <i>Catalogue of the specimens illustrating the osteology and dentition of vertebrated animals, recent and extinct: contained in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England</i> (London: Royal College of Surgeons of England, 1879-84).
Stewart, <i>Catalogue</i>	William Henry Flower and Charles Stewart, eds., <i>Catalogue of the specimens illustrating the osteology and dentition of vertebrated animals, recent and extinct, contained in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, Part 1: Homo Sapiens, Linn.</i> , 2nd. edition (London: Royal College of Surgeon of England, 1907).

ABSTRACT

Bodies of the Weak tells the intimate history of the encounter between British collectors, indigenous bodies, and the people to whom they belonged in the British World between 1780 and 1880. It traces the movement of indigenous bodies as scientific objects across the globe. A reconstruction of their histories within the decentralized framework of their circulation, rather than the centralized framework of their accumulation in Europe's museums, reveals that these indigenous remains embodied several worlds simultaneously. The fragmentation of these indigenous bodies, the circulation of their parts and their transformation into the raw materials of European classifications, I suggest, do not only reflect difference, but also reveal what is shared in the history of colonial entanglement. Examining accession records, letter books, museum catalogues, and travel narratives, I trace how British collecting of indigenous bodies emerges as a constitutive, though at times silenced, element in the history of British colonialism in the nineteenth century.

The extension and extent of British power depended on the ability of collectors to mobilize and reassemble the remains of the indigenous dead. Nevertheless, the acquisition and circulation of indigenous remains only rarely make it into the historiography of empire. In the nineteenth century, empirical evidence that indigenous peoples were rapidly vanishing from the face of the globe quickly became widespread and invigorated attempts to collect and record their passing. Observers soon understood that these were the bodies of the weak. The remains of the indigenous dead became "contact bodies," objects around which collectors and indigenous men,

women and children formed unsettled relationships and articulated unsettling meanings. Seen through the eyes of collectors of the indigenous dead and their indigenous interlocutors, the regime of classification British collectors carried with them on board Her Majesty's men of war, survey vessels and steam ships appears not so much as a paragon of Britain's hegemony in the world, but rather, and more importantly, as a testimony to the unsettled nature of the social categories upon which her power depended. Collectors of indigenous remains, rambling, ransacking and rummaging through human debris in search of the raw materials from which to construct elaborate natural classifications, ended up confusing the very boundaries they were trying to delineate. They depended on indigenous collectors, customs and conflict to obtain their prized human materials. At times, however, indigenous peoples resisted the British efforts to alienate the remains of their dead.

In the space between British dominance and open indigenous resistance, alternative forms of power and appropriation developed. Borrowing, confiscating, purchasing, stealing, conquering, bone collectors found that easy oppositions between "colonizer" and "colonized," "powerful" and "powerless," could not survive in the nineteenth-century drive to acquire indigenous body parts. Indigenous men, women and children did not surrender the remains of their loved ones without a fight. Nor did they blindly collaborate with European collectors. They often withheld crucial information, showed indifference to the objects for which British collectors were risking their lives, and ridiculed these visitors and their curious obsession with the remains of the indigenous dead. The bodies of the weak were not simply there for the taking. These contact bodies presented indigenous men and women with exceptional as well as everyday opportunities to challenge the social categories they were meant to embody, to resist the extension of British power and influence, and to articulate alternative meanings of these remains.

INTRODUCTION

History in the Flesh

The people brought us several Bones of men the flesh of which they had eat, which are now become a kind of article of trade among our people who constantly ask for and purchase them for whatever trifles they have. In one part we observ'd a kind of wooden Cross ornamented with feathers made exactly in the form of a Crucifix cross. This engag'd our attention and we were told that it was a monument for a dead man, maybe a Cenotaph as the body was not there: thus much they told us but would not let us know where it was.

Joseph Banks, Journal (1962[1770])¹

24 January 1770 – With these words, a young Joseph Banks recorded his encounter with the indigenous people of Cannibal Cove, Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand. Over the past week or so, Banks had become obsessed with the remains of the indigenous dead. We see some of that obsession in the matter-of-fact mention of “the flesh of which they had eat.” As I will discuss later on, this passage and many more like it have provided historians and anthropologists with ample fodder to debate the extent and nature of cannibalism among indigenous tribes in the South Seas. But there is more to Banks’ observation about indigenous anthropophagi. The passage, I suggest, is far more interesting for what it does not tell us: the whereabouts of the dead man’s body. In this brief account, we encounter a tension – for Banks a source of some frustration, one can imagine – between the commonplace presence of human bones and the conspicuous absence of the indigenous body the Maori will not reveal to Banks. This dissertation is about missing bodies such as the one of this Maori.

¹ Joseph Banks, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768-1771*, ed. John C. Beaglehole (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Limited, 1962), vol. 1, 458.

Why were the Maori so anxious to keep the final resting place of the body of their dead a secret for Banks and his band of visitors? The passage in Banks' journal reveals the participants in this story. *Bodies of the Weak* is a dissertation about the cross-cultural encounter between British collectors, indigenous bodies, and the people to whom they belonged. It is not just another story about appropriation and violation, though much of that took place. It is also a story about exchange and entanglement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century drive for indigenous remains. Banks' interest in the remains of the indigenous dead had been aroused just four days before. On 20 January 1770, an old man approached Banks, offering the naturalist "the heads of 4 people which were preserv'd with the flesh and hair on."² Then, Banks appears to have resisted the temptation to acquire it. A little while later, however, Banks seized the opportunity to trade for a preserved indigenous head when another "old man," presumed to be the chief of a nearby village, came up to him with six or seven preserved specimens. The exchange did not proceed without some display of British power, though. When after some back-and-forth over the price, the old man had second thoughts and refused to hand over the head, Banks "enforc'd my threats by shewing Him a musquet." Reluctantly, the seller relinquished the head and retreated with the price of "a pair of old Drawers of very white linnen."³ Banks took the head on board the *Endeavour* to convey it to Europe's centers of learning, and the old man simply disappeared.

Banks was not the only one interested in acquiring indigenous remains. William Monkhouse, the ship's surgeon, was also looking to procure human specimens. When a Maori brought him "a child in a dried state," apparently his own, Monkhouse "readily bartered it for a

² Banks, *Endeavour Journal*, vol. 1, 457.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 31.

trifle.”⁴ By the time of Cook’s second (1772-75) and third voyages (1776-80), sailors and naturalists on board the *Resolution and Discovery* found a flourishing trade in human specimens. In March 1778, the Surgeon’s mate William Wade Ellis saw proof of this among the Nootka, along the northwestern coast of America. “There was an article which some of these people exposed to sale today that we never saw before in any country,” Ellis recorded. The articles to which he was referring included “several human skulls and dried hands.”⁵ Even before Banks set eyes on Nootka Sound, Russian demand had created the market of indigenous remains that seemed to offend Ellis. Moreover, Ellis was apparently unaware that such specimens had been coveted objects among the members of the first expeditions. During these earlier voyages, the acquisitive gazes of the ship’s crew had fixed upon anything they believed had any value for collectors. Johann Reinhold Forster, who had replaced Banks as the naturalist on board the *Resolution* during Cook’s second voyage, complained about the crew’s avarice. “The Ship’s Crew are mad after curiosities,” he recorded, frequently trading the ship’s stores of fresh fish for anything of interest.⁶ The indiscriminate greed of European visitors had created a barter economy in human heads, skulls and bones. Ellis, however, appears to have quickly recovered from his initial encounter with this unsettling trade in human body parts. Members of the ship’s crew soon purchased “three or four Human hands” and Ellis himself acquired a human skull.⁷

⁴ James Cook, *The Voyage of The Endeavour, 1768-1771*, ed. John C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 584-5.

⁵ William Wade Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke in His Majesty’s Ships Resolution and Discovery during the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779 and 1780* (London: G. Robinson, 1782), 192.

⁶ J. Reinhold Forster, *The Resolution Journal of Johann Reinhold Forster, 1772-1775*, ed. Michael E. Hoare (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982), vol. 4, 697.

⁷ James Cook, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780*, ed. John C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), vol. 1, 297, fn. 1.

This dissertation traces the acquisition and circulation of indigenous bodies in the century after Cook's voyages. Its protagonists are the individuals who sailed in Britain's war ships, fought her wars, governed her new subjects and explored little-known lands in her name. These collecting men were, in the words of David Mackay, true "agents of empire."⁸ Although for many of these individuals, the acquisition of the remains of the indigenous dead was a corollary to their official duties, the collections and classifications they made reflected and imposed European order. The acquisition and circulation of indigenous remains were instrumental in the rise of British domination in the nineteenth century. However, these processes also reveal the limits of British power and the entanglement of British and indigenous worlds. The circulation of indigenous bodies, I suggest, gave substance to the empire as an unsettling and unsettled collection of peoples.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the bodies of the indigenous dead became objects of imperial power as both raw materials and carriers of a regime of classification that sought to determine the place of indigenous populations in the natural hierarchy of humanity. Ordering the human terrain was paramount to the success of British power abroad. As Bruno Latour has suggested, "domination at a distance" is only possible when those seeking to exert their power succeed in resolving the confusion of peoples and places created by separation. This, he claims, can only be achieved by "*somehow* bringing home these events, places and people." Mobility, stability and combinability are crucial. First, by separating indigenous remains from the spiritual economies in which they circulated, collectors made them mobile. Second, by transforming them into commodities, they turned them into stable objects, whose meaning could

⁸ David MacKay, "Agents of Empire: The Banksian Collectors and Evaluation of New Lands," in David Philip Miller and Peter Hans Reill, ed., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38-56.

be read on labels and in lists, whose value could be calculated, and whose ownership could be transferred. Finally, they inserted these objects into larger series and collections, extrapolating their meaning by association and combination with other objects of its kind. Like charts and plant specimens in previous centuries, human objects could easily be turned into what Latour calls “immutable and combinable mobiles.”⁹ The extension and extent of British power thus depended on the ability of collectors to mobilize and reassemble the remains of the indigenous dead.

The acquisition and circulation of indigenous remains only rarely make it into the historiography of empire. Yet, this history of their circulation intersects with the history of the British empire in three ways. First, and perhaps most obviously, the collectors of indigenous skulls, bones and hair samples supplied the raw materials of European classifications that sought to capture and describe human diversity. Facial angles, cranial cavities and prognathous jaws provided the coordinates that mapped out the trajectory of the development of human races from high to low, from man to ape, and from European to Hottentot.¹⁰ Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, these human specimens became linchpins in debates about racial inferiority, slavery and conflict. In the words of one historian, skulls were the “holy grail of the

⁹ The obsession of foreign observers with “bearings, clocks, diaries, labels, dictionaries, specimens, herbaries” was rooted in a desire to accumulate “some traces of the travel to go back to the place that sent the expedition away.” Collectors were not so much interested in the place itself, as they were in “bringing this place *back*,” first “back to their ship,” and finally to their “centres of calculation.” Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 217-8, 223, 227.

¹⁰ My use of the phrase “from man to ape” should not be read as limiting the argument to evolutionary theories of human difference, which after the publication of Darwin’s *Origins of Species* increasingly gained ground in classifications of the human species. Instead, it refers to a myriad of scientific hierarchies of human diversity, including for example the “great chain of being,” that shaped visions of the other in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See for example, Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001). For the role of human specimens in the creation of such hierarchies, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, revised edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996).

nineteenth-century creed of Romantic race theory.”¹¹ The systematization of human diversity in and through collections of indigenous remains thus supplied British and European imperialists with powerful arguments about the inferior intelligence and backward cultures of non-Europeans that resurfaced as defenses of and justifications for colonization. As they entered private and institutional collections in Europe, Australia and America, anthropologist Janet Hoskins has suggested, these indigenous human specimens became “evidence of a ‘timeless’ state of savagery,” far removed from European civilization in both space and time. In the process, they “assume[d] new meanings as trophies of the Western appropriation of indigenous history and personhood.”¹² The remains of the indigenous dead thus came to embody the incommensurability of European and non-European cultures and, *ipso facto*, seemed to explain the disappearance of indigenous peoples everywhere.

Second, in the wake of growing interest in human difference, a global trade in human body parts arose. The effect of this change was the commodification of the indigenous body. Collectors of indigenous remains dismembered the spiritual economies in which indigenous bodies traditionally moved and made sense, and reassembled them as barter economies, in which indigenous bodies became human commodities to be traded for trifles. In doing so, they inserted indigenous bodies into global networks of exchange in which scientific curiosity was allied with commercial interest. Shipping companies capitalized on the growing need to convey human specimens to centers in Europe. Manufacturers of preservation fluids profited from the need for

¹¹ Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson, “Exploration, Race Theory and Headhunting: The Skull Beneath the Skin,” in *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 127-48 (quote 148).

¹² Janet Hoskins, “Introduction: Headhunting as Practice and as Trope,” in Janet Hoskins, ed., *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1-49 (quote from 16-17). See also Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

supplies in Britain's colonies. Like scalping in North America, or the slave trade in the Atlantic, the commodification of indigenous remains held out the promise of profit to both Europeans and those indigenous men and women willing to help them.¹³ The consumption of indigenous remains also produced competition. Museums across Europe continuously looked to enrich their stores of indigenous body parts with rare or unique specimens. In the end, national collections in London, Paris, Berlin and elsewhere in Europe and America competed with one another for these limited human resources.

Finally, the acquisition and circulation of the indigenous dead did not only export the hard facts that shaped ideas about human difference at home, they also imported attitudes towards the dead and the violation of indigenous bodies. As historian Valeria Finucci suggests, "Culturally inflected customs, religious beliefs, moral values, political expediencies, and social conventions accompany death and determine each step of a corpse's disposal."¹⁴ In premodern and modern Europe, men and women not only tolerated, but often celebrated, the remains of the dead. During the Middle Ages, for example, the relics of saints attracted thousands of pilgrims and circulated in sacred economies.¹⁵ Public executions drew large crowds in Britain and on the continent, and spectators often vied with the family members of the executed, the henchmen and

¹³ For the commercialization of scalping in North America, see James Axtell, "Scalping: The Ethnohistory of a Moral Question," in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 207-44. For a brief discussion of the continuities between the trade in indigenous body parts and Africa bodies, see Chapter Two, especially footnote 53.

¹⁴ Valeria Finucci, "Thinking through Death: The Politics of the Corpse," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 2015), 1-6 (especially 2).

¹⁵ Caroline Walker-Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 239-98 (especially 270-1); P. Geary, "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," in A. Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 169-91.

the local surgeons for the cadaver.¹⁶ Abjection was key to the treatment of these remains. Dissection after execution, Ruth Richardson and others have shown, added insult to injury. The desecration of the body and its often anonymous interment afterwards were extensions of the punishment, often reflecting the heinous nature of the crimes themselves.¹⁷ Within the environments of anatomy theaters and pathological collections, human remains were not only often sterile specimens, they were objects of desire and voyeurism.¹⁸ Recently, historians of science have revealed how the trade in human remains destined for the anatomy theaters and medical schools in Europe was connected to processes of social, religious and political struggle, the professionalization of medicine and science, and the development of corporal economies of otherness.¹⁹

¹⁶ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime And Civil Society In The Eighteenth Century*, second edition (New York: Verso, 2006); Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons," in Douglas Hay et al., eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1977), 65-117; V. A. C. Gattrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Richardson argues that because of its association with the execution of criminals, dissection became in the nineteenth century instrumental in the criminalization of poverty. The 1832 Anatomy Act, she suggests, responded to the growing need in anatomy schools by making available to them the unclaimed corpses of patients in hospitals and workhouses. Historian Katharine Park, however, has argued that such analyses of criminal dissections underestimate the number of more "intimate anatomies" that circulated within private anatomy theaters and medical schools. Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001). See also Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dissecting the Criminal Corpse: Staging Post-Execution Punishment in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and *Dying for Victorian: Medicine English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, c.1834 - 1929* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For a slightly different view of the culture of dissections, see Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 214.

¹⁸ Jonathan Strauss, *Human Remains: Medicine, Death, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006 [1995]), 39-53.

¹⁹ Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Tatjana Buklijas, "Cultures of Death and Politics of Corpse Supply: Anatomy in Vienna, 1848-1914," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 82, no.3 (Fall 2008), 570-607; Stanley Chojnacki, "The Patronage of the Body: Burial Sites, Identity, and Gender in Fifteenth-Century Venice," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 2015), 79-101; Diana Bullen Presciuti, "Domesticating Cannibalism: Visual Rhetorics of Madness and Maternal Infanticide in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 2015), 159-95; J. Fontein, "Between Tortured Bodies and Resurfacing Bones: The Politics of the Dead in Zimbabwe," in K. Krmpotich, J. Fontein, and J.

The acquisition of indigenous bodies could also be a violent process. Head collecting could be both cause and consequence of colonial conflict. Collectors of the indigenous dead introduced these political, cultural and scientific meanings into an already rich indigenous cultural landscape. Indigenous uses of human body parts were particularly unsettling to European ideas about relics and specimens.²⁰ The remains of the indigenous dead thus emerge in this story as profoundly political objects. They embodied ambiguous, and often conflicting meanings, which made them into the raw materials of social categories, conflict and change.

While this history of the circulation of the indigenous dead unfolds within the context of British imperial history, it is not just the straightforward story of British expansion told anew through the afterlives of human objects. In fact, the acquisition and circulation of indigenous body parts expose British domination on the edges of empire as unstable and inchoate. Although contemporaries were often convinced of the contrary, it was “impossible to impose a system where no system was.” The commercial interests in the Atlantic Ocean and strategic concerns in the Indian and Pacific Oceans held an imperfect empire together.²¹ But strained by imperial

Harries, eds., *The Substance of Bones: The Emotive materiality and Affective Presence of Human Remains*, Special Issue: *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2010), 423-48.

²⁰ Andrew Lipman, “‘A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather’: The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 1 (2008), 3-28. For studies of human remains as trophies, see M. Hagner, “Skulls, Brains and Memorial Culture: On Cerebral Cultures of Scientists in the Nineteenth Century,” *Science in Context*, vol. 16, no. ½ (2003), 195-218; Simon Harrison, “Skull Trophies of the Pacific War: Transgressive Objects of Remembrance,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. Vol. 12, no. 4 (2006), 817-36; and “Skulls and Scientific Collecting in the Victorian Military: Keeping the Enemy Dead in British Frontier Warfare,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2008), 285-303; A. G. Morris, “Trophy Skulls, Museums and the San,” in P. Scott, ed., *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 67-79; J. Riding In, “Six Pawnee Crania: Historical and Contemporary Issues Associated with the Massacre and Decapitation of Pawnee Indians in 1869,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1992), 101-19; E. Juzda, “Skulls, Science, and the Spoils of War: Craniological Studies at the United States Army Medical Museum, 1868-1900,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, vol. 40 (2009), 156-67.

²¹ Ronald Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2. John Darwin has more recently argued that despite

rivalry and indigenous resilience, they could also become the forces pulling it apart. The story of the British empire in this period is, to borrow Linda Colley's words, "a complex saga of the collisions, compromises, and comings together of many different cultures."²²

This dissertation tells the intimate history of the encounter between British collectors, indigenous men, women and children, and their bodies. In the nineteenth century, the British empire was more than just a conglomerate of territorial and commercial interests. Walter Crane's "Imperial Federation Map of the World" from 1886 illustrates the human diversity of the British empire (see Figure 0.1). The map suggests that empire is about more than just a collection of lands, blank areas on the map waiting to be colored red, or the global circulation of resources and trade goods. The British empire was also a collection of fauna (the tiger in the bottom-left, or the Kangaroo in the bottom-right, for example), flora and people.

countervailing forces, a British world-system did emerge by the first decades of the twentieth century and was undone in the aftermath of the Second World War. See John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²² Linda Colley, "Clashes and Collaborations," *London Review of Books* (18 July 1996), 8.



Fig. 0.1: “Imperial Federation Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886. Statistical information furnished by CAPTAIN J. C. R. COLOMB, M. P. Formerly R. M. A. _ British Territories Coloured Red.” By Walter Crane (1845-1915). The inset shows a map of British territories in 1786, illustrating the progress of empire over the past century. Supplement to *The Graphic Magazine*, July 24, 1886. Published by: Maclure & Co.

The composition of people around the edges of the map constitutes a choreography of Britain’s masculine imperial power.²³ The native American chief on the top left, the Indian “coolies” below, the two women stretched out by Britannia’s feet, one from Africa the other from the

²³ Historian Brian Harley, for example, uses Crane’s map to show how cartography and knowledge of geography constituted a “language of power.” Maps in general, and this map in particular, articulated and naturalized relationships of power between Britain and its overseas possessions. After all, Harley argued, Britannia sits on top of the world. All the figures, including and most obviously, the female African figure on the left and the Pacific Islander on the right look up at her in admiration. Brian Harley, “Maps, knowledge and power,” in Paul Laxton, ed., *The New Nature of Maps. Essays in the History of Cartography* (London, The Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), 51-82.

South Seas, as well as the Australian Aborigine and the Asian female on the right offer the onlooker a glimpse of the human diversity contained within British Empire. They are all facing Britannia, as if they willingly accept her authority and long for her civilizing grace. Like the collections of indigenous remains in Europe, the image represents the indigenous individuals as people without history. Time has no grip on them.²⁴ The Native American chief is wearing traditional dress, including a bow and arrow, seemingly unaffected by the centuries of contact between North American Indians and Europeans. The Aborigine woman stands bare-breasted, with only a simple cloth hanging from her hips, while the female Australian colonist to the right shows off the produce of the land and its animals. Curiously, with the exception of the Native American chief, all the colonized figures are female, while the colonizers (the fur-trapper, the sailor, the soldier, the gamesman and the Australian laborer) are mostly men, suggesting that the indigenous inhabitants are passive recipients of British civilization and progress. Moreover, the masculine figures, like the sailor poised to draw his pistol, all seem to suggest that, like Banks' ability to persuade the old man to part with the indigenous head, British imperial power flowed from the muzzle of a gun.

But the indigenous subjects of British empire were far from the timeless, passive recipients of British power that Crane would have us believe. The map, perhaps inadvertently, shows us the British empire as, in the words of historian Maya Jasanoff, itself "a kind of collection," not a neatly circumscribed territorial entity, but an assemblage of people, lands and cultures "pieced together and gaining definition over time, shaped a by a range of circumstances, accidents and intentions."²⁵ Collectors of indigenous bodies on the edge of empire had to

²⁴ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, new edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).

²⁵ Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 4.

confront these uncertainties. On the one hand, the acquisition of their human prizes depended on the extension of British power into previously unknown regions. They ransacked battlefields, plundered burial grounds and negotiated, like Banks, the exchange of human objects at gun point. On the other hand, however, their ability to collect, plunder and trade was restrained by the power of their indigenous interlocutors. They depended on indigenous informants, who sometimes violently opposed them, withheld information, lied and deceived. While plundering burial grounds and battlefields, they had to worry about indigenous retaliation. The success of their attempts at trade were determined by the quality of their trade goods and the desire of the indigenous seller for these goods. This history of the circulation of the indigenous dead, thus, reveals that these encounters between collectors and their indigenous informants and assistants were also instances of crossing and mixing. Most importantly, this study shows that in small acts of concealment and comedy as much as in violent clashes over the remains of their dead, indigenous individuals found ways of resisting, ridiculing, and perhaps for a moment, reversing British power.

The remains of the indigenous dead circulated in an unsettled world, where connection and disconnection, recognition and alienation, dominance and resilience existed in tension. The movement of these human materials in the nineteenth century not only reflects the economic and political expansion of a European state. It also shows the ways in which the encounters and exchanges over human remains drew British collectors and indigenous peoples together in a web of colonial entanglement, in which commodities like indigenous human body parts rarely traveled along straightforward lines of colonial appropriation.²⁶ The skulls, bones and flesh of native peoples thus became fragments of “contact bodies.” Distorted and disassembled, they

²⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

embodied contact, conflict and collaboration. In the process, the lines between European and non-European, colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless, blurred or even disappeared.²⁷

The act of collecting was thus not only accumulative but also transgressive. Collectors of human remains, rambling, ransacking and rummaging through human debris in search of the raw materials from which to construct elaborate natural classifications, ended up confusing the very boundaries they were trying to settle, justify and enforce. Their encounters show that easy oppositions between “us” and “them” could not survive in the field.²⁸ Borrowing, confiscating, purchasing, stealing, conquering, the modes of acquisition bone collectors used in the field could easily explode the distinctions between Europeans and non-Europeans. A reconstruction of their histories within the decentralized framework of their circulation, rather than the centralized framework of their accumulation in Europe’s museums, suggests that these human remains embodied several worlds simultaneously. British collecting of indigenous bodies emerges in this story as a constitutive, though at times silenced, element of British colonialism.²⁹

²⁷ See Ricardo Roque, and Kim Wagner, “Introduction: Engaging Colonial Knowledge,” in Ricardo Roque and Kim Wagner, eds., *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-32.

²⁸ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) traced the development European imaginings of the orient as not the occident. Since then, however, historians and social scientists have added layers of difference to the relations between East and West, as well as the metropole and colonies. See Said’s own *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), where he argues that empire has produced a “hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” world. (xxxii). See also, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 1-37; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 15-18; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4-5. For a summary of the debate and a critique of Said, see John Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

²⁹ I am indebted to Ricardo Roque for this insight. In examining the fate of a collection of Timorese skulls in a Portuguese museum, he uncovered that the Portuguese used “headhunting” as a means of procuring human specimens. In doing so, he concluded, collectors had turned headhunting into “a constituent element of Portuguese colonialism.” Ricardo Roque, *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

The circulation of indigenous bodies thus shows that British power abroad was far from hegemonic.³⁰ Once the unsettled and unsettling meaning of these fragmented indigenous bodies emerges into view, it becomes clear that European collectors were in many cases able to direct the appropriation of human remains, but not at will. They often depended on indigenous collectors, customs and conflict to obtain their prized human materials. In the space between British dominance and indigenous resistance, alternative forms of power and appropriation developed. Indigenous men and women did not surrender the remains of their loved ones without a fight. Nor did they blindly collaborate with European collectors. They withheld crucial information and mislead British bone collectors.³¹ Once we recognize that British power did not preclude the re-articulation of an indigenous politics of human remains, the neat boundaries between powerful and powerless begin to fade.³² The bodies of the weak were not simply there for the taking. They presented indigenous men and women with opportunities to challenge the social categories they were meant to embody, to resist the extension of British power and influence, and to articulate alternative meanings of these bodies.

³⁰ This nuance between dominance and hegemony depends on the recognition that in between colonial categories subalterns found space to act for themselves, to develop and deploy their own politics. See G. Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review*, vol. 99 (1994), 1475-90 (especially 1478).

³¹ Kapil Raj, "Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators," in Bernard Lightman, ed., *A Companion to the History of Science* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 39-57

³² Frederick Cooper has argued that once historians begin to recognize the persistence and creation anew of subaltern power and politics in India and Africa, the "binaries between colonizer/colonized, western/non-western, and dominance/resistance begin as useful devices for opening up questions of power but end up constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is enjoyed, contested, deflected and appropriated." Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review*, vol. 99 (1994), 1516-1545 (especially 1517).

Looking Out over the Human Terrain

As I began working in the archives of the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Natural History Museum in London, I found myself looking out into the world. After picking up a few letters from collectors in the field, I soon realized that they opened a window into the everyday practice of collecting on the margins of empire. At first, the world of these collectors seemed chaotic. Many of them seemed to seek fortune, crave fame and chase thrills. In this sense, the histories of these indigenous remains contained within these documents seemed to reflect the disorder of the earliest cabinets of curiosity, or *Wunderkammer*. These collections exposed their audience to the disorderly wonders of nature, whether animal, human or otherwise (see Figure 0.2). For example, when William Nicholson visited the famous collection of Hans Sloane, the London physician, he found a world of marvelous things “crammed” into “four large Rooms.” He was amazed, not only by its size, but by its variety. Its sheer breadth was overwhelming. “The collection,” Nicholson recorded, “since the Accession of the whole stores of the late Mr. Charlton’s Rarities of all kinds and Mr. Dendridge’s Insects, Dr. Plukenet’s dried Plants, &c. is wonderful.”³³ However, as Katie Whitaker has suggested, the variety and disorder of early modern cabinets of curiosities were deliberate. The juxtapositioning of objects without any organizing principle evoked an acute sense of wonder, not merely by the individual objects themselves, but by their dramatic association with unrelated ones.³⁴

³³ Entry for 17 January 1711/12 in Nicholson’s “Note Book” of antiquarian visits, William Nicholson, *The London Diaries of William Nicholson Bishop of Carlisle*, ed. Clyve Jones and Geoffrey Holmes (Oxford, 1985), 699.

³⁴ Whitaker also suggests that in bringing together such a wide array of objects, the collector sought to recreate paradise before the fall. Katie Whitaker, “The culture of curiosity,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75-91 (especially 87-9). For another attempt to recreate paradise by collecting, see John Prest, *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).



Fig. 0.2. Sloane's collections saw may have looked something like Olaus Worm's cabinet of curiosities in Denmark. Worm's museum contained stuffed specimens of crocodiles, birds, fish and other aquatic animals; animal remains; human implements such as paddles, spears, and a canoe suspended from the ceiling; fossils; jars of herbs and spices; and many more curiosities. The image conveys the variety and disorder of the collections of curiosities at the time. Their chaotic and miscellaneous character were deliberate attempts to produce wonder in onlookers by placing as many different rarities as possible in close proximity. See Olaus Worm, *Museum Wormianum seu Historia rerum Rariorum* (Leyden, 1655), *s.p.*

Such disorder of human and animal remains could also be found in Europe's anatomy theaters at the time (see Figure 0.3). The architect and stage-designer Inigo Jones designed the anatomy theater for the Barber-Surgeons of London in 1636. Besides "two humane skins ... of a man and a woman, in imitation of Adam and Eva," the theater contained a mummy skull acquired in 1655, the skeleton of an executed criminal, the skeletons of five more human bodies, and "the

skeleton of an ostrich.”³⁵ In the anatomy theater, the presence of human and animal remains was a matter of architecture and aesthetics, transforming it into what Jonathan Sawday calls a “cabinet of death,” where the “living faced the dead” in a kind of “theatrical performance” designed to evoke a “combination of loathing and profound fascination.”³⁶ Human and animal remains in these early modern cabinets encoded both a moral message about the transience of life and a scientific argument about the anatomical structures of living beings.

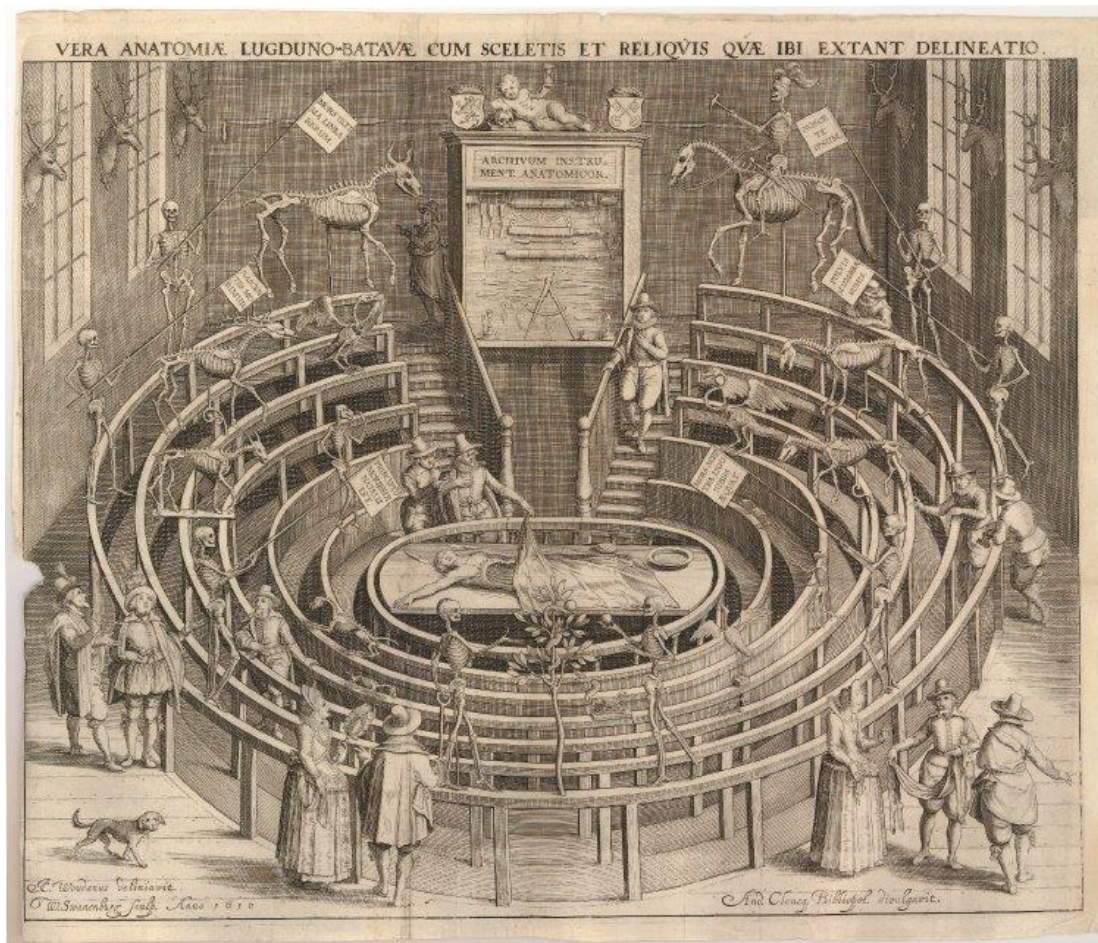


Fig. 0.3. Etching of an anatomy theater at the University of Leyden, c. 1610. Source: 1875,0814.738, AN436286001, British Library.

³⁵ Edward Hatton, *New View of London* (London: J. Nicholson, 1708), vol. 2, 597.

³⁶ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 73, 75, 78. See also Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), and “The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 47 (1994), 12-3

By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, such collections retained much of their ability to evoke a sense of wonder. An early sketch of the original museum of the Royal College of Surgeons by the hand of Richard Owen reveals a variety similar to the one that characterized early modern cabinets of curiosities and anatomy theaters across Europe (Figure 0.4). Stuffed animal specimens mingled with their osteological frames, while a series of animal heads adorned the wall to the left. Even when the new building was finished in 1837, spectators looked at the human and animal specimens on display and were struck by its variety (Figure 0.5). The new museum, one spectator recalled, “possesses almost everything the imagination of man can conceive of that can be useful or necessary for the study of physical life.” It was as if, he continued, “the whole earth has been ransacked to enrich its stores.”³⁷ Much like the cabinets and theaters before, the museum John Hunter had founded sought to showcase the “riches” of the world. It confronted onlookers with a variety of specimens too vast to apprehend.

³⁷ C. Knight, *London* (London, 1841-4), vol. 3, 200-3.

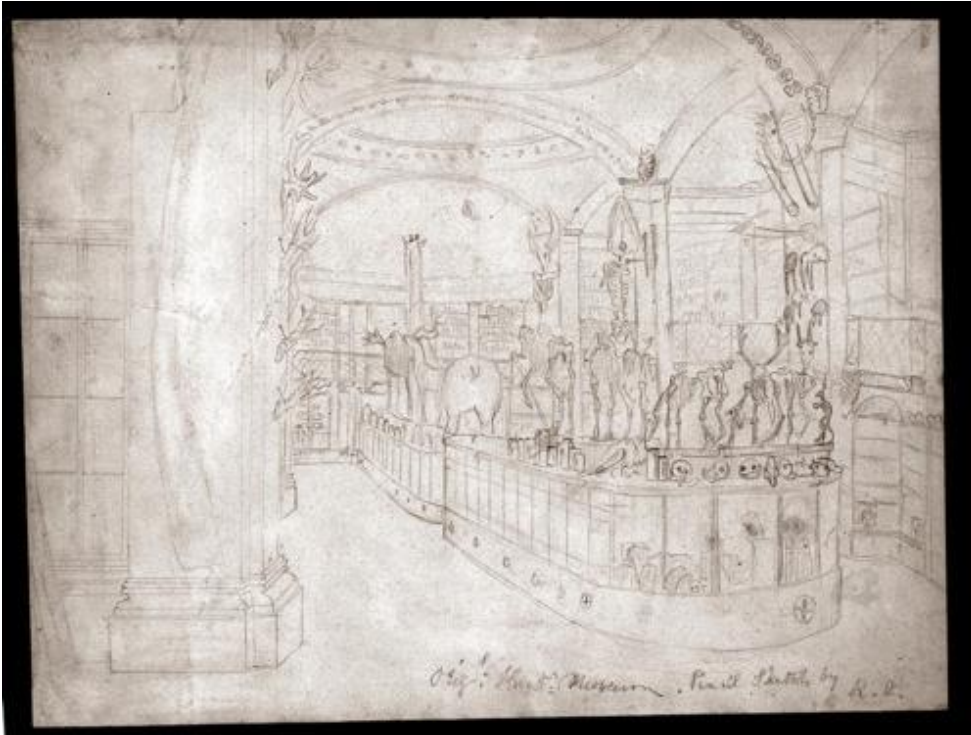


Fig. 0.4. (Above) “View of the Museum.” (1828-1834). This is a drawing of the Hunterian Museum by the hand of Richard Owen (signed) prior to the construction of the new building in 1834-7. This is a view of the original museum hall designed by George Dance and James Lewis. Finished in 1813, it was in use until 1834, when it was demolished as part of Charles Barry’s rebuilding of the College. Notice especially a series of animal, and perhaps human, skulls in the bottom-right corner. Source: RCSSC/P 316, Special Collections, Royal College of Surgeons of London.



Fig. 0.5. (Below) “The Hunterian Museum.” This is a pencil and water-color view of the new College Museum, which was completed in 1837 (c.1842), by the hand of Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (signed). The gesticulating figure on the left is likely the Assistant Conservator, Richard Owen. Source: RCSSC/P 316, Special Collections, Royal College of Surgeons of London.

Yet, both Hunter's old and new museum were not as disordered as some spectators would have us believe. By the late nineteenth century, museums like the Hunterian had evolved from the early modern cabinets of curiosity. One commentator, David Murray, reported in 1904, "Sir William Flower thinks, and probably with justice, that John Hunter is to be regarded as the founder of the modern museum, the distinguishing features of which are specialisation and classification."³⁸ Disorder had given way to order. Moreover, museums made this ordered human terrain seem the result of natural rather than manmade processes. Despite the diversity of their motives, collectors in the field were the vanguard of a new classificatory regime. When a new wave of explorers fanned out across the globe in the nineteenth century and discovered new worlds inhabited by strange peoples, they brought with them a new visual vocabulary to describe and dominate them.

In fact, guidebooks to the Hunterian Museum recorded the increasing significance, organization and specialization of the collection of indigenous remains throughout the nineteenth century. In the bottom right quadrant of Owen's sketch (Figure 0.4) we catch a glimpse of a series of skulls, possibly human and animal. Such comparative series became increasingly important to the choreography of specimens at the museum. A museum guide for 1813 did not mention the presence of such a comparative human series, though the synopsis of 1818 informed visitors that the cases in the cabinet room contained several human skulls belonging to "natives of different nations."³⁹ By 1845, three wall cabinets under the section "Bimana" opposite the entry of the main museum room contained specimens of the "white" (cabinet 1), "red and

³⁸ David Murray, *Museums: Their History and their Use* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904), vol. 1, 231.

³⁹ RCS-MUS/8/1/2, p. 23, 1818, Synopsis of the Arrangement of the Preparations in the Gallery of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, For the Use of Visitors. RCS, London. See also, RCS-MUS/8/1/1, 1813, Summary of the Arrangement of the Hunterian Collection, in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons; for the use of Visitors. RCS, London.

yellow” (cabinet 2), and “black” races (cabinet 3). The cabinets to the right of these housed those specimens displaying the “modifications of the Mammalian Skeletons, which show the progressive degradation from the human type, and its adaptation to the various habits and modes of locomotion of the lower orders of the class.”⁴⁰ Five years later, the human series included another category: the Mongolian variety. The arrangement of human skulls was now part of a larger “series of entire skulls,” contained in compartments 4, 5, and 6, “showing the progressive change in the ‘facial angle’ produced by the predominance of the jaws over the brain-case, as the species of vertebrated animals descend in the scale.”⁴¹ Three decades later, curators abandoned this organizational scheme. The human osteological series had now become the museum’s largest series, organized according to geography “without committal to any theoretical view of its origin or affinities .”⁴²

Today, such series of indigenous remains can no longer be seen by the public. Ethical concerns about their acquisition have all but erased these objects and their histories from the collective memory put on display in the modern museum. Leafing through accession records, letter books, account ledgers, manuscript catalogues and guidebooks I was able to recover some parts of their histories. Their acquisition was often a violent process, and indigenous bodies have suffered tremendously. As historian Emma C. Spary concludes, “Increasingly, toward the end of the century, justifications for social, racial and gender hierarchies were located within the fabric of the body itself.”⁴³ Nevertheless, spectators today would be hard-pressed to speak about how

⁴⁰ RCS-MUS/8/1/3, p. 4, 1845, Synopsis of the Arrangement of the Preparations in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, For the Use of Visitors. RCS. London.

⁴¹ RCS-MUS/8/1/4, 1850, p. 22, RCS, London. Synopsis of the Contents of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

⁴² RCS-MUS/8/1/5, 1880, p. 17, Synopsis of the Contents of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

⁴³ Emma C. Spary, “Political, Natural, and Bodily Economies,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 178-195 (quote from 195).

exactly the objects they looked at with a sense of wonder and fascination came to reside in Britain. Museums, Deana Heath has suggested, “have long overlooked the violence of empire.” Collections of indigenous remains like the ones held by the Hunterian and the Natural History museum helped sanitize the history of empire, displacing the causes of indigenous backwardness, savagery and violence squarely onto the shoulders of indigenous peoples.⁴⁴ Standing in the archives of some of Europe’s greatest collections of indigenous remains, I have tried to tell their stories, not as indictments of the past, but as reminders of colonialism’s predatory obsession with classification and the ways in which indigenous peoples resisted that order.

Indigenous Bodies on the Move

In this dissertation I have tried to locate the movement of indigenous bodies within the historiography of global scientific exchange. This body of work, I suggest, contains useful methodological tools for investigating how body parts traveled across the globe, who moved them, and how this circulation drew upon the resources of empire in the nineteenth century. In recent decades, historians of science have revealed how the global circulation of natural resources, such as plants and seeds, brought together scientific, commercial and imperial interests.⁴⁵ As natural resources for medicines, foodstuffs and luxuries, the circulation of plants

⁴⁴ Deana Heath, “Museums have long overlooked the violence of empire,” *The Conversation* (25 November 2015). [Accessed at <https://theconversation.com/museums-have-long-overlooked-the-violence-of-empire-51269>, 20 August 2018.]

⁴⁵ The literature on the global circulation of natural resources is too vast to list here. A few of the works that have contributed to my thinking on the subject are: Daniel Margoscy, *Commercial Visions: Science, Trade, and Visual Culture in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2014); Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 2007); Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Garden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). The circulation of medicines is a particularly strong subfield within this historiography. See especially Harold J. Cook

and seeds not only drove the development of modern taxonomies, nomenclatures and classifications in botany, it also contributed to the commercial and political success of European expansion and colonization.⁴⁶ Moreover, historians of science have been especially successful in revealing how plants and seeds, and knowledge of nature more broadly, was instrumental in extracting wealth from the colonies, securing political power abroad, and establishing export markets for European commodities.⁴⁷

The circulation of the indigenous dead dovetailed with the global trade in plants. Collecting the indigenous dead emerged in the nineteenth century as a growing corollary to the bioprospecting of the previous century. As Justin Smith has argued, ethnoprospectors were carrying out “an exhaustive global survey of human diversity,” which maintained close connections to the modern expansion of empire, the globalization of commerce and the systematization of nature.⁴⁸ To do so, collectors used and deployed the imperial resources bioprospectors had developed in the previous centuries. Many of the collectors discussed in this

and Timothy D. Walker, “Circulation of Medicine in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” *Social History of Medicine*, Special issue: *Mobilising Medicine: Trade & Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, vol. 26, ed. Harold J. Cook and Timothy D. Walker (2013), 337-351; and Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ For the rise of systematics in botany, see especially William Thomas Stearn, “Botanical Exploration to the Time of Linnaeus,” *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London*, vol. 169 (1958), 175-196; and “The Background of Linnaeus’s Contributions to the Nomenclature and Methods of Systematic Biology,” *Systematic Zoology*, vol. 8 (1959), 4-22.

⁴⁷ Marie-Noëlle Bourguet and Christophe Bonneuil, eds., “L’inventaire du monde à la mise en valeur du globe. Botanique et colonisation,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, vol. 86 (1999), 14; Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-12; John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Emma Spary, *Utopia’s Garden: French natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 11-2.

dissertation also collected botanical and zoological specimens, and the bone circuits took indigenous remains along the same maritime corridors that connected London to the precious resources in Britain's colonies.

Despite this convergence between the circulation of plants and the movement of indigenous bodies, there are crucial differences between two. For one, collecting plants, animals and minerals had clear economic advantages. The discovery, description and domestication of new plants could become instrumental in the relocation of cash crops, drugs and luxuries from the colonies to Europe.⁴⁹ Plants and minerals provided useful medicines to sustain military campaigns in environments hostile to European bodies.⁵⁰ This alliance between science and practical knowledge in Linnaeus' natural history, Lisbet Koerner, has argued was a "syncretic 'new science,'" which Linnaeus saw as "simultaneously an epistemology and a technology, that is, as both a way to know, and a material tool."⁵¹ Nevertheless, similar questions can be asked about the circulation of indigenous bodies in the nineteenth century. The growth of connections over the course of the nineteenth century allowed for the increased accumulation of ethnological

⁴⁹ Carl Linnaeus defined the work of collectors in terms of economics. "Nature has arranged herself in such a way, that each country produces something especially useful; the task of economics is to collect [plants] from other places and cultivate such things that don't want to grow [at home] but can grow [there]." Curiously, Linnaeus inspired a generation of travellers to venture out into the world, although he himself preferred to document Swedish fauna and flora. Letter from Linnaeus to the Swedish Academy of Science, Uppsala, 10 January 1746, in *Bref och skrivelser af och till Carl von Linné*, vol. 1, no. 2, ed. T. M. Fries and J. M. Hulth (Stockholm, 1097-43), 59. Quoted in Lisbet Koerner, "Carl Linnaeus in his time and place," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145-62 (quoted on 151).

⁵⁰ In his translation of Linnaeus' *Systema naturae* of 1792, Robert Kerr emphasizes both the book's usefulness to naturalists at home and abroad, who might find a this work a systematic guide in their pursuits, and to collectors, who might see in it an "object of pecuniary advantage," enabling them to select and preserve "the more valuable specimens, which are in great request, and bear a high price among collectors of cabinets." Robert Kerr, transl., *The Animal Kingdom, or Zoological System, of the Celebrated Sir Charles Linnaeus...* (Edinburgh: A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, London, and W. Creech, 1792), 46.

⁵¹ Lisbet Koerner, "Carl Linnaeus in his time and place," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145-62 (quote from 152).

and anthropological materials in European museums. These institutions became part of transnational networks of material exchange in a “global political economy” of anthropological specimens.⁵² Indigenous remains were inextricably bound up in these global networks of exchange.⁵³ How the circulation of human remains became an epistemological resource and a material tool for imperial expansion is the subject of this dissertation.

Unlike most historical studies of collections of indigenous remains, the protagonists of this dissertation surveyed the human terrain from the outside. Looking at collections of indigenous remains in Europe, historians of science have exposed the role of human specimens, particularly skulls, in conceptualizing and measuring human difference. In doing so, they have shown how, far from the resources of objective scientific investigation, these human materials became vessels for ideologies that shaped and sustained racial categories as well as an imperialist drive for knowledge about indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ These histories, however, have focused on what happened to these remains once they entered national collections in Europe and America.

⁵² Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), especially 151. I am indebted here to Rocardo Roque’s insights in his *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire, 1870-1930* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

⁵³ For the circulation and display of living human specimens, see Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2011). For the trade in dead human materials, see Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Éric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire, *Zoos Humaines. De la Vénus Hottentote aux Reality Shows* (Paris: Découverte, 2002); Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn, eds., *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism in the Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵⁴ Some of the best examples of this historiography include Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, revised edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996); Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013); and Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Besides some histories of collections of human specimens in national or regional contexts, few studies examine the indigenous remains on the move.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, historians are beginning to explore how human remains circulated as raw materials on a global scale.⁵⁶ The collection and circulation of human remains had emerged in the nineteenth century as a global phenomenon, linking the Old World with the New.⁵⁷ Ann Fabian, for example, has shown how Samuel George Morton depended on a global network of collectors, which included friends, diplomats, doctors, soldiers, and fellow naturalists, who gathered human remains from battlefields and burial grounds.⁵⁸ In his book on “bone rooms” at the Smithsonian Institute, Samuel Redman has suggested that collecting native human remains sustained imperial power and reinforced colonial policy under the guise of scientific advancement and social progress. With each skull they brought back, American, French, German and British collectors were creating what he calls “bone empires.”⁵⁹

Crucial to my argument is the idea of “contact zones” drawn from recent scholarship on global scientific exchange. Mary Louise Pratt defines these “contact zones” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths

⁵⁵ For collecting human remains in the United States, see Tony Platt, *Grave Matters: Excavating California's Buried Past* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2011).

⁵⁶ For a few examples of ethnographic collecting more broadly conceived, see L. Franney, “Ethnographic Collecting and Travel: Blurring Boundaries, Forming a Discipline,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2001), 219-31; Michael T. Bravo's “Ethnological Encounters,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 338-357.

⁵⁷ Helen MacDonal, *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), xii.

⁵⁸ Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 6, 72.

as they are lived out across the globe today.” For Pratt, these “contact zones” were sites of transculturation, spaces where often subordinated native peoples were to some degree able to determine how they made the dominant culture their own.⁶⁰ Londa Schiebinger has introduced these spaces into the historiography of science as those environments where European bioprospectors and native peoples met, fought and compromised over natural resources.⁶¹

A global history of the circulation of indigenous remains takes place, for the most part, in these unsettled spaces. It stresses entanglement over separation, contact over conquest, and negotiation over negation. These conflicting forces exist in considerable tension, especially in histories of the encounter between indigenous peoples and European colonizers on the margins of empire. But the creative aspects of that encounter, rather than its destructive ones, not only survive, but thrive, in those frontiers where Europeans and indigenous peoples came together to steal, trade and collect the indigenous dead. The circulation of indigenous specimens began in spaces like these, where European collectors and their indigenous interlocutors sought to contest, negotiate and settle the different, often opposing, meanings of these human materials.

The Bare Bones

The thesis of this dissertation and its place in the historiographies of empire and global scientific exchange I have presented in the preceding pages belie the haphazard process by which the chapters of this dissertation came about. I started from the assumption that the circulation of indigenous bodies would reveal something about the relationship between science, colonialism and violence. What exactly that relationship looked like, how it unfolded and why, were

⁶⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2006[1992]), 7.

⁶¹ Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 17-8.

questions I was not at all certain I would be able to answer in this way. When the archival research was done, I simply began writing. Lacking the confidence of an experienced scholar, I regularly had to convince myself that I was writing toward a point.⁶² There was no initial plan for the dissertation, and in some instances this is apparent in the text, I think.

Nevertheless, there is a plan now, and the way I am telling the story matters. The order in which the chapters appear represents a larger process of the decolonization of knowledge about human difference. It begins with the ways in which Europeans saw, thought about and deployed the remains of the indigenous dead. But it soon moves out into the world, exposing how human specimens became the raw materials out of which Britons created order from the disorder of a growing empire and gave British men and women a place in that order.⁶³ The result is a collection of chapters that, with the exception of the first chapter, which discusses the development of the idea of the lost indigenous body, take place far away from Britain, where bodies were being tossed around on oceans, had to endure the thick air in dense forests on islands in the Pacific, and suffered along the frontiers of South Africa. There, I want to tell a story of continuous change. In part, this is because the chronology of the circulation of indigenous bodies shows no clear break: a before and after. Fascination with the remains of the indigenous dead stretches back into renaissance and early modern cabinets of curiosities. However, an analysis of accession records does suggest that circulation picked up in the second half of the nineteenth century, but no single event, nor the theories of a single individual, can serve as a tipping point. Another reason for structuring this dissertation as a series of essays on specific aspects of the

⁶² As I began the writing process, I was encouraged by the experience of Clifford Geertz, who during the writing of his *The Interpretation of Culture* was confronted by the same question: What does it all point to? “You write,” he summarizes his own experience, “and then you figure out what you are writing about.” See Clifford Geertz, “Preface to the 2000 Edition,” in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), xii.

⁶³ Mary Louise Pratt embarks on a similar quest to decolonize knowledge in her book, *Imperial Eyes*, 3.

circulation of indigenous bodies lies in the hope of being able to trace how and why the circulation changed, what problems collectors had to cope with, what motivated them, and how the acquisition of indigenous remains shaped the face of colonialism. To split each of these up into chapters that divide the story into an artificial succession of historical moments, I felt, would jeopardize the internal coherence of the argument I am trying to make about the unsettled and unsettling trajectories of these indigenous bodies.

Chapter One, “The Indigenous Body Lost,” examines the development of ideas about the extinction of human races and how those ideas shaped the circulation of the indigenous dead.⁶⁴ By the final quarter of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries, the “anatomy of difference” was no longer just about skin color, facial and other hair, or aesthetics, but increasingly also about the size and shape of the skull, and the stature of the bone structure.⁶⁵ This reorientation of human difference inwards accelerated during the late 1840s and 1850s, when new scientific discoveries, continued exploration, and social conflict at home and abroad undermined British confidence in existing Christian cosmogonies, the ability of ‘others’ to become civilized, and became the carriers of a colonizing ethos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁶ Indigenous remains embodied these crises in different ways. They were at

⁶⁴ Initially, I intended to include a chapter on the emergence of images of indigenous peoples in European natural history, but I have decided to take it out of the final draft of the dissertation. While editing the final version of my dissertation I realized that many of the connections I was drawing between the emergence of the indigenous body in images and collections in early modern Europe and collecting itself were too superficial. The chapter had materialized relatively late in the writing process and I had made too many assumptions. The chapter was just not ready yet. Even without it, though, I think the dissertation works well and the first chapter on the extinction of indigenous races takes up the question of why British collectors started collecting indigenous remains in some detail.

⁶⁵ Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, Special Issue: The Politics of Difference (Summer, 1990), 387-405.

⁶⁶ For the events that contributed to this change in the nineteenth century, see Seymour Drescher, “The Ending of the Slave Trade and the Evolution of Racism,” *Social Science History*, vol. 14 (1990), 415-50; George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (London: Free Press, 1989); idem, “What’s in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1837-71,” *Man*, vol. 6 (1971), 369-90; idem, “From Chronology to Ethnology: James

the heart of debates within the developing scientific disciplines of comparative anatomy, ethnology and anthropology about Europeans and non-Europeans. Moreover, in the hands of some, they became material evidence of racial conflict, and as such they reflected and shaped the course of European colonization. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the interest collectors took in the remains of the vanishing Tasmanians. On these bodies, European theories of extinction, racial conflict and colonialism converged. Rooted in part in stores of indigenous remains, the systematization of human difference and the collection of indigenous body parts emerged by the 1860s as a powerful ally to empire.⁶⁷

In Chapter Two, “Bone Circuits,” I follow these indigenous body parts as they moved along maritime routes in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. It traces trends and shifts in the circulation of these human specimens, describes their transformation into commodities, reconstructs the global networks within which they circulated, and uncovers how indigenous remains became the objects of a scientific imperialism that challenged notions of free exchange. Indigenous bodies were shaped by their journeys along these bone circuits. It was here, passing along Britain’s trade routes on her war ships and mail steamers, that the separation of indigenous remains from their indigenous environment was completed and the commodification of indigenous bodies was most successfully achieved. The value and meaning of this human capital

Cowles Prichard and British Anthropology, 1800-1850,” in James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Man*, ed. George W. Stocking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), ix-cx; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (London: MacMillan Press, 1987); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 187-276.

⁶⁷ For studies into the contributions of empire to the science of man in French, Dutch, German and American contexts, see Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013); Laura Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, with a New Preface* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Robert Lawrence Gunn, *Ethnology and Empire: Languages, Literature, and the Making of the North American Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

were not intrinsic. Like the bodies of slaves, the remains of the indigenous dead gained value only in a global web of exchange, one where scientific, commercial and imperial interests converged to alienate the body from those to whom it had belonged.

Chapter Three, “Bodies of the Weak,” is the backbone of this story. It is about the practice of collecting indigenous body parts on the margins of empire, and brings to light the ways in which British collectors, indigenous bodies and the men, women and children to whom they belonged came together and drew apart. In examining how collectors acquired the remains of the indigenous dead, I hope to offer a glimpse into a colonizing and collecting mindset. Obsessed with order, collectors in the field saw an indigenous ecology littered with the remains of the indigenous dead as disordered nature. For these British visitors, the acquisition of indigenous remains was about creating order. Collectors also believed they were witnessing in the ubiquitous presence of human remains proof of an indigenous savagery, violence and even anthropophagi that needed to be collected, classified, put on display, but ultimately also, displaced. However, the acquisition of indigenous bodies also required collaboration and crossing. Collectors were outsiders, whom indigenous men and women often regarded with suspicion, if not hostility. Collecting was also about cooperation, concealment and conflict. Collectors often resorted to less than reputable means of procuring their prizes. Relationships with indigenous informants could rapidly deteriorate, and British collectors could not always rely on the information indigenous collaborators provided. The social spaces in which British collectors traded and plundered indigenous remains were unsettling places, where the lines separating European from non-European seemed blurry at best. Crucially, the chapter reveals how, besides violent clashes, indigenous men, women and children developed everyday forms of action to resist, ridicule and even reverse British power.

In Chapter Four, I examine the motives of the individuals who collected the indigenous dead. Recreating the roles medical men, colonial officials, explorers, missionaries and long-term residents played in the acquisition and circulation of indigenous bodies, this chapter interrogates the motives behind scientific activity in the field. While contemporaries often pledged their assistance as a contribution to science, a closer reading of the sources reveals a profound concern for self-fashioning. Collectors in the field sought to profit socially, politically, financially as well as professionally from their contributions to collections of indigenous bodies in Britain. Some hoped to become gentlemen or patrons of science, participating in or promoting scientific activity on the margins of empire. Others sought to cash in on their collections, acquiring the means to organize new expeditions or simply to start a new life. Still others hoped that their contributions to collections in Europe would benefit scientific and spiritual progress in the colonies. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of one female collector, Lady Jane Franklin. The wife of the former governor of Van Diemen's Land and Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin, Jane Franklin saw her contributions as a means to participate in a world restricted to men. Taken together, this chapter examines what science was on the margins of empire, who could practice it, and where it could take place.

Finally, Chapter Five presents a case study of British head taking in South Africa during its frontier wars (1781-1879). In it, I examine how head taking emerged as both practice and trope in the violent confrontations between British and indigenous forces. Head taking, I suggest, derived its meaning in an environment in which the human body and its parts became signs in a semiotics of terror. In this context, the mutilation and dismemberment of the enemy body enacted in a vicious and visceral manner the 'otherness' of the enemy. Moreover, in the eyes of the perpetrators, adopting an even more cruel treatment than the one deployed by the enemy put

into relief the inhumanity of the ‘other’ whilst mimicking his actions. Head taking became an intricate part of this language of terror. And through this association, head taking became a constitutive element of British colonialism in South Africa. British soldiers and officials were unaware that in taking heads, they were incorporating into their own colonizing ethos one of the elements they abhorred most in indigenous warfare. Most reports of British head taking ignored this instance of transculturation, and British officials sought to suppress rumors of British head taking. The documents accompanying collections of South African skulls often replicated this process of silencing, emphasizing indigenous savagery as the sole cause of these indigenous bodies.

History in the Flesh

Now is perhaps a good time to reflect on the title of this introduction: “history in the flesh.” I started out wanting to write a history of the ways in which the indigenous body reflected and shaped the course of science and colonialism in the nineteenth century. The focus on the material dimension of indigenous body parts –skulls, bones and hair – serves to draw ideas about human difference out of the comfort zone of European thought and into the world of the lived experiences of colonizers and colonized. As Michael T. Bravo has argued, historians have to write something “more than a history of the ideas of great European thinkers.” What we need is a “more global or decentralized framework to consider encounters between members of diverse cultures in different parts of the world” in order to “explain the production of ethnological knowledge in terms of the beliefs, actions and intentions of all the human groups involved.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Michael T. Bravo, “Ethnological Encounters,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 338-357 (quotes from 338).

In other words, the flesh is missing from these bones. To restore the histories of their acquisition is to reconstruct the true face of colonialism. This dissertation is not simply about Britain's drive for appropriation, separation and conquest, but about the unintended consequences of these processes: the opportunities for exchange, crossing and resistance. This reorientation is part of a larger shift in the historiography of empire. In recent decades historians have shown that histories of European empires, particularly in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, can no longer afford to ignore the permeability of political and ecological boundaries.⁶⁹ But men and women of the nineteenth century experienced this permeability as profoundly problematic. As C. A. Bayly suggests, this period witnessed the emergence of a paradox of modern globalization. As nation-states and empires became more politically, economically and religiously homogeneous, they also became more antagonistic. As "interconnectedness" and "uniformity" grew, so did the "sense of *difference*."⁷⁰ The same, I argue, can be said for human boundaries.

Indigenous bodies were caught between the opposing forces of connection and disconnection.

On the one hand, British philanthropists, scientists and ordinary men and women felt the need to record, understand and display how they were different, physically, culturally and morally, from the people living on the margins of empire. On the other hand, many of them believed that those differences could be attenuated, and even erased, by exporting their own, universal norms, customs and practices.⁷¹ Stripped of their flesh and shipped along bone circuits, indigenous

⁶⁹ For Britain, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1917* (London: New Haven: Yale University press, 1992); Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-67* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For pioneering analyses of the ecological transformations in the wake of imperial expansion, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁰ C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 1-2.

⁷¹ For these tensions in British ideas about human difference, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66-159;

remains embodied these tensions. Their circulation shows that the acquisition of the empirical evidence often raised questions and doubts about the validity of ideas about human difference.

This study thus contains its own unresolved tension. The circulation of the indigenous dead entwined colonial and indigenous worlds while at the same time making clear their incommensurability to its participants. On the margins of empire, the trade in indigenous bodies brought collectors and indigenous interlocutors together in ways that neither could have anticipated. Indigenous men and women traded the remains of their ancestors for trifles, while British collectors became plunderers and even headhunters. Historian Ricardo Roque has described this entanglement as a form of “colonial parasitism.” More specifically, he has shown how Timorese ritual life in the form of headhunting became intertwined with colonial rule, even as colonial officials condemned it as backward and savage.⁷² A similar “parasitism” lies at the heart of the circulation of the indigenous dead in the British empire. There, too, British collectors exploited indigenous ritual life, including cannibalism, trophy-taking and burial practices, to procure their human specimens. By returning to the remains of the indigenous dead at the time of their acquisition and circulation, I hope to catch the indigenous body, its parts, and the actors who handled it, in the act of becoming, not one thing, but many. Above all, this dissertation is intended as a reminder that a history about the circulation of indigenous skulls and bones is also a story about people of flesh and blood.

⁷² Ricardo Roque, *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

CHAPTER ONE

The Indigenous Body Lost

Introduction

It is a brutal testament to the violence and destruction of colonialism in the nineteenth century that as indigenous bodies became more visible in collections and shows in Europe, they were being lost almost everywhere else.¹ In February 1877, Arthur C. Horner, former surgeon on board *HMS Pandora* on a cruise to discover the northwest passage in 1875-6, wrote to William H. Flower at the Hunterian Museum concerning the “Greenland Eskimo” and some crania he had acquired during his voyage.² His letter included two abstracts providing detailed anatomical descriptions of the indigenous men and women from two settlements in Baden Bay, Whale Sound, and Upernavik. Most of them had vanished. Not far from the Netlik settlement in Baden Bay, Horner had found five human graves and near Upernavik he had discovered several more. In these, he informed Flower, he had found the bones of “1, 2, 3, or even more bodies in each of them,” and one of them contained no less than the “bones of 6 Esquimaux lying full length.” The indigenous dead had been wrapped in seal or walrus skin and buried under vaults of stones.³ The

¹ For the increased visibility of indigenous peoples in museums in Britain and elsewhere during the nineteenth century, Anne E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), see 109-128 and 129-60; Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 172-200 and 201-216.

² RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.46, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Arthur C. Horner to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Museum, 28 February 1877.

³ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.46, f. 5-6, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Horner’s abstract about the Netlik Settlement, Baden Bay, Whale Sound, 29 August 1876.

village, Horner learned from a local “history,” had been “deserted many years ago on account of smallpox.”⁴ When the Europeans came to Greenland, it seems, the indigenous body went away.

As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, the vanishing indigenous body was everywhere. The collectors and men of science interested in accumulating, recording and classifying indigenous bodies agreed about one thing: across the world indigenous peoples were disappearing. Historians and anthropologists have shown that this realization was the very foundation of the science that came to be known as anthropology. They have argued that the study of man as it emerged in the nineteenth century and developed into the twentieth was— and to a certain extent, still is — essentially the study of a “disappearing object.”⁵ As the nineteenth century continued and European expansion stretched deeper into unknown regions, collectors of indigenous remains at home and abroad saw evidence of their passing in deserted villages, burial grounds and battlefields. Some of them deplored it; others celebrated it. But all of them sought to redeem this loss by collecting the customs, artefacts and bodies of the indigenous.⁶ The science of man was, thus, from the very start, a “nostalgic” science, burdened by bouts of “mourning for what one has destroyed.”⁷

This chapter examines how ideas about the indigenous body lost invigorated the search for the remains of the indigenous dead. The acquisition and circulation of the indigenous body in the nineteenth century was both the cause and effect of this vanishing. One could argue that the

⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.46, f. 7, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Horner’s abstract about a settlement near Upernavik, 7-11 September 1876.

⁵ James Clifford writes: The other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text.” James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” in James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 98-121 (quote from 112).

⁶ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 244.

⁷ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon, 1988), 68-87 (quote from 69).

disappearance of the indigenous was a precondition for the accumulation of their remains in European museums. The skulls, bones and tissues that flooded storerooms in Europe's centers of calculation came from the indigenous *dead*. As indigenous bodies became the objects of European regimes of classification, they were exposed to the full force of colonialism's power of appropriation. Plundered from burial grounds, ransacked from battlefields, and traded in shops on the margins of empire, the remains of the indigenous dead came to embody the cruel colonial logic of indigenous annihilation. The anthropologist Patrick Wolfe has argued that the passing of the indigenous was part of colonialism's script: "The role colonialism has assigned to indigenous peoples is to disappear."⁸ From his death bed, Frantz Fanon wrote: "The arrival of the colonist signified syncretically the death of indigenous society."⁹ Such conclusions were evident to nineteenth century observers as well. More than a century before Fanon, a young naturalist was witnessing the decline of Australian aborigines. "Wherever the European has trod," Charles Darwin wrote down in his journal, "death seems to pursue the aboriginal."¹⁰

In this chapter I argue that over the course of the nineteenth century, collectors of indigenous bodies in Britain came to see their collections as records of this passing. They became historical archives, recording and telling the histories of indigenous peoples in a language of violence. Moreover, these collections also came to represent an apologetic narrative of colonialism. If in the nineteenth century, as Patrick Wolfe has suggested, race was "colonialism speaking," the indigenous body was the vocabulary through which it sought to

⁸ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso, 2017), 2.

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 50.

¹⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. Edward O. Wilson, *From So Simple A Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006 [1845]), 375.

express itself.¹¹ The message it told was unmistakable: “primitive” peoples were doomed because they were weak. And so were their bodies. Incapable of resisting European power or adopting and adapting to European civilization, indigenous populations were credited with an innate, and profoundly somatic, weakness that made their annihilation seem natural. Collections of indigenous remains such as the those in the Hunterian Museum and the British Museum in the nineteenth century documented the drama of the extinction of indigenous peoples. The remains of the indigenous dead pouring into Europe’s storerooms in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided tangible proof for the growing body of literature predicting, elegizing and sometimes even celebrating the death of the indigenous. As Patrick Brantlinger has argued, this belief in the disappearance of primitive indigenous races was widespread, uniting warm-hearted humanitarians and cold-blooded imperialists alike.¹² This shared “extinction discourse” drew its strength from and, in turn, encouraged the accumulation of indigenous remains. Hard facts, it seems, were also cold facts.

These collections of indigenous bodies were also collections of forms of colonial violence. The destruction to which indigenous men, women and children were subjected when Europeans arrived took many forms, but the outcome was usually the same. “When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians,” Darwin commented on the extinction of the races of

¹¹ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces*, 5. See also Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 27. Stoler has suggested that in the nineteenth century, earlier determinants of difference at the heart of colonialism, such as skin color and religion, were replaced by biological conceptualizations of race as the “organizing grammar” of colonialism.

¹² Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell university Press, 2003), 1. For an analysis of the “extinction discourse” in Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997). I am indebted to Brantlinger’s work for many of the references in this chapter.

man, “the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race.”¹³ The young naturalist was right on both counts. In North and South America, European explorers and invaders moved into regions ravaged by disease or decimated by conquest. However, in the tropical regions of the southern hemisphere, from Asia to Africa to America, climate and disease impeded the advance of European visitors and conquerors.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the most obvious, though not necessarily most commonly acknowledged, cause of the annihilation of non-Europeans was violent conflict with European invaders. Regardless of who was responsible, observers frequently saw it as a natural process. The extinction of indigenous peoples, they believed, mirrored the extinction of wild animals. In a popular account of humanity’s diversity, Robert Brown wrote: “The disappearance of wild races before the civilised is, for the greater part, as explicable as the destruction of wild animals before civilised sportsmen.”¹⁵ Imperialists, Browne seemed to suggest, could no more be asked to take pity on indigenous peoples than the sportsman could be required to spare the life of his prey.

Another form of violence, as Arthur C. Horner witnessed, was natural as well: disease. Smallpox devastated indigenous populations in south and north America in the centuries following Columbus. Just how many died remains an open question, but the number of lives lost must almost certainly be estimated in the tens of millions.¹⁶ But the form of violence most to

¹³ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, ed. Edward O. Wilson, *From So Simple A Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006 [1871]), 912.

¹⁴ For the historical reality of the Caribbean as the “White Man’s Grave,” see Philip D. Curtin, “‘The White Man’s Grave’: Image and Reality, 1780-1850,” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1961), 94-110; and his “The End of the ‘White Man’s Grave’? Nineteenth-Century Mortality in West Africa,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Summer 1990), 63-88.

¹⁵ Robert Brown, *The Races of Mankind: Being a Popular Description of the Characters, Manners, and Customs of the Principal Varieties of the Human Family*, 4 vols. (London: Cassel, Petter and Calpin, 1873), vol. 3, 199.

¹⁶ In a series of articles and monographs published between 1963 and 1983, the ethnohistorian Henry F. Dobyns attempted to recreate the indigenous population of South America during the centuries after contact. He argued that

blame for the disappearance of the indigenous and their bodies, nineteenth-century commentators believed, emanated from the indigenous themselves: self-annihilation. The culture and biology of indigenous peoples was working against them. Their ignorance and immorality were slowly pushing them towards extinction. The extinction of the Tasmanians, for example, a *fait accompli* by 1876, most contemporary observers believed, was due to their rejection of Christianity and innate inferiority.¹⁷

These examples of incommensurability had a powerful somatic dimension. They were often seen as embodied in smaller brains, thicker skulls and weaker bodies. Indigenous bodies, most commentators in the nineteenth century agreed, registered these forms of violence in the biology of “primitive” races. The long transformation of the concept of race from a cultural one into a biological during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sealed the fates of indigenous peoples and their bodies. From Linnaeus and Buffon onwards, comparative anatomy, and the emerging sciences of ethnology and anthropology, pioneered by men like Camper, Hunter, and

the spread of smallpox was so swift that many indigenous men and women died before they even saw a European. As for population numbers, Dobyns estimated that in the space of 130 years, ninety-five percent of South America’s indigenous population died. Counting backwards, Dobyns then hypothesized that South America’s pre-contact population must have ranged between 90 and 112 million, more than Europe. More recently, social scientists and historians have suggested that Dobyns’ numbers were too high, though they have acknowledged that the devastation was immense and must be expressed in the tens of millions. See Henry F. Dobyns, “Estimating Aboriginal Population: An Appraisal of techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 7 (1966), 395-416; and his *Their Number Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). See also, Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *The Aboriginal Population of Central Mexico on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1863). Dobyns acknowledged the work Cook and Borah had been doing in the 1850s and 1860s as more or less telling the same story, though then, not many people were listening. Later assessments, which lowered Dobyns’ estimates but recognized the general devastation visited upon indigenous populations, include Alfred W. Crosby, “The ‘Virgin Soil’ Epidemic as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 33 (1973), 289-99; William M. Denevan, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); and William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 2nd ed. (New York: Anchor, 1998).

¹⁷ John J. Cove, *What the Bones Say: Tasmanian Aborigines, Science, and Domination* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 44-5.

Blumenbach in the eighteenth century, and Lamarck, Bichat, Cuvier, St. Hilaire, Retzius, Gobineau, Prichard, Huxley, Wallace, Darwin and Spencer, to name but a few, in the nineteenth, began explaining human difference in terms of natural processes, rather than supernatural intervention. Their inquiries into human classification, origins and development increasingly drew on concepts and methods developed in the natural sciences.¹⁸ This history of the idea of race goes much deeper than this shortlist of names suggests. The point is rather that, as one historian summarizes, towards the final decades of the eighteenth century, “biological ideas of ‘race’ as innate, hereditary, and fundamentally differentiating steadily displaced the environmental and cultural criteria with their connotation of essential human similitude on which earlier descriptions and classifications mainly drew.”¹⁹ Yet, despite the consolidation of a

¹⁸ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1987), especially 20-110; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), especially 255-73; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1987), 76.

¹⁹ Bronwen Douglas, “Seaborne Ethnography and the Natural History of Man,” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 38 (2003), 6; “Science and the Art of Representing ‘Savages’: Reading ‘Race’ in Text and Image in South Seas Voyage literature,” *History and Anthropology*, vol. 11 (1999), 162. Similar analyses of the emergence in the late eighteenth century of biological, essential and racial notions of human difference have become commonplace; see for example, Bronwen Douglas, “Climate to Crania: science and the racialization of human difference,” in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750-1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra, Australia: The Australian National University EPress, 2008), 33-98 (especially 43-4); Claude Blanckaert, “On the Origins of French Ethnology,” in George W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 24-30; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1987), ix-xiv; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 13-41; Thomas Strack, “Philosophical Anthropology on the Eve of Biological Determinism: Immanuel Kant and Georg Forster on the Moral Qualities and Biological Characteristics of the Human Race,” *Central European History*, vol. 29 (1996), 291-9; Diego Venturino “Race et histoire: le paradigme nobiliaire de la distinction sociale au début du XVIIIe siècle,” in *L’idée de ‘race’ dans les sciences humaines et la littérature (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles)*, ed. Sarga Moussa (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), 19-38 (especially 20-2) Some historians, however, have traced such biological ideas about race further back than this. See Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Difference,” in *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 117-119; and Tom Ryan, “‘Le Président des Terres Australes’: Charles de Brosses and the French Enlightenment Beginnings of Oceanic Anthropology,” *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 37 (2002), 166-76.

biological concept of race during this period in scientific circles, “race-as-biology” was far from hegemonic, even in a place like the American South before the civil War.²⁰ If nineteenth-century Americans were not entirely convinced that race was biology, today, the idea that race is a biological category still seems hard banish. Even in the age of genetics and DNA-sequencing, the point that race is *not* biology needs to be rehearsed regularly.²¹

Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century progressed, the idea that human difference could be explained in biological terms transformed the empirical observation of the disappearing indigenous body into biological destiny. Moreover, such biological explanations of this disappearance increasingly came to represent it in terms of a natural struggle. In his *Oceana* from 1886, James Anthony Froude applied Darwin’s theory of natural selection to explain the vanishing of the “primitive” races in the wake of European expansion. “It is with the wild races of human beings as with wild animals, and birds, and trees, and plants,” he wrote. “Those only will survive who can domesticate themselves into servants of the modern forms of social development.” The fates of all living creatures depended on their ability to adapt to or escape the limits of their biology. Those animals, like the sheep, ox, horse and ass, who accepted their roles as beast of burden thrived and multiplied, while others, like the lion, leopard, hawk and eagle, simply disappeared. “So it is with man,” Froude concluded. “The negro submits to the

²⁰ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: North Carolina University Press, 2004), 250.

²¹ See among others, Jared Diamond, “Race Without Color,” *Discover Magazine* (1 November 1994), 83-9; Daniel B. Blackburn, “Why Race is not a Biological Concept,” in Berel Lang, ed., *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 3-26; Kenneth K. Kidd, “Races, Genes and Human Origins: How Genetically Diverse Are We?” in Arthur W. Galston and Emily G. Shurr, eds., *New Dimensions in Bioethics: Science, Ethics and the Formulation of Public Policy* (Leyden: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 11-24; Steve Olson, *Mapping Human History: Genes, Race, and Our Common Origins* (London: Mariner Books, 2003), especially 63; Alian F. Corcos, *The Myth of Human Races* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1997).

conditions, becomes useful, and rises to a higher level. The Red Indian and the Maori pine away as in a cage, sink first into apathy and moral degradation, and then vanish.”²² This was the story that indigenous bodies in collections across Europe reassembled and recorded. But we must start at the beginning.

On the Extinction of Human Races

Changing notions of earth’s history during the late eighteenth and the early decades of the nineteenth centuries laid the groundwork for the extinction of indigenous peoples as biological destiny. Growing collections of fossils in Europe’s museums, such as the ones overseen by George Cuvier in Paris and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in Göttingen were bursting the limits of time, and with them, the image of a static Creation, inhabited by fixed and eternal species.²³

As early as the publication of his *Contributions to Natural History* in 1779, Germany’s most avid collectors of human remains, Johann Friederich Blumenbach, looked at his growing collection of fossils and concluded that “Nature is something more solid than that statue of Minerva, - and it will not go to pieces even if one species of creatures dies out, or another is newly created.”

Moreover, he suggested, chances were that this had already happened, “without the slightest

²² James Anthony Froude, *Oceana; or, England and Her Colonies* (London: Longmans, Gree, 1886), 300.

²³ Cuvier and Blumenbach were not the only collectors of indigenous remains who shared an interest in fossil remains as evidence for the extinction and creation of species. Petrus Camper and John Hunter both amassed substantial collections of fossils and contemplated what the evidence meant for the long history of life on earth. See for example, Petrus Camper, “Conjectures Relative to Petrifications found in St. Peter’s Mountain, near Maestricht,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 76 (1786), 443-65 and plates 15-6; and John Hunter, “Observations on the Fossil Bones Presented to the Royal Society by his Most Serene Highness the Margrave of Anspach, &c.,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 84 (1794), 407-17 and plates 19-20; and his *Observations and Reflections on Geology; Intended to Serve as an Introduction to the Catalogue of Extraneous Fossils* (London, 1859). Hunter’s examination of his fossil collections, however, convinced him that the differences between fossils and their “living analogues” were not so great as to suggest that they belonged to totally different species, rather than the same species changed under the influence of local causes.

danger to order, either in the physical or in the moral world, or for religion in general.” Instead, he offered an image of a changing nature in which the “guidance of a higher hand is unmistakable; so that in spite of this recognized instability of nature, the creation continues going on its quiet way.” For Blumenbach the extinction of old species (the Dodo, or the Grey Wolf in Scotland, England and Ireland) and the appearance of new ones were part of the “great mutability in nature,” which owed its existence to “the active and wise determination of the Creator.”²⁴ In a series of publications between 1801 and 1803, Blumenbach further developed these ideas and highlighted the significance of fossils in reconstructing geohistory, including the history of life on earth.²⁵ Drawing on specimens he obtained from Blumenbach in Göttingen, the aspiring comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier in Paris believed that earth’s geological strata provided conclusive proof of the possibility of extinct species. In 1800, he asserted that the older the stratum in which the fossils were found, the greater the differences between the extinct animals and their living counterparts.²⁶ Nature, Blumenbach and Cuvier realized, could easily endure the death of a few species. And so, it would survive the extinction of a few human races.

But more than Blumenbach or Cuvier, Darwin’s ideas about the extinction of “primitive” human races had been influenced by Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, published in three

²⁴ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “Contributions to Natural History,” third edition, in *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter*, ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), 290.

²⁵ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “Specimen archaeologiae telluris, terrarumque in primis Hannoveranarum” (1801); and his *Specimen archaeologiae telluris, terrarumque in primis Hannoveranarum* (Göttingen, 1803). Blumenbach’s *Beyträge zur Naturgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1806-11), consolidated much of the materials from these two publications. See also *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 424-8.

²⁶ Cuvier first mentioned these ideas in a paper on quadrupeds in 1801. See Georges Cuvier, “Extrait d’un ouvrage sur les espèces de quadrupèdes don’t on a trouvé les ossements dans l’intérieur de la terre, adressé aux savants et des amateurs des sciences,” *Journal de physique, de l’histoire naturelle et des arts*, vol. 52 (1801), 253-67 (especially 260). See also Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 424-5.

volumes between 1830-33. Though Lyell's new geology failed to convince the Anglican cohort of British science, a younger generation of scientists (including Darwin) saw their world turned upside down. When Captain FitzRoy presented Darwin with the first volume of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* shortly after departing on the surveying voyage of the *Beagle*, the young naturalist felt as if his childhood innocence had suddenly been stripped from him. He realized that "the solid earth, considered from our earliest childhood as the very type of solidity has oscillated like a thin crust beneath our feet."²⁷ Darwin's sense of disorientation was not unfounded. Here was a new kind of nature, one that was more like a continuous cycle of extinctions and creations, rather than a static, immutable line. Although he agreed with Cuvier's evidence for extinctions, Lyell challenged Cuvier's catastrophic interpretations of earth's history, substituting it with an updated version of the late eighteenth-century uniformitarian view of James Hutton, which held that the earth had been formed by slow, long and continuous natural processes.²⁸ This behemoth of natural change, Lyell had come to believe by the 1830s, ravaged both "animate" and "inanimate creation," causing all species to be subjected to "incessant

²⁷ Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, ed. Randall Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 445. See also, Howard E. Gurber and Valmai Gruber, "The Eye of Reason: Darwin's Development During the *Beagle* Voyage," *Isis*, vol. 53 (1962), 186-200.

²⁸ Scottish geologist James Hutton presented evidence for this geological theory in 1785, which he later published as a *Theory of the Earth* (1795). Martin J. Rudwick has suggested that Hutton's geology contained very few new elements, though he had combined them in a "unusual and original way." See James Hutton, *Abstract of a Dissertation read in the Royal Society of Edinburgh, upon the seventh of March, and fourth of April, MDCCLXXXV, concerning the System of the Earth, its Duration, and Stability* (Edinburgh: Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1785); "Theory of the Earth; or an Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution and Restoration of the Land upon the Globe," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 1 (1788), 209-304; *Theory of the Earth; with proofs and illustrations*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Cadell, junior, and Davies, 1795). See also Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 160-72.

vicissitudes.” The material transformations in the earth’s crust made the “the successive destruction of species ... part of the regular and constant order of Nature.”²⁹

While his theory rejected the notion of sudden catastrophic change, his notion of continuous change and its explicit acknowledgement of the extinction of species was itself quite revolutionary. So, Lyell had to tread carefully. His theory proposed a new chronology for the history of the earth, one fundamentally at odds with the still influential biblical chronology. Cuvier’s findings of catastrophic changes in earth’s long history had provided evidence for events recounted in Scripture.³⁰ Lyell responded to these concerns by seeing in the changes in the earth’s crust, her oceans, climate, and the plant and animal species that dwelled on her surface, “a perfect harmony of design and unity of purpose,” attributed to “an Infinite and Eternal being.”³¹ But there was a powerful social and political thrust behind Lyell’s theory of geological change too. Articulating his theory in the 1820s and 1830s, he was conscious of the threat posed by the democratic energies endorsed by Lamarck’s theory of transmutation in France and by the Reform Bill of 1832 at home. Undermining the reality of sudden, cataclysmic changes in earth’s

²⁹ Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology: Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth’s Surface, by Reference to Causes Now in Operation*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1833), vol. 2, 147.

³⁰ In 1813, Robert Jameson, for example, a conservative geologist at Edinburgh University, interpreted Cuvier’s data as evidence for the biblical Flood. A decade after the publication of Cuvier’s Theory in English, William Buckland presented what he believed was geological proof for the Flood. Having discovered the bones of Hyenas found in Asia in deposits in English caves, Buckland concluded that they must have been carried there by an inundation that had covered the entire surface of the earth with water. When the waters receded, they left the bones amongst other deposits. Nicholas Rupke argues that Buckland’s interpretation of the geological evidence enabled him to improve the reputation of geology at Oxford, then still dominated by religious orthodoxy. William Buckland, *Reliquiae Diluvianae; Or, Observations on the Organic Remains Contained in Caves, Fissures and Diluvial Gravel* (London: John Murray, 1823). The title of Buckland’s work translates as “Relics of the Deluge.” Nicholas Rupke, *The Great Chain of History: William Buckland and the English School of Geology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); and Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Palaeontology* (London: MacDonald, 1975).

³¹ Lyell, *Principles*, vol. 3, 385.

history, Adrian Desmond has argued, Lyell's geology was in fact an anti-revolutionary science, inspired by the fear of violent reform from the bottom-up.³²

Nevertheless, there was something profoundly unsettling about Lyell's theory about the extinction of species. What did it mean for the future of the human species? If Lyell left any doubt that the extinction of species might, in time, come to include humanity, his critics and admirers certainly did not fail to draw attention to it (see Figure 1.1). In a caricature by the hand of Henry de la Beche, Lyell, here depicted as "Professor Ichthyosauri, presides over what appears to be a human skull. The caption then identifies the skull as belonging to "some of the lower order of animals" now extinct.³³ The human origins of the fossil skull are only confirmed by the caption at the top. Critics immediately realized that Lyell's theory not only helped to explain the extinction of plant and animal species but predicted that of humanity as well.

³² K. Lyell, *Life Letter and Journals of Sir Charles Lyell, Bart.* (London: Murray, 1881), vol. 1, 291-2, 308, 363. See also Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 328-31.

³³ See also Martin J. S. Rudwick, "Caricature as a Source for the History of Science: De la Beche's Anti-Lyellian Sketches of 1831," *Isis*, vol. 66, no. 4 (December 1975), 534-560.

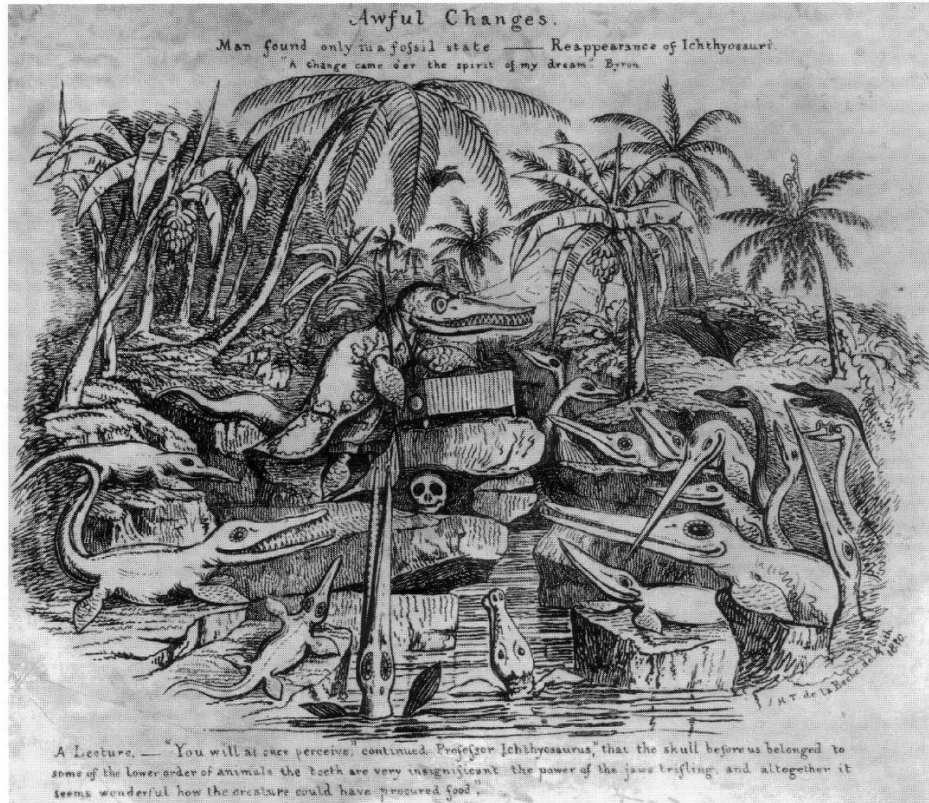


Fig. 1.1. “Awful Changes. Man Found only in a Fossil State - Reappearance of Ichthyosauri.” By Henry De la Beche (1830). The caption reads: “A lecture, — ‘You will at once perceive,’ continued Professor Ichthyosaurus, ‘that the skull before us belonged to some of the lower order of animals; the teeth are very insignificant, the power of the jaws trifling, and altogether it seems wonderful how the creature could have procured food.’” From: Francis Trevelyan Buckland, *Curiosities of Natural History*, 4 vols. (London, 1857-75).

Connections between his ideas on the extinction of animal and plant species, and the increasingly evident reality of disappearing indigenous peoples across the world were not lost on Lyell. In a brief passage, he alluded to the passing of indigenous peoples in Australia and New Holland as “faint” forebodings of the extinction of the human species.

A faint image of the certain doom of a species less fitted to struggle with some new condition in a region which it previously inhabited, and where it has to contend with a more vigorous species, is presented by the extirpation of savage tribes of men by the advancing colony of some civilized nation. In this case the contest is merely between two different *races*, each gifted with equal capacities of improvement – between two

varieties, moreover, of a species which exceeds all others in its aptitude to accommodate its habits to the most extraordinary variations of circumstances.³⁴

Lyell left little to the imagination about what was causing their disappearance. Despite “equal capacities of improvement,” he believed that the outcome of the colonial encounter was inevitable: “Few future events are more certain than that speedy extermination of the Indians of North America and the savages of New Holland in the course of a few centuries.”³⁵ If the mechanism was nature, colonization was its agent. The expansion of European nations into what he called “unoccupied lands,” had already produced the “annihilation of a multitude of species,” and would continue to do so in the future. And, so it would with the human races. Lyell was thus an apologist of empire. The most pressing question, he believed, was not a matter of guilt, nor even of responsibility, but of humility. “If we wield the sword of extermination as we advance, we have no reason to repine at the havoc committed,” but “we have only to reflect, that in thus obtaining possession of the earth by conquest, ... we exercise no exclusive prerogative.”³⁶ If Lyell was willing to contemplate the annihilation of the entire human species, many others, like Darwin and Froude, rejected this. They saw the disappearance of certain human races as an intraspecies struggle for life that would result in the conquest of the weak by the strong.

A few years later, a young naturalist serving on board the *Beagle* witnessed Lyell’s future in person, though, unlike Lyell, he could not help but feel that something was being lost. Darwin, too, had few doubts about the causes of the disappearance of the indigenous. In New Zealand, he heard the melancholic laments of the otherwise “fine and energetic natives” as they told him that

³⁴ Lyell, *Principles*, vol. 2, 181.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 181.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 162-3.

“they knew the land was doomed to pass from their children.”³⁷ The fierce competition that pushed some animal species into extinction and promoted others, was determining the fate of indigenous peoples across the globe. The idea that in the struggle for existence, one species would succeed another have proved particularly resilient. More than a century later, Frantz Fanon would accept this logic, though he would turn it against European colonizers.³⁸

The theory of vanishing species as it developed in geology and comparative anatomy in the early nineteenth century paved the way for scientific explanations and justifications for the disappearance of the indigenous. Increasingly, their passing came to be seen in terms of biological destiny, a matter of natural process, to which plants, animals, and ultimately also humans, had been exposed from the very beginning. As with plants and animals, interspecies competition as the consequence of contact and colonization would result in the extirpation of indigenous peoples. By mid-century, the extinction of “primitive” indigenous races seemed inevitable and natural. Their passing was a matter of biological destiny.

By mid-century, reports of the disappearance of “primitive” indigenous races, abroad and at home, seemed to confirm the underlying mechanism of Lyell’s theory. Everywhere, the struggle for life pitted the weak against the strong, and the indigenous almost always seemed to lose out. Nature herself seemed to favor the strong over the weak. Noting his journal of the *Beagle*, Darwin saw in the dying of indigenous Australians one incontrovertible, but melancholic truth: “The varieties of man seem to act on each other in the same way as different species of

³⁷ Because of disease, spirits, and depletion of food sources, “the number of [Australian] aborigines is rapidly declining,” Darwin recorded early in January 1836. Darwin, *Voyage*, 375.

³⁸ “Decolonization,” he writes, “is quite simply the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another.” The violent interspecies struggle for life is a powerful trope in Fanon’s work. Elsewhere he writes: “This compartmentalized world, this world divided in to [between colonizers and colonized], is inhabited by different species.” Jean-Paul Sartre similarly argues that European colonizers saw in indigenous peoples “a race of subhumans overseas.” Frantz Fanon, *Wretched*, 1, 5; Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in Fanon, *Wretched*, lix.

animals – the stronger extirpating the weaker.”³⁹ Three decades later, observing the disappearance of indigenous men and women in Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the wake of contact with civilized Europeans, Anthony Trollope was convinced that “they have withered by commune with us as the weaker grasses of Nature’s first planting wither and die wherever come the hardier plants, which science added to nature has produced.”⁴⁰ As the century progressed, the extinction of indigenous peoples in the face of European contact became naturalized.

Speaking to a crowd at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1839, James Cowles Prichard fully applied Lyell’s theory about the extinction of species to the human past. In doing so, he echoed the sentiments Darwin still had to publish in his account of the journey on board *Beagle*. “It is certain that many vast regions of the earth, if not the whole or the greater part of its surface,” he told the members of the BAAS, “were formerly the abode of tribes which have long ago perished.” In the process, indigenous bodies were lost. “Many of these races,” Prichard continued, “were different in physical character from those which at present exist in the same countries.” The recently found remains of lost indigenous tribes from northern Asia to Polynesia, from Ohio North America to Titicaca in Peru, were proof that the extinction of indigenous peoples with skulls and skeletons of “different conformation than that of the present tribes” had happened. And, he added, “the extermination of human races is still going on.”⁴¹ To Prichard the cause of their passing was clear. A humanitarian, and one of the earliest members of Thomas Hodgkin’s Aboriginal Protection Society, he condemned the “modern system of colonization,” which, he believed, had assisted in

³⁹ Darwin, *Voyage*, 375.

⁴⁰ Anthony Trollope, *South Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1878), vol. 2, 332.

⁴¹ James Cowles Prichard, “On the Extinction of Human Races,” *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, vol. 28 (1839), 167.

the annihilation of the Guanches from the Canary Islands, had erased countless peoples from north and south America, and had assigned the Xhosa to their current wretched state. “Wherever Europeans have settled, their arrival has been the harbinger of extermination to the native tribes,” he told his audience. This, he considered, was a fact as true now as it had been since “the time when the first shepherd fell by the hand of the first tiller of the soil.”⁴²

Prichard was not the first to call the attention of his contemporaries to the ongoing disappearance of indigenous races caused by European expansion. In 1820, John Crawfurd, a future ally of the racist James Hunt and later president of the Ethnological Society during and after he split with James Hunt, claimed that the passing of indigenous peoples was not just an unintended consequence of colonization, but was, in fact, its intended objective. He wrote of the “East Insular Negro” that “whenever they are encountered by the fairer races, they are hunted down like the wild animals of the forest.”⁴³ Later, Crawfurd suggested that if the “Maories of New Zealand” would not voluntarily part with some of their lands to a “superior race,” then “they must be taught that they must give way.”⁴⁴ The annihilation of the indigenous, Crawfurd seemed to suggest, was a necessary precondition for the acquisition of land.

To many observers, the middle decades of the nineteenth century, seemed a watershed in the contest between the weak and the strong. Even Thomas Hodgkin, the Quaker physician, humanitarian, and friend of Prichard, had to admit that “savage atrocities” being committed in Europe and elsewhere pointed to a single truth: “the wars of races.”⁴⁵ By then, the idea of continuous ‘interspecies’ war among the races of humanity had gained considerable ground

⁴² Prichard, “On the Extinction of Human Races,” 168-9.

⁴³ John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago. Containing an Account of the Manners, Arts, Languages, Religions, Institutions, and Commerce of Its Inhabitants* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1820), vol. 1: 24-6.

⁴⁴ James Crawfurd, “Anthropology at the British Association, A. D. 1864,” [Comments on Alfred Russel Wallace, ‘On the Progress of Civilisation in Northern Celebes’], *Anthropological Review*, vol. 2 (1864), 334.

⁴⁵ Thomas Hodgkin, “Obituary of Dr. Prichard,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol. 2 (1850), 182.

among those who took an interest in the natural history of man. In 1848, Charles Hamilton Smith saw war and extinction as the natural and inevitable outcomes of the encounter between superior and inferior peoples, or, “pure” and “mixed” races. The collision between the two would always result in the annihilation of the latter, since “parent stock, a typical form of the present genus or species ... is ... indestructible and ineffaceable.”⁴⁶

Like, Prichard, Smith believed that this had already taken place, and was continuing into his day. The extinction of indigenous races was inevitable, the result of some incomprehensible law. War, disease and assimilation (or failure to do so), Smith believed, were pushing some into extinction. “From the occasional destruction of whole tribes and race, which is sometimes caused, even in modern ages, by the sword, by contagious diseases, or by new modes of life, and the introduction of vices before unknown,” he wrote, “it is evident, that numerous populations of the human family have disappeared, without leaving a record of their ancient existence.”⁴⁷ The outcome, Smith believed, “appeared to be sealed in many quarters, and seems, by a pre-ordained law, to be an effect of more mysterious import than human reason can grasp.” Smith, however, was unwilling to absolve European imperialists of the “conquering and all-absorbing covetousness of European Civilization.” Moreover, since it was impossible to fully understand the law that destined impure races to extinction, Smith suggested that all could claim “the rights of humanity.”⁴⁸ Some, however, would have a stronger claim than others.

⁴⁶ Smith acknowledged the existence of “mixed,” and therefore inferior, races, beside the three “pure” races: the “woolly-haired” inhabitants of central Africa, the “beardless” inhabitants of Central Asia, and the “bearded Caucasian.” Each race, Smith believed, could only thrive in its respective “centre of existence.” Outside of it, climate or the arrival of the purer race would push the mixed race into extinction. Charles Hamilton Smith, *The Natural History of the Human Species; Its Typical Forms, Primeval Distribution, Filiations, and Migrations* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1851[1848]), 173-5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193-4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

At this time, the conflict between the strong and the weak acquire a distinctly racial aspect. In Europe and Britain, the events of late 1840s and 1850s appeared to justify fears of racial conflict. In 1848, the spirit of revolution was consuming the whole of Europe. For decades the working classes in industrial centers across Europe had been feeling the pressures of British industrial superiority, and now uprisings were challenging the ruling classes in France, Italy, the German confederation, and across the Habsburg empire. Although ultimately of uneven and often short-lived success, these revolutions traced deep scars across the face of Europe, exposing the weakness political establishments, giving rise to representative assemblies, demonstrating the possibility of national self-determination, and forcing far-reaching social and economic reforms to ensure equality before the law of all citizens.⁴⁹ These ideological conflicts also resonated with the collectors of indigenous remains, who had been witnessing its consequences in the extinction of indigenous populations for decades. In 1870, Julius von Haast, curator of the small Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, received news of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. In a letter to William H. Flower at the Hunterian Museum, Haast could not contain his elation “at the success of the German arms and in defense of a just cause.” He envisioned the conflict as a struggle “for supremacy” between “the Teutonic race (Anglo-Saxons included)” and “the Latin ones.” Not only was it a struggle of “Republic against Monarch,” but the outcome would also determine “which race will be the dominant one.”⁵⁰ Collectors of the indigenous dead across were witnessing the “war of races” playing out before their eyes.

Closer to home, the chartist movement of the 1840s threatened insurrection in Britain’s main industrial centers of Glasgow, London and Manchester. The government responded with

⁴⁹ Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-51* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Mike Rappaport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

⁵⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 81, f. 8, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 24 October 1870.

both repression and reform, transporting offenders like the mixed-race sailor William Cuffay (1788-1870) to Tasmania and carefully avoiding raising taxes on an already burdened population. It also reduced military spending and cut subsidies to planters, causing Jamaican planters to refuse paying their taxes and loyalists in Montreal to burn the parliament building. The repeal of the corn laws in 1846 not just signaled that the middle class cultural ideologies of free trade and entrepreneurial competition had carried the day, but it also pointed to a conservative effort to divert more inflammatory democratic energies and preserve traditional authority.⁵¹

Within Britain, the presence of a domestic “other” raised the specter of racial conflict. In the nineteenth century, the languages of race and class became intertwined in ways that condemned both to the losing side of history.⁵² Henry Mayhew described the lower orders of London as a “nomad race,” or “wandering tribes,” adverse to labor, coarse in their dealings, and subjected to the material wants of their environment.⁵³ Accounts of working conditions elsewhere in Britain increasingly revealed that savages resided not only in far-away lands, but in England as well. Friedrich Engels identified the working classes as a “race apart,” both physically, morally and intellectually, not only because of the adverse working conditions in the

⁵¹ K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1998), 10-1.

⁵² Since the 1990s, British historians have paid more attention to the intersection of class and race in Britain’s imperial context. Some foundational analyses include S. Thorne, “The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain,” In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 238-62; and Catherine Hall, “Re-thinking Imperial Histories: The Reform Act of 1867,” *New Left review*, vol. 208 (December 1994), 3-29; P. Hollis, “Anti-Slavery and British Working-class Radicalism in the Years of Reform,” in *Anti-slavery, religion and Reform*, ed. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Hamden, Conn. : Archon Books, 1980), 294-315.

⁵³ Mayhew defined “nomads” in terms of political economy, characterised by a “repugnance to regular and continuous labor.” See Henry Mayhew, *London Labour And The London Poor*, vol. 1 (London, 1851), chapter 1.

Manchester factories, but also because of their association with the Irish.⁵⁴ Further afield in the British Isles, the progress of civilization spelled out the disappearance of indigenous societies. Roads and railroads, Engels proclaimed, were transforming Scottish Highlanders from “poachers and smugglers” into “farmers and hand-workers.” Across, Scotland and Ireland, “Gaelic-Celtic customs and speech are rapidly vanishing before the approach of English civilization.”⁵⁵

Such analogies between the urban poor in Britain and savage peoples elsewhere had been feeding back into classifications of humanity. Blumenbach had earlier declared that the skin color of the European artisan darkened by exposure to the sun differed from the “cheeks of the delicate [European] female, as man himself does from the dark American, and he again from the European.”⁵⁶ These images only gained ground among proponents of sociocultural evolutionism during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1870 John Lubbock expressed his hope that “the blessings of civilization” would extend themselves not only to savages in other countries but would also envelope “countrymen of our own living, in our very midst, a life worse than that of a savage.”⁵⁷ In 1869 John Ferguson McLennan echoed Mayhew’s words in his statement of sociocultural evolutionism. He suggested that it was possible to find in London, the center of “arts, sciences and intelligence,” people joined in “predatory bands, leading the life of the lowest nomads,” illustrating all the stages of human development. Across Britain, from Cornwall to the

⁵⁴ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, transl. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958 [1845]), 104-5

⁵⁵ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, 11.

⁵⁶ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” third edition, in *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter*, ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), 108. See also Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, Special Issue: *The Politics of Difference* (Summer, 1990), 387-405 (especially 390).

⁵⁷ John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1875), 462.

Highlands, McLennan found “inequalities of development” that could shed light on human development throughout unrecorded history.⁵⁸ The conservative anatomy Joseph Green and Richard Owen had been crafting during the 1830s-1850s welcomed such assessments of the urban poor. As Adrian Desmond has suggested, Owen’s anti-Lamarckian comparative anatomy undermined the democratic forces of self-developing materialism which were mobilizing the reformers of the 1830s and the Chartists of the 1840s. It was “essential to the gentlemen’s internal imperialism - their strategy to conquer the new worlds at home, the godless urban tracts and growing regions of industrial Dissent.”⁵⁹

As Engels had done, collectors of human remains in Britain singled out the Irish in the struggle for existence at home. Historians have shown the physical and mental descriptions of the Irish “other” oscillated between that of a domestic “savage” or a child.⁶⁰ Whichever analogy they used, observers of human difference moored these deficiencies, or weaknesses, onto the anatomy of the Irish. Physical anthropologists John Beddoe and James Hunt, for example, were rehearsing this point in the 1860s, when they claimed that an Irishman “of tolerably pure blood” differed from an Englishman “in frame of body, in form of the skull and brain, in color of skin

⁵⁸ Because these “inequalities of development” were “indefinitely more numerous and striking for the totality of races of men than for any one of them,” McLennan believed that “every conceivable phase of progress can be studied as somewhere observed and recorded.” John Ferguson McLennan, “The Early History of Man,” *North British Review*, vol. 50 (1869), 272-290.

⁵⁹ Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 323.

⁶⁰ David Fitzpatrick, “Ireland and the Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 495-521 (especially 498-90); L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, CN: The University of Bridgeport Press, 1968); and *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971); Colin Kidd, “Teutonist Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition, 1780-1880,” *Scottish Historical review*, vol. 74 (1995), 45-68; and “Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth Century Scottish Nationhood,” *Historical Journal*, vol. 46 (2003), 873-92. For a discussion of the resilience of these tropes into the twentieth century, see “David Fitzpatrick, “The Overflow of the Deluge: Anglo-Irish Relationships, 1912-1922,” in Oliver MacDonagh and W. F. Mandle, eds., *Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History* (London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1986), 89.

and hair; and the moral and the mental correspond to the physical differences.”⁶¹ The image of the Irish “other” had taken shape in the context of the colonization of Ireland. Since Elizabethan times, British imperialists had been honing their strategies and skills in the Irish Sea.⁶² They later exported these lessons across the Atlantic, and ultimately the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

As George Stocking has concluded, there existed “a close articulation, both experiential and ideological, between the domestic and the colonial spheres of otherness.”⁶³ Abroad, too, social, political and religious tensions were slowly tilting the scales of human difference against non-European peoples.⁶⁴ These events were often seen as exposing the savagery of foreign peoples. They planted doubts in the minds of Britons about whether improvement was desirable or even possible. In British Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka, for example, British expansion, political scheming, and colonial taxation ignited a series of rebellions between 1803 and 1817. The last of these saw the mobilization of some twenty thousand Buddhists in an effort to restore the Kandian government. British troops crushed the rebellion and suspended the shot body of its leader from a tree for four days. In South Africa, Boers rose to rumors of the revolutions in Europe in 1848 and mobilized themselves against the increasing number British settlers. The

⁶¹ James Hunt, “The Manchester Anthropological Society,” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 5 (1867), 1-27 (especially 20).

⁶² Nicolas Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560-1800* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); and his *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976). For the linguistic aftermath of Elizabethan conquest of Ireland, see Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Louise Breen shows that an official in North America often let his family’s colonial experience in Ireland shape his policies towards “praying Indians.” See Louise Breen, “Praying With the Enemy: Daniel Gookin, King Philip’s War and the Dangers of Intercultural Mediation,” in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 100-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 101-22.

⁶³ Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology*, 234.

⁶⁴ Ronald Hyam provides an excellent overview of the conflicts that upset the British empire 1850s and 1860s. R. Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002[1976]).

governor of Cape Town, Sir Harry Smith, later bragged about his victory over the Boers by claiming that Britain was better at keeping its territories in line than Germany. Governors in Malta and the Ionian Islands recognized the danger spreading across Europe and passed measured reforms. In 1849, Sir James Brooke's, the Rajah of Sarawak, continuing campaigns against Dayak piracy and raiding revealed the savagery of the Malays and ignited doubts about their humanity.⁶⁵ But it was in British India that the "war of races" became grafted onto the English imagination. There, race caught up with empire, affecting British public opinion of the Indian subaltern in a way that made the struggle for life between European and non-European races seem inevitable.

When in 1857-8 East India Company Sepoys marched on Delhi and Lucknow, killing men, women and children along the way, British public opinion turned against these "savages." British Newspapers reported daily on Indian atrocities. Thomas Babington Macaulay preserved the moment in his diary in June of 1857: "The cruelties of the Sepoy natives have inflamed the Nation to a degree unprecedented within my memory." He was not alone, he recalled. No one, not even Peace Societies, the Aborigines Protection Society or reformation societies dared defend the actions of the Sepoys. "There is one cry for revenge." The nation was united in its thirst for retribution, and even Macaulay had to admit that he was not above such a sentiment. "The almost universal feeling is that not a single Sepoy within the walls of Delhi should be spared," he wrote, "and I own that it is a feeling with which I cannot help sympathizing."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ In the absence of efficient metropolitan reform, local British administrators had to respond to such threats. Peter Burroughs, "Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170-97; Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815-1914* (London: Penguin Random House Books, 2016), 225-6.

⁶⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay quoted in D. Woodruff, "Expansion and Migration," in *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 349-410 (especially 404-5). See also Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Rebellion of 1857*, ed. C. A. Bayly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Macaulay's sense of universal condemnation among Britons was not exaggerated. Richard Cobden, a critic of Britain's Indian empire, seized the opportunity to point out the futility of trying to civilize "a people which has shown itself, after a century of contact with us, to be capable of crimes which would revolt any savage tribe of whom we read in Dr. Livingstone's narrative." It was, he believed, useless to send "red coats as well as black to Christianize [them]," since for better or worse "Hindustan must be ruled by those who live on that side of the globe." Nevertheless, Cobden claimed, the mutiny had to be "put down ... in justice to the peaceable population, who are at the mercy of the armed mutineers." Two months later Cobden reiterated these sentiments to John Blight. Although he attributed the cruelties to the savagery of the Sepoy mutineers, he blamed British colonial policy inspiring their "feeling of alienation," and for using the Indian people "for their own obvious and conscious degradation" and as "instruments of their own humiliation." Among the examples Cobden raised was that "*nigger*" was a "common epithet applied to our fellow countrymen in Hindostan."⁶⁷ William H. Flower would later claim that the indiscriminate application of this epithet was rooted in a misunderstanding of the racial classifications he and his colleagues were working on. He argued that only the sustained comparative study of human remains would be able to assign each race to its proper place. It is clear then, that not all observers of racial conflict believed in the inevitability of indigenous extinction. However, most had to acknowledge that arguments for cohabitation were becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

⁶⁷ Richard Cobden to Mr. Ashworth, Midhurst, 16 June 1857, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, vol. 2 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 669-672 (especially 670-1); Richard Cobden to John Blight, 24 August 1857, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, vol. 2 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 672-7 (especially 672-3).

The maligned anatomist Robert Knox had long been sensitive to the growing tensions of the 1840s and 1850s, and to him, they seemed proof of the inevitable struggle for life between the human races.⁶⁸ “Race is everything,” he pronounced in 1850, “literature, science, art, in a word, civilization, depend on it.”⁶⁹ Everywhere, racial hatred seemed to spill over into war. Like Prichard’s obituarist, Knox had become convinced that he was witnessing “the war of race.”⁷⁰ Marginalized, Knox’s work came to synthesize and disperse emerging ideas about the physical and mental differences between the human races, the inevitability of racial conflict, and the extinction of the weaker (“darker”) races. Knox’s latent polygenism, too, historians have shown, remained influential in the sciences of man in 1850s-1860s.⁷¹ Unlike Charles Lyell, Knox drew strength from a growing radicalism in Scottish society. In the 1820s and early 1830s artisans, shopkeepers and merchants increasingly challenged political and clerical authority. The Chartist Patrick Matthew and the phrenologist Henry Watson, for example, were attracted to the French materialist notion that matter contained the potential for life and that animal life developed by

⁶⁸ Although he had taught at the anatomy theater of John Barclay, one of the most popular private anatomy schools in Edinburgh, in the 1820s, his professional marginality after 1830 was affected by his involvement in the crimes of William Burke and William Hare in 1827-8, who in order to supply the increasing demand for cadavers for dissection in the Scottish medical community, resorted to helping the course of nature by killing sixteen individuals. See Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 131-58; Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Lisa Rosner, *The Anatomy Murders* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomist Anatomist's: An Experimental Discipline in Enlightenment Europe* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

⁶⁹ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 13. See also James Cowles Prichard, “Anniversary Address for 1848, to the Ethnological Society of London on the Recent Progress of Ethnology.,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol. 2 (1850), 119-49 (especially 147).

⁷¹ Fritz Rehbock has shown that despite his marginal status in the medical community, Knox exerted considerable influence by training naturalists. See Fritz Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists: Themes in Early Nineteenth-Century British Biology* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1983); and Evelyne Richards, “The Moral Anatomy of Robert Knox: The Interplay between Biological and Social Thought in Victorian Scientific Naturalism,” *Journal for the History of Biology*, vol. 22 (1989), 373-436.

natural laws.⁷² This scientific iconoclasm translated itself into a social and political radicalism that was anticlerical and democratic, characteristics that naturally appealed to an already ostracized Knox.⁷³

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, Knox had lost much of radical and democratic edge. He now espoused a profoundly racist line of thinking in anatomical and physiological terms, with clear polygenist overtones. He believed in the original unity of humanity but suggested that the human family had historically developed into “many distinct species,” with marked physical and psychological differences separating the “races of men.”⁷⁴ By the second edition of *The Races of Men* (1862), Knox had become convinced that some of these races were “entitled to the name of species.”⁷⁵ Historian Evelyne Richards has argued that Knox’s turn away from the influence of environmentalism and the mutability of species reflected his growing dissatisfaction with the subversive social implications of Lamarck’s self-evolving

⁷² Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 60.

⁷³ As historians Cooter and Shapin have suggested, the phrenologist movement gained considerable support among the commercial classes in Edinburgh, who wished to participate in scientific debates as well as political power. Although phrenologists like George Combe and Henry Watson were suspicious of the radical environmentalist bent of French materialism and British exponents of it, they were attracted to the idea of a body and mind bound by the laws of nature. Roger J. Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1984); Steven Shapin, “Homo Phrenologicus: Anthropological Perspectives on a Historical Problem,” in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. B. Barnes and Steven Shapin (London: Sage, 1979), 41-67; and “Phrenological Knowledge and the Social Structure of Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh,” *Annals of Science*, vol. 32 (1975), 219-43.

⁷⁴ His ideas about the fixity of species did not preclude variation; instead, they embodied it within the physical structure of the embryo, which provided for “the type of all the races of men.” Robert Knox, *Races*, 9-23, 52, 66-7, 107, 145-7, 296-8, 301, 564; “Some Remarks on the Aztecque and Bosjieman Children, now Being Exhibited in London, and on the Races to which they are Presumed to Belong,” *Lancet*, vol. 65: (1855), 357-60 (especially 357-8); “Introduction to Inquiries into the Philosophy of Zoology,” *Lancet*, vol. 65 (1855), 625-7 (especially 626); “Contributions to the Philosophy of Zoology, with Special Reference to the Natural History of Man,” *Lancet*, vol. 66 (1855), 24-6, 45-6, 68-71, 162-4, 186-8, 216-18 (especially 25-6, 45).

⁷⁵ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Influence of Race Over the Destinies of Nations* (London: H. Renshaw, 1862), 591.

nature. He singled out the idea that one could change man by controlling his social environment, denying, for example, that sanitation and welfare would produce noticeable and lasting results.⁷⁶

Knox was one of those observers who believed the extinction of indigenous races was not only inevitable but desirable. His observations on the “races of man” had been made possible by the information and raw materials collected during European voyages of exploration and conquest, some of which he had collected himself.⁷⁷ As a result, he held a particularly pessimistic view of the future of indigenous races. He believed that the intellectually and morally inferior “dark races” would inevitably become extinct at the hands of the superior European. This inevitable outcome, or “sure extinction” as he called it, had already taken place: “Already, in a few years, we have cleared Van Diemen’s Land of every human aboriginal.” Soon the indigenous men and women of Australia and New Zealand would follow. “There is no denying the fact,” he poured scorn onto his countrymen, “that the Saxon, call him by what name you will, has a perfect horror for his darker brethren.”⁷⁸ That “horror,” Knox added, compelled him to seek everywhere “the extermination of the dark races of men - the aborigines - the men of the desert and of the forest.”⁷⁹ Attuned to the unfavorable assessment of Mayhew and Engels, Knox believed that the Celtic races, too, were doomed to a “darkening future.”⁸⁰ Given the times, Knox’s notion of a “war of races” proved a resilient one. Historians have revealed that Knox’s pessimism reverberated in the works of liberal and radical evolutionists of later decades.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Richards, “The Moral Anatomy of Robert Knox,” 373-436; Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 73-4.

⁷⁷ See chapter Five.

⁷⁸ Knox, *Races*, 153.

⁷⁹ North and South America, Central Africa, Australia, New Zealand, “the field of extermination” before the “Saxon, Celtic and Sarmatian races” was too large to comprehend. Knox, *Races*, 153.

⁸⁰ Knox, *Races*, 216.

⁸¹ Richards, “The Moral Anatomy of Robert Knox,” 373-436; Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 248-323; George W. Stocking, Jr., “What’s in a Name? The

Knox's commitment to the physical, intellectual and moral inferiority of the "dark" races, continuous racial conflict, and the inevitable extinction of inferior races found almost unanimous support in James Hunt's Anthropological Society of London. Hunt himself later acknowledged his indebtedness to Robert Knox, whom he heralded as a hero against those "imposters" who denied the significance of race.⁸² Moreover, Hunt mobilized collectors to secure the precious scientific knowledge on the verge of disappearing forever – and along with it, the remains of the indigenous dead. During the 1860s, Hunt's Society quickly became the standard bearer of physical anthropology in Britain, after he left the Ethnological Society of London to form his own learned society.⁸³ Initially a member of the Ethnological Society of London Prichard had founded in 1843, Hunt clashed with the humanitarian faction of the Ethnological Society, represented by the Quakers Hodgkin and Christy, over the publication of a series of engravings of inhabitants of Sierra Leone.⁸⁴ A rupture was inevitable given Hunt's virulent rejection of monogenism. In 1863, he argued that the "Negro" was a distinct species, closer to apes than

Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)," *Man*, vol. 6 (1971), 369-90; and *Victorian Anthropology*, 238-73; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 46.

⁸² In 1868, Hunt said: "Let us call in an anthropological doctor. Let Dr. Knox instruct us from his grave." Knox's biographer, Charles Carter Blake, similarly recognized the influence of this "great master" on "our study of the races of man." The term "imposters" is Knox's own. James Hunt, "The President's Address [at the Annual Meeting, 1 January 1867]," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 5 (1867), xlv-lxx (especially lviii); "Knox on the Celtic Race," *Anthropological Review*, vol. 6 (1868), 191; see also his "On the Application of the Principle of Natural Selection to Anthropology," *Anthropological Review*, vol. 4 (1866), 320-40 (especially 336); Charles Carter Blake, "The Life of Dr. Knox," *Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1871), 332-8.

⁸³ Historians have shown that British anthropology emerged in the 1850s and 1860s as the scientific alternative to humanitarian ethnology. I am indebted for this and the following paragraph on the history of the Anthropological Institute to the work of George Stocking and Ter Ellington. George W. Stocking, Jr., "What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)," *Man*, New Series, vol. 6, no. 3 (September 1971), 369-390; *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 238-273; and Ter Ellington, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2001), 239-89.

⁸⁴ Hunt recounts that Robert Knox had been "black-balled" from the Ethnological Society in 1855, only to be elected an Honorary Fellow in 1858, indicating the turn in fortunes of the Quaker faction within the society. See James Hunt, "On the Origin of the Anthropological Review and Its Connection With the Anthropological Society," *Anthropological Review*, vol. 6 (1868), 431-42 (especially 433).

Europeans. “The Negro’s Place in Nature” was his most polemical contribution to the debate. He echoed the position broadly shared by members of the Society that because of their mental inferiority, “Negroes” would benefit more from slavery in the Confederate States of America than from freedom in Sierra Leone.⁸⁵ Hunt drew on the evidence presented by the most prominent physical anthropologists in Britain (Lawrence and Knox), France (Gobineau and Broca), and the United States (Morton and Nott).

Hunt wasted no time in proclaiming the society’s commitment to physical anthropology. He rejected the problem of human origins as beyond empirical resolution, best left to “those who like to waste their time and energies on so profitless a subject.” Instead, he suggested that anthropologists apply themselves “merely to classify man as he now exists, or has existed, since the historical period.” This classification was to be based on anatomical and physiological evidence, especially “the form of the cranium.”⁸⁶ In that same year, he seemed to contradict himself, expressing doubts as to whether craniology could constitute an “absolute test of the intellectual power of any race.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Hunt’s commitment to anatomical evidence remained strong throughout his career. In 1867 Hunt called for renewed efforts to record the histories of those peoples on the verge of extinction. The direction Hunt took anthropology in illustrates the extent to which “preservation” and “salvage,” rather than protection and

⁸⁵ Hunt once again sought to lock horns with Huxley by borrowing the title from his 1863 work on man as a natural subject. The paper’s title, “On the Negro’s Place in Nature,” was a direct reference to Huxley’s *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (1863), whose monogenic, evolutionist conclusions Hunt rigorously rejected. James Hunt, “On the Negro’s Place in Nature,” *Memoirs of the Anthropological Society*, vol. 1 (1863), 1-64 (especially 51-7).

⁸⁶ Although his writings overwhelmingly confirm that Hunt was a polygenist, he was often dismissive of the question. Hunt, “The President’s Address,” xlvi; “On Anthropological Classification,” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 1 (1863), 381-2 (especially 382).

⁸⁷ Hunt, “On the Negro’s Place in Nature,” 13.

improvement, had become the chief motives behind the science of man.⁸⁸ Their increase in British collections shows that the remains of the indigenous dead were part of the “data” salvaged from vanishing peoples. An examination of the accession records of human skulls to the Hunterian Museum by the Anthropological Institute in 1879 suggests that an overwhelming majority of the skulls came into its collections during the 1860s and 1870s.⁸⁹

Not everyone at the Society’s meetings remained silent upon hearing Hunt’s racist diatribes. After hearing Hunt’s remarks in 1863, the Reverend J. Dingle raised objections to Hunt’s “arbitrary and haphazard propositions” about the “Negro.” Dingle looked in vain “for more impartiality, and a deeper sense of responsibility, in propounding doctrines which aim to cut off a large part of the human family from the common rights of humanity.” Moreover, Dingle continued, such propositions “have become stale in the service of avarice and tyranny, having been in use now for a century or more to justify the most outrageous oppression, and to palliate the most disgusting cruelty.”⁹⁰ Humanitarian critiques had not disappeared completely, though they had lost influence among anthropologists. Among the Society’s overwhelmingly polygenist and racist membership, Dingle’s objections fell on deaf ears. In the lion’s den, the conscience of this religious critic was outmatched by the racial superiority of his peers.

As he sought to essentialize human difference in physical structures, Hunt sought to incorporate opposing opinions in the diseased structure of his opponents’ bodies. Everyone who did not agree with his conclusions, Hunt proclaimed, suffered from “negromania,” “religious

⁸⁸ Similar arguments are again employed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as genome projects and pharmaceutical companies try to harvest DNA sequences from previously isolated populations. See the conclusion to this dissertation.

⁸⁹ This trend is also visible in collections at the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons and the British Museum. For a more detailed analysis of the circulation of human remains, see Chapter Two. RCS-MUS/7/8/9, 1879 (?), Manuscript List of Skull Obtained from the Anthropological Society in 1879; and RCS-MUS/7/8/10, n.d., Catalogue of Skulls of the Various Races of Man in the Collection of the Anthropological Institute.

⁹⁰ James Hunt, “On the Negro’s Place in Nature,” xxix-xxx.

mania,” or “the rights-of-man mania” Men suffering from the first disease “you can no longer reason with,” he claimed. Those who had been afflicted with the second suffered from “arrested brain development” or “the early closing of one or more of the sutures.” Those suffering from the third affliction experienced “more or less defective reasoning power” and “a want of harmony between the organs of sense and expression - between the brain and the face.”⁹¹ One “radical” who provoked Hunt’s ire was the political economist John Stuart Mill, who had frequently voiced his opposition to slavery and the oppression of women, as well as his support for democratic principles and equality.⁹²

But Hunt and Mill had more in common than either perhaps realized. Both recognized the disappearance of indigenous peoples taking place in their time and both saw in their extinction a cause for optimism. Moreover, if some were simply recording this inevitable process, others, like Hunt and Mill, appeared to be calling for the annihilation of indigenous races as a necessary step towards the development of a uniform human species. Extinction, the political economist believed, was a consequence of the gradual development of civilization among indigenous peoples through contact with Europeans. “Since both the natural varieties of mankind, and the

⁹¹ In addressing a Manchester crowd of anthropologists in 1867, Hunt borrowed the term “negromania” from the American polygenist John Campbell. Hunt also referred to those denying the evidence provided by anthropology as suffering from “ANTHROPOLOGICOPHOBIA,” a rabies-like affliction, which makes the sufferer “not only bark and growl, but sometimes attempt to bite.” James Hunt, “The Manchester Anthropological Society,” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 5 (1867), 1-27 (especially 17); “President’s Address, [at the Annual Meeting, 1 January 1867],” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 5 (1867), xlv-lxx (especially lviii-lix). See also John Campbell, *Negro mania: Being and Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Man* (Philadelphia: Campbell and Power, 1851).

⁹² Mill’s case of “rights-of-man mania,” Hunt believed, was “perhaps the most painful ever recorded,” for “it demonstrates to what absurdities the greatest minds may be driven when thus afflicted.” By race he meant anatomy; by culture he meant improvement. See for example, John Stuart Mill, “The Negro Question,” *Frazer’s magazine*, vol. 41 (January 1850), 25-31; James Hunt, “President’s Address, [at the Annual Meeting, 1 January 1867],” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 5 (1867), xlv-lxx (especially lix-lx); “Race in Legislation and Political Economy,” *Anthropological Review*, vol. 4 (1866), 113-35 (especially 126). See also Ter Ellington, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 256-7.

original diversities of local circumstances, are much less considerable than the points of agreement,” he wrote in 1843, “there will naturally be a certain degree of uniformity in the progressive development of man and of his work.” The “various states of society now existing in different regions of the earth,” Mill believed, showed that such uniformity was increasing alongside the spread of civilization, as the peoples of the earth interacted with one another.⁹³

One could disagree with Knox’s and Hunt’s racialist theories, particularly their polygenism, but it was hard to ignore the empirical reality of the extinction of indigenous races. Moreover, even their most ardent opponents seem to have agreed that the vanishing of the weak before the onslaught of strong was a matter of biological destiny. As we have seen, evidence of “the wide and repeated exterminations of [earth’s] inhabitants” regularly confronted Darwin during his voyage on the *Beagle*.⁹⁴ Darwin’s shipmate John Lort Stokes agreed and shed light on the “moral responsibility on the part of the whites” for the disappearance of indigenous peoples. “Their destiny is accomplished,” he wrote, “all we can do is to soothe their declining years, to provide that they shall advance gently, surrounded by all the comforts of civilization, and by all the consolations of religion, to their inevitable doom; and to draw a great lesson from their melancholy history.”⁹⁵ Darwin agreed with Stokes, but questioned whether one could ever truly understand the mechanism behind the disappearance of certain races. “We need not marvel at

⁹³ George Stocking has argued that “much of Victorian sociocultural evolutionism was implicit in Mill’s program,” but that “it was not yet evolutionist in the biological sense.” John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (New York, 1850 [1843]), 574-8. See also George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1987), 41.

⁹⁴ Despite considerable evidence to support his conclusions, for example in South America (109-10), Tahiti (357) and Polynesia, and Australia (375), Darwin also admitted that some indigenous populations appeared to be thriving against all odds. In Tierra del Fuego, for example, Darwin observed that “there is no reason to believe that the Fuegians decrease in number.” Darwin, *Voyage*, 199.

⁹⁵ John Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia; with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle, in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43 ...*, 2 vols. (London: T. and W. Boone, 1846), vol. 1: 263-4; vol. 2: 450-1, 463-4, 470.

extinction,” he wrote in his *Origins of Species*, “if we must marvel, let it be at our presumption in imagining for a moment that we understand the many complex contingencies, on which the existence of each species depends.”⁹⁶ War, disease, spirits, and the destruction of their customs were some of the contingencies threatening the very lives of indigenous peoples wherever Europeans went. Humanity was turning on itself. In September 1860, Darwin wrote to Charles Lyell, approving of the geologist’s idea of “man now keeping down any new man.” As they fanned across the globe, Darwin replied, “the white man is ‘improving off the face of the earth’ even races nearly his equal.”⁹⁷ Two decades later, Darwin’s belief in the ultimate extinction of indigenous peoples had only grown stronger and more acute. In a letter to W. Graham in July 1881, Darwin predicted that “at no very distant date . . . an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world.”⁹⁸

Alfred Russel Wallace and Thomas Henry Huxley shared Darwin’s sense of loss at the disappearance of indigenous peoples in the Pacific. Nor did they leave any doubt as to who was responsible. Huxley too looked forward with regret to the changes that would transform the “Paradise of the Lotus-Eaters,” New Guinea, and its inhabitants, who lived “in harmony with the soft murmur of the graceful feathery leaves of the cocoa-nut trees, trembling in the lap of the gentle monsoon, with the surf breaking in athwart the deep blue sea, not in loud and angry rebellion against iron-bound shores, but in lazy play with the outstretched arms of the coral.” All of this beauty and tranquility, Huxley believed, “shall be defaced by the obtrusion of the

⁹⁶ Charles Darwin, *On the Origins of Species By Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. Edward O. Wilson (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006 [1859]), 654.

⁹⁷ Letter from Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, 23 September 1860, in Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1887), 341-344 (quote from 344).

⁹⁸ Letter from Charles Darwin to W. Graham, 3 July 1861, in Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. 1, 284-6 (especially 286).

Polynesian ‘scourge of God’ - the white man.” The only “blessings of civilization” that the “dark races” would encounter, were “labour, care, drunkenness, disease, and ultimate subjection and extinction.” The progress of civilization held only the promise of disappearance. The Papuans would find only “seven worse” devils than their own “in the train of the white man, his commerce, and his missionaries.”⁹⁹ Wallace envisioned the same outcome. “if the tide of colonization should be turned to new Guinea, then there can be little doubt of the early extinction of the Papuan race,” he wrote in 1869. Resistant to European progress, which Wallace described as “national slavery” or “domestic servitude,” this indigenous race “must disappear before the white man as surely as do the wolf and the tiger.”¹⁰⁰ The extinction of species and the extinction of human races were part of the same natural process.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the struggle for life between Europeans and non-Europeans seemed to be heralding the extinction of indigenous peoples everywhere. In the second half of that century, even a cultural anthropologist like Edward Burnett Tylor or an archaeologist like Augustus Lane-For Pitt-Rivers, who were much more interested in indigenous artefacts than indigenous bodies, could not ignore the devastating consequences of imperial expansion on indigenous populations. For Tylor, their disappearance was merely the natural outcome “when a rude but strong race overcomes a cultivated but weak race.”¹⁰¹ Scientists like

⁹⁹ Thomas Henry Huxley, “Science at Sea,” *Westminster Review*, vol. 61 (April 1854), 98-119 (especially 118-9).

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Russell Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utan, and the Bird of Paradise*, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1869), vol. 2, 282.

¹⁰¹ In 1865, Edward Burnett Tylor claimed to have witnessed “the disappearance of savage arts in the presence of a higher civilization.” This, however, he believed to be a positive effect of the colonial encounter, one “which must not be confounded with the physical and moral decline of so many tribes under the oppression and temptation of civilized men.” To even the most casual observer, Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers was convinced, “there can be little doubt that in a few years all the most barbarous races will have disappeared from the earth, or will have ceased to preserve their native arts.” Edward Burnett Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (London: John Murray, 1865), 184; and Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, *The Evolution of Culture, and Other Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906[1867]), 54.

Lyell, Darwin, Huxley and Wallace had succeeded in “naturalizing” the extinction of human races. The eugenics movement of the late nineteenth century was born out of this idea, though it reversed the outcome of this process and embraced the ideas of Hunt and Mill that the progress of the human species might require human intervention.¹⁰² Under the umbrella of civilization, the strong were being overrun, bred out of existence by the weak.

But the struggle for life between the strong and the weak was playing out most violently on the margins of the British empire. Colonization was rapidly producing the winners and losers of history. As George Stocking concludes, on the eve of the colonization of Africa, British anthropology, like its continental counterparts, was ready to provide European expansionists with “a portion of ideological motive power,” which half a century later would become “a part of the white man’s ideological burden.”¹⁰³ For those interested in classifying the human difference, however, time was running out. Collectors soon fanned out across the globe to salvage what information was left, and with it, all that was left of the peoples themselves.

The Indigenous Body Regained

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mounting empirical evidence concerning the impending extinction of indigenous races in the wake of European imperial expansion spurred collectors into action. By the final decades of the nineteenth century, some collectors of indigenous remains accepted the extinction of some indigenous peoples as not only possible, but, in some cases, inevitable. Rooted in the idea that earth’s history had been shaped by a struggle for life, the notion of a “war of races,” increasingly understood in terms of a racial biology, only

¹⁰² Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London: Henry S. King, 1877[1874]), 353; Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1869), 344-5.

¹⁰³ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 272-3.

intensified the search for the lost indigenous body. The mid-nineteenth century appears to have been crucial for the development of collections of indigenous remains in Britain. Collectors from St. Vincent in the Caribbean to the Chatham Islands in the southern Pacific began sending the remains of the indigenous dead for no other reason than that they believed these races would soon become extinct. In February 1882, Allen Lewis, a resident of St. Vincent forwarded the skull of a Carib to William Flower at the Hunterian. He was pleased to be able to do so, since “the Carib race are nearly extinct in this island.” The specimen was remarkable for the customary flattening of the forehead. The few Carib who were left, often dressed in European clothes, and Lewis informed Flower that very often “the only way you know them is from the flattened features.”¹⁰⁴ Convinced of the value of the specimens he was offering William Henry Flower at the Hunterian Museum in 1869, a local collector named Samuel Cobb, believed that “a few more years will probably see the entire extinction of the New Zealander.”¹⁰⁵ The same urgency underpinned the offer of a “a Maori specimen of unmixed descent” to the Hunterian in March 1880. The donor had acquired it at Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1868, and now wished to dispose of it since “at the above named date there were but very few existing Maoris in the middle island and the race must there be all but extinct by this time.”¹⁰⁶ Four years before and three hundred miles to the East, the Moriori, the indigenous inhabitants of the Chatham Islands, were suffering the same fate. Again, a collector offered one of their skulls that he had recently

¹⁰⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 119, f. 3-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Allan Lewis to William H. Flower, Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 28 February 1882.

¹⁰⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, p.17, f. 2, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Samuel Cobb to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 6 April 1869.

¹⁰⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 83, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from G. Garrick Steet to [?] Holden, 5 March 1880.

dug up from a peat on Pitt Island. He thought it “worthy of interest from the from the fact that the Aborigines are now almost, if not entirely, extinct.”¹⁰⁷

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the extinction of indigenous populations described and foretold by observers in Britain and elsewhere underwrote their rationale for possessing the indigenous body. In 1839 James Cowles Prichard, for example, told an audience of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) that the extinction of primitive peoples was only a matter of time. He urged his audience to imagine how great the loss to science and humanity would be if such valuable psychological, physiological and philological information would disappear into oblivion along with its living human carriers. If the Christian nations were loath to intervene in the extinction of the human races, he said, “it is of the greatest importance, in a philosophical point of view, to obtain much more extensive information than we now possess of their physical and moral characters.”¹⁰⁸ Almost three decades later, Prichard’s fiercest rival, Jams Hunt, expressed a similar sentiment, though his call lacked Prichard’s humanitarian urgency. He called on members of the Anthropological Society to finance portraits of African races to preserve as much data as possible on their physical appearance. “Shall the form of a river or the height of a mountain be investigated at the expense of thousands of pounds,” he asked the members, “while the form and height of such fleeting objects such as men and women be lost for ever, through our apathy?”¹⁰⁹ The members of the BAAS agreed with

¹⁰⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 40, f. 2-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Anderson Critchett to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Museum, 4 July 1876.

¹⁰⁸ In order to facilitate this, the BAAS authorized the publication of an ethnographic questionnaire to be circulated among travelers, colonial officials, surgeons and medical personnel abroad. Prichard was not the only ethnologist to recognize the imminent extinction of non-European races. Crawford and Hunt grew apart towards the end of the 1850s, due to the former’s monogenist and antislavery stances. Alfred Russel Wallace opposed Crawford’s comments. Prichard, “On the Extinction of Human Races,” 169-70;

¹⁰⁹ Hunt’s friend and supporter in the Anthropological Society John Beddoe had similar doubts as to whether “that noble race of barbarians, the Maori, can be raised to the level of our civilisation, or whether they are destined utterly

Prichard, and a committee immediately began working on a questionnaire to assist ethnographers in the field. If the indigenous could not be saved, their demise could perhaps be recorded.

The motives behind this survey were both moral and mundane. Not only did it seek to preserve valuable and vanishing knowledge, it also sought to secure Britain's leading role in the science of man. "Britain, in her extensive colonial possessions and commerce, and in the number and intelligence of her naval officers," the committee claimed, "possesses unrivalled facilities for the elucidation of the whole subject; and it would be a stain on her character, as well as a loss to humanity, were she to allow herself to be left behind by other nations in this inquiry." The list included 89 questions on topics such as physical appearance, language, lifestyles, architecture, art, geography, demographics, society, and religion. Twelve of these focused on native anatomy, asking travelers to take careful measurements of height, size of the head, length of extremities as well as an accurate description of the head, including "the corresponding development of moral and intellectual character." The committee also encouraged travelers to collect, or at the very least examine, skulls, and to obtain a view of the contour and width of the head from above.¹¹⁰ From the onset, then, national pride rode the crest of humanitarian concerns. France, Germany and the United States were proving themselves avid collectors of such human materials, and if Britain wished to safeguard her hard-won dominance in the world, it would need to compete with these rivals in the collection of indigenous remains.

to perish." Hunt, "The President's Address," liv. See also John Beddoe in James Hunt, "The Manchester Anthropological Society," 20.

¹¹⁰ Charles Darwin et al., ed., "Varieties of human race: Queries respecting the human race, to be addressed to travellers and others. Drawn up by a Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, appointed in 1839," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* [at the Plymouth meeting, 1839], vol. 11 (1841), 332-339 (quote from 333).

Yet, despite such fierce competition between European and American institutions of learning, there was a prolific exchange of ideas, resources and objects. Prichard's earliest questionnaire from 1839, for example, was indebted to similar publications from members of Louis Francois Jauffret's *Société des Observateurs de l'homme*, the "world's first anthropological society," and its successor, the Anthropological Society of Paris.¹¹¹ Georges Cuvier outlined the goals of this fledgling society in his *Note instructive* from 1799.¹¹² Indigenous anatomical specimens, especially a complete skeleton, he remarks, were "infinitely precious" objects for the study of human difference, and he asks travelers, whether as witnesses or participants in battles, to peruse battlefields and burial grounds "in any manner whatever" for these valuable resources. The note also advised collectors to "carefully" record all available information about the individual.¹¹³

In the decades following Cuvier's and Prichard's manuals, there was no shortage of manuals in Britain advising travelers on how to contribute to the budding science of man. In 1851, Prichard drafted similar recommendations in a manual on scientific inquiry for the Lord

¹¹¹ This society counted among its members answered were the biologists Cuvier, Lamarck, and Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, the physicians Cabanis and Pinel, Fourcroy, the explorers Bougainville and Levaillant, the de Tracy and Sicard. See George W. Stocking, "French Anthropology in 1800," *Isis*, vol. 55, no. 2 (June 1964), 134-150 (quote from 134).

¹¹² Another influence may have been Joseph Marie de Gérando's *Considération sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages* (Paris, 1800). De Gérando was particularly disappointed in the authenticity of earlier observations, claiming that past observers "transmit to us bizarre descriptions which amuse the idle curiosity of the vulgar, but which furnish no information useful for the scientific spirit." The solution, he suggests, is adherence to the three key phases of the natural historical method: close observation, comparison and formulation of general laws. For a translation of de Gérando's instructions, see *The observation of savage peoples*, transl. F. C. T. Moore, with a preface by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), quote from 159.

¹¹³ Cuvier emphasizes key anatomical features such as the proportion of the cranium to the face, the projection of the upper and lower jaws, the breadth of the cheekbones, the shape of the eye-sockets. He stressed these characteristics because he believed they constituted indicators of the moral and intellectual faculties of these foreign people. Georges Cuvier, "Note instructive sur les recherches à faire relativement aux différences anatomiques des diverses races d'hommes," in *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française: les mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII*, ed. Jean Copans and Jean Jamin (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1994 [1799]), 70-1.

Commissioners of the Admiralty. Now, he encouraged travelers to bring home “a collection of skulls” as “the most authentic testimony” of the “principal characters distinguishing the several tribes of the human family.” If that proved impossible, he considered plaster casts the “best substitute.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, in 1874, the updated manual of the BAAS advised that skulls and skeletons “should, if possible, be brought to England, where they can be measured and examined by experts.”¹¹⁵

By the final quarter of the century, collecting and circulating human remains had become a crucial aspect of the science of human difference. Moreover, such calls for human specimens increasingly depended on and advocated a vision of a global network of collectors and correspondents. Speaking to an audience of anthropologists at the Anthropological Institute in 1871, Charles Carter Blake expressed his confidence in the success of the newly constituted Anthropological Institute, the “uniting of two ancient families—in other words, the amalgamation of two societies which always should have been one.” All that remained to be achieved, Blake commented, was to extend and mature “our system of establishing local secretaries and collectors over the globe, to take that position which the high importance of our studies claims.”¹¹⁶ If European expansion was causing the destruction of indigenous peoples everywhere, the colonial connections that were developing in the wake of the entry of European soldiers and merchants could also provide the means to salvage what could not be saved.

¹¹⁴ James Cowles Prichard, “Ethnology,” in *A Manual of Scientific Enquiry, Prepared for Use in Her Majesty’s Navy; and Travellers in General*, ed. John F. W. Herschel (London: John Murray, 1851), 438-58 (quote from 441).

¹¹⁵ John Beddoe drafted the section on “Form and Size” along with the majority of sections. John Beddoe et al., *Notes and queries on anthropology: for the use of travellers and residents in uncivilized lands* (London: Edward Stanford, 1874), 4.

¹¹⁶ Charles Carter Blake, “On Anthropological Collections from the Holy Land. By Richard F. Burton (late her Majesty’s Consul at Damascus), With Notes on the Human Remains. By Dr. C. Carter Blake, F.G.S.” Paper read at the meeting of the Anthropological Institute on 20 November 1871. Reprinted in Richard F. Burton, *Unexplored Syria* (London: Tinsley Borthers, 1872), vol. 2, 228.

By the beginning of the 1880s, however, the appeal of physical anthropology in Britain was showing signs of waning and William Henry Flower, curator of the Hunterian Museum, had to remind anthropologists at home of the significance of collections of indigenous remains. “In looking for proofs of consanguinity of descent from common ancestors,” Flower advised, “we must first look at their physical or anatomical characters, next to their moral and intellectual characters, . . . , and lastly, as affording hints, often valuable in aid of our researches, but rarely to be depended upon, unless corroborated from other sources, to language, religion, and social customs.” At the same time, Flower issued a call to his audience for the collection and preservation of evidence of physical difference between the human races, “as we live in an age in which, in a far greater degree than any previous one, the destruction of races, both by annihilation and absorption, is going on.” This evidence, Flower suggested, could include “photographs, models, anatomical specimens, skeletons or parts of skeletons, with their histories carefully registered.” Despite his experiences as curator of the Hunterian Museum, Flower believed that only “an institution commanding the resources of a nation” such as the British Museum could bring together such a collection.¹¹⁷

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the extinction of one specific human race testified to the urgency of Flower’s words: the indigenous men and women of Van Diemen’s Land, also known as Tasmanians. Observers from Darwin to Knox to Wallace had described and anticipated the disappearance of this “primitive” indigenous race. In January 1836, the *Beagle* made port in Hobart Town, Van Diemen’s Land. The indigenous men and women, Darwin remarked, had all been removed to an island in Bass’s Straits “so that Van Diemen’s Land now enjoys the great advantage of being free from a native population.” Soon the world would be too.

¹¹⁷ William Henry flower, “Address [1881],” *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: John Murray, 1882), 682-9 (especially 684, 688).

If this “most cruel step” had not been taken, Darwin explained, the continuing resistance of that Tasmanians to “our overwhelming power” in the form of robbery, arson, and murder “sooner or later would have ended in their utter destruction.” In 1830, the colony was placed under martial law and settlers organized into bands to round up the remaining Tasmanians, much like “the great hunting-matches in India.” Their destruction, however, had already begun. While in 1835, at the time of their removal, their number consisted of 210 individuals, by 1842 there were just fifty-four left.¹¹⁸ From then on, their disappearance was swift. By 1869, that number had dwindled to almost zero. Wallace, as always, was clear about who was responsible. “If the Spaniards exterminated the natives of the West Indies, we have done the same thing in Tasmania,” he wrote.¹¹⁹ Britain now had its own Black Legend. Most of the accounts that described the disappearance of the Tasmanians, however, blamed the indigenous themselves. They were burdened by an innate inferiority which prevented them from either assimilating into the fold of European progress or resisting it outright. Their bones said as much. Here, in Van Diemen’s Land, extinction and racial conflict would determine the fate of indigenous remains.

The impending extinction of the Tasmanians invigorated the search for their remains in the 1850s and 1860s, a contributor to Henry Ling Roth’s *The Aborigines of Tasmania* (1899) explained: “It was only very shortly before the Tasmanians became extinct, that the importance of preserving their osteological remains, seems to have been recognized, and means taken to secure what specimens were still available.” At the time of writing, Roth believed the largest collection was to be found in the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London. Its storerooms held two complete skeletons and seventeen skulls, either donated to the

¹¹⁸ Darwin, *Voyage*, 384-5. For Knox’s assessment of the future of the Tasmanians, see an earlier quoted passage from Knox, *Races*, 153.

¹¹⁹ Alfred Russell Wallace, *The Wonderful Century; Its Successes and Its Failures* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), 392.

College or acquired along with Barnard Davis' collection in 1879-80. Among them was the skeleton of Bessy Clark, one of the very last Tasmanians, who had died at Oyster Cove in February 1867.¹²⁰ Morton Allport, a member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, had donated her skeleton, along with that of a male specimen, to the College in 1872.¹²¹ Most the other specimens, had arrived in the 1850s and 1860s.¹²² But Bessy Clark was not the last of her race. That was to be the lamentable fate of William Lanné a few years later.¹²³

Lanné (also spelled Lanney), or “King Billy,” as he was often called, died of cholera and dysentery in the hospital at Hobart Town on 3 March 1869. In the days and weeks following Lanné’s death, his remains became the object of an intense and vitriolic contest between William L. Crowther, a member of the RCS in London, and members of the Royal Society of Tasmania, including Dr. George Stokell and Morton Allport. Contemporary accounts and newspaper reports suggested that Lanné’s whole body had been appropriated in some manner. Historian Lyndall Ryan suggests that parts of his skin were used to make a tobacco pouch, a custom not uncommon

¹²⁰ J. G. Garson, “Osteology,” in Henry Ling Roth, ed., *The Aborigines of Tasmania* (Halifax, England: F. King & Sons, 1899), 191. James Bonwick recorded the last days and struggles of the Tasmanians in his *The Last of the Tasmanians: Or, The Black War of Van Diemen’s Land* (London: Sampson, Low, Son & Marston, 1870). Between pages 280-1. Bonwick provided a woodcut of Bessy taken from photograph by Mr. Woolley from 1866.

¹²¹ Flower, *Catalogue*, 198-9, no. 1096-7.

¹²² Two crania were part of John Hunter’s original collection and are listed simply as “Hunterian” specimens in the catalogue from 1853. Between 1809 and 1825, five more crania arrived at the College, of which three are recorded in Owen’s catalogue and two are mentioned in the manuscript accession records. Twelve others arrived between 1854 and 1864, including two from one of the few female donors of indigenous remains, Lady Jane Franklin, whom I briefly discuss in the Chapter Five. Owen, *Catalogue*, 826, no. 5324 and 5326; 825, no. 5322; 829, no. 5345 and no. 5321; 826-88, no. 5320, 5323, 5325, 5328, 5327, 5329, 5763, 5755. Flower, *Catalogue*, 200, no.1101-2; 203, no. 1110 and 1113A; 198, no. 1096 and 1098-9. See also RCS-MUS/3/1/3, no. 1082, 1817-22, Donation Book, Vol 3; and RCS-MUS/5/1/1, 89, 1800-1830, Museum Letter Book, Vol 1.

¹²³ William Lanné was only the last *male* Tasmanian in 1869. Seven years later, the last female Tasmanian, Trucannini, died in Hobart Town, fearing that the fate of her remains would be the same as Lanné’s. See Lynette Russell, “William Lanné’s Pipe: Reclaiming the “Last” Tasmanian Male,” in Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Rebecca Tillett, ed., *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 53-68 (especially 53-4). I am indebted to Russell’s account for much of the narrative of what happened to Lanné’s body after death.

in North America as well.¹²⁴ Similar rumors about trophy-taking persisted about Lanné's ears, nose, arms and feet, though some claimed that they had been taken to prevent them from being appropriated for collections in Europe.¹²⁵ The historian Helen MacDonald dissects this particularly toxic episode in the history of Tasmania in great detail. She suggests that the competing claims to Lanné's body cannot be properly understood without reference to political strife and professional envy.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, news of the death of Lanné induced the local surgeon William L. Crowther to offer his remains to the museum of the RCS. But the members of the Royal Society of Tasmania wanted Lanné's remains for their own collection. Later that night, against orders from the premier, Sir Richard Dry, that the body of Lanné's was not to be touched, his skull was taken from the hospital's dissecting room, replaced by that of another deceased individual to cover up the theft.¹²⁷ William L. Crowther was suspected and fired from his position as surgeon.

Though most of his bones would come to reside in the museum of the Tasmanian Royal Society in Hobart Town, Tasmania, his skull, along with two vertebrae, were stolen from the General Hospital there shortly after his death.¹²⁸ In March of 1869, Crowther informed Flower that he had not forgotten his promise to procure "for the College Museum a pair of skeletons of the aborigines of this Colony." In order to reassure Flower that his request was being dealt with,

¹²⁴ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St. Leonard's: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 217.

¹²⁵ Lynette Russell, "William Lanné's Pipe: Reclaiming the 'Last' Tasmanian Male," in *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming*, ed. Fear-Segal, Jacqueline and Rebecca Tillett (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), 53-65 (especially 55).

¹²⁶ Helen P. MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 136-182. See also Stefan Petrow, "The Last Man: The Mutilation of William Lanné in 1869 and its Aftermath," *Aboriginal History*, vol. 21 (1997), 108; and Tim Murray, "The Childhood of William Lanné: Contact Archaeology and Aboriginality in Tasmania," *Antiquity*, vol. 67, no. 259 (1993), 504-519.

¹²⁷ *Mercury* (27 March 1869), 3, col. 3.

¹²⁸ William Lanné's achievements in life have largely been overshadowed by this notorious episode of mutilation in the service of science. However, historian Lynette Russell reminds us that it is important to examine Lanné's life as a whaler and harpooner to look beyond colonial exploitation. See Russell, "William Lanné's Pipe," 53-65.

Crowther detailed the arrangements he had made with the Tasmanian colonial government to ensure his access to these human remains. He had been given assurances by “The Ministry,” whom he described as “not friends of my own,” that “every facility should be afforded for the carrying out of so praiseworthy an object” The plan he had proposed to the Colonial Secretary involved ordering sick Tasmanians to be admitted into hospital, of which he was an honorary surgeon, where upon their deaths, “their osseous remains could be procured without trouble to myself or repugnance to the feelings of their relatives.” An opportunity soon presented itself. A female Tasmanian arrived at the hospital and soon succumbed to her illness. Crowther appealed to the colonial government to make good on their promise, but the Royal Society of Tasmania acquired the remains instead, much “to my annoyance.” A little while later, another opportunity presented itself when Willian Lanné died in hospital, but again the influence of the Royal Society thwarted Crowther’s plans to procure the remains of a Tasmanian.

Crowther lamented that these human remains had become to object of a bitter political feud between himself and the “Royal Society clique,” who enjoyed the backing of the colonial government. However, his letter indicates that he did manage to secure the head illicitly, and the Colonial Secretary decided to remove Crowther “from [his] office of charity” soon after.¹²⁹ In April 1869, Crowther wrote to Flower with some newspaper articles, indicating that he had been the subject “of the most violent political attacks.”¹³⁰ Public opinion had turned against Crowther, with most colonists convinced that the remains should have remained interred as Christian customs demanded.

¹²⁹ Crowther’s handwriting is very poor, and I have not been able to reconstruct the narrative of his account in every detail. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 16, f. 2-6, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from William Lodewyk Crowther to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 27 March 1869

¹³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 16, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from William Lodewyk Crowther to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 April 1869.

In June 1869 William Flower responded to Crowther's letter of 22 April. He deplored "that your exertions in the cause of this Museum should have led to such unpleasant results." He hoped that soon popular passions would make room for scientific considerations. Flower lacked confidence in the ability of the public to see the benefits to science. "It is very unfortunate that such things should ever come upon the eye of the general public," he wrote to Crowther, since they "are quite unable to judge of the rights of the case, and have such strong prejudices." Since Crowther's last communication, Flower had received a formal request to return the remains to Tasmania. Flower informed the applicants that "no such head had been received" by the Hunterian. Moreover, he assured Crowther, "it does not appear that the applicant had any more property in the skull in question than you or anybody else."¹³¹ It is still unclear whether Crowther had actually sent the skull to the Hunterian Museum, but his sacrifices in the name of science were definitely noticed and he was made a fellow in 1873.¹³²

Two years later, in December 1871, the rumor that the Lanné's skull was part of the Hunterian collection was still circulating. Morton Allport, a prominent member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, offered Flower two complete Tasmanian skeletons, and he "would willingly give another perfect skeleton" for the "skull and two vertebrae of the of the last Tasmanian male aborigine" still believed to be in Flower's storeroom.¹³³ In that same year, Morton also sent the skeleton of an indigenous Tasmanian to the Royal Anthropological Institute.¹³⁴ Animosity between Crowther and Morton over Lanné's body had not yet cooled

¹³¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 16, f. 3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, to William Lodewyk Crowther, 18 June 1869.

¹³² RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 118, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Richard Ryther Steer Bowker (1815-1903) to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 11 February 1873.

¹³³ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 98, f. 3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Morton Allport, Hobart Town, to William Henry Flower, Curator at the Hunterian Museum, 29 December 1871.

¹³⁴ A70/1/4.1-2, RAI, 30 December 1871, letter from Morton Allport to J. F. Collingwood, Secretary of the Anthropological Society re the shipment of a case containing the skeleton a Tasmanian native.

down. When Crowther heard of Morton's offer, he addressed a letter to Flower, casting doubt over the authenticity of Morton's specimens. He had visited the burial grounds in Oyster Cave where Morton procured his specimens earlier and could find no more skulls. It was therefore highly unlikely Morton had been able to procure complete skeletons. Crowther, however, knew of another place and would send some genuine specimens soon.¹³⁵

The disappearance of an indigenous race increased the desirability of their remains, sparking fierce contests over who would be allowed to possess them. When these became increasingly scarce, like William Lanné's, collectors in Europe and Britain had to settle for reproductions such as plaster casts. When in 1876, Richard Owen at the British Museum heard that a collector had in his possession a cranial cast of "the now extinct race of the lowest type of Australian aborigines, viz., the Tasmanian one," he advised Albert Günther to implore with its owner to have a mold made so he could produce more. "If reasonably procurable in our Ethnological Sub Department of Zoology," Owen assured Günther, the item was "most desirable."¹³⁶ The owner of the plaster cast, a Mr. Audley Coote of Hobart Town, had presented the item to Günther as one-of-a-kind, "taken from the last Tasmanian." Coote considered it of great value and had it insured for £100.¹³⁷ This was an astronomical sum, since authentic

¹³⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 121, 2-3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from William Lodewyk Crowther to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 19 April 1873.

¹³⁶ The item in question was the unique plaster bust of William Lanné, the last Tasmanian. DF [ZOO/200/15, 101a, f. 1, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K. Letter from Richard Owen to Dr. A. Günther at the British Museum, 16 December 1879.

¹³⁷ Coote did not offer the specimens for sale. He simply wanted to know how much Günther would value the specimen. However, it was not uncommon at the time to write to collectors in Europe asking for the value of a specimen to determine whether an object was worth selling. DF [ZOO/200/15, 101, f. 1-2, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K. Letter from Audley[?] Coote to the British Museum, 6 October 1879.

remains of most indigenous races, even those on the verge of extinction, usually went for £8-10.¹³⁸ The last Tasmanian, it seems, was worth a princely sum.

Conclusion

The scientific investigation and classification of man matured at a time when the unity of humankind was being challenged by events at home and abroad. Exploration of unknown parts of the world, particularly in the South Pacific, continued to reveal new peoples, whose place in existing accounts of humanity was as unsettled as their appearances and customs were unsettling. In the arena of science, the expansion of geological time since Hutton, Cuvier and Lyell had cast a long shadow over Christian cosmogenies. In the 1850s and early 1860s, these changes continued to feed into a “crisis of faith” and a “crisis of liberalism.”¹³⁹ In the meantime, conflicts with increasingly resilient “savages” abroad and at home reshaped existing theories of “otherness.” The growing realization in the field, that the “other” was not so easily converted to Christianity, or brought into the fold of civilization, shook the confidence of colonizers abroad and imperialists back home. The various races of humanity, it seemed to many, were at war.

¹³⁸ In 1874, a C. C. Smith offered “2 or 3 skeletons of an extinct tribe of aboriginals” from Australia, for £10 each. In 1877, Henry A. Ward offered Günther “he complete skeleton of a Pawnee or Sioux Indian (I can learn certainly which),” which was “not at all easy to obtain” for \$70, or £14. DF [ZOO/]200/8, 227, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence Sm-Z. Letter from C. C. Smith to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 7 September 1874; DF [ZOO/]200/14, 588, f. 2, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from Henry A. Ward, U.S.A., to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 28 December 1877.

¹³⁹ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 121-2; Andrew Bank, “Losing Faith in the Civilizing Mission: The Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism at the Cape, 1840-60,” in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 100-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 364-83. Ronald Hyam has argued that there was a also a crisis in sexual relations. If previously sex between British men and native women had been tolerated, the nineteenth century witnessed a rejection of such intercourse. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the extinction of indigenous races made the idea that “race” was biology seem incontrovertible. Its appeal was not only rooted in the fact that it seemed to conform to and explain what was going on in the world. The growing number of reports detailing the extinction of indigenous peoples proved that natural processes in earth history were at work in human history as well. Moreover, biological explanations of human difference provided convincing explanations for the series of conflicts between Europeans and the non-European, or in the case of the Irish, European “other.” Finally, scientists had been successful in accumulating growing sets of empirical data and measurements to corroborate its conclusions.¹⁴⁰ Observers at home and abroad blamed war, disease and most importantly, the indigenous themselves. Moreover, imperial expansion, often called the “progress of civilization,” was cast as the contest between the strong and the weak. Classifiers of human difference frequently appealed to the extinction of indigenous men and women to encourage the collection of their remains. As indigenous passed into extinction half way across the world, collections across Europe and Britain sought to record their passing.

¹⁴⁰ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 46.

CHAPTER TWO

Bone Circuits

Introduction

The collections of indigenous bodies that were being accumulated in Britain and Europe by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shed light on the intimate connections between science, empire and globalization during this period. In 1795, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach sat down in his study at the University of Göttingen to finish the third edition of his work on the natural variety of humankind. The German anthropologist was not alone. Nature surrounded him, even within the walls of his university study. In fleeting moments between writing, his gaze was likely drawn to the collection of human skulls lining the wall.¹ He referred to them as the “assistance taken from nature herself.”² Despite a life-long interest in these human materials, Blumenbach himself had never obtained a skull in the field. Instead, he relied on a vast network of correspondents, curators and collectors who sent him skulls from all over the world. One of these contributors was Joseph Banks (1743-1820). In a letter to his British colleague in 1795, Blumenbach thanked him for his assistance in “enrich[ing] my collection of the skulls of different nations with those specimens I was so anxious above all to obtain.”³ Banks had provided Blumenbach with the skulls of two of his five principal varieties: a Otaheitan (Pacific

¹ Blumenbach describes his collection in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Collectionis suae Craniorum Diversarum Gentium Illustratae Decades* (Göttingen: J. C. Dieterich, 1790–1828) [“Illustrated Parts of His Collection of Craniums of Various Races”].

² According to himself, Blumenbach’s collection exceeded that of Pieter Camper in the Netherlands and John Hunter in England. Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” 155, 162.

³ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach to Joseph Banks, 11 April 1795, reprinted in Blumenbach, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” 149-154 (quote from 149).

Islander) and a Carib (American). If Banks had seen more of the world than Blumenbach, he too had never dirtied his hands digging in the soil for these prized specimens.

The global exchange of indigenous remains as it developed into the nineteenth century depended on men like Banks, whose influence facilitated and sustained the circulation of scientific specimens. Banks' position at the heart of such this network in Britain had made him a broker of indigenous remains, connecting collectors in the field and scientists in Britain and across Europe. Banks was truly a man of capacious curiosity. Although his first interest was botany, his scientific versatility included an interest geology, hydrography, and ethnology.⁴ In all these fields, he maintained a global and eclectic network of correspondents, contributors and collectors. The connections helped him acquire the indigenous specimens Blumenbach so desperately wanted.

But during the late eighteenth century, the remains of the indigenous dead were becoming coveted articles and even Banks had trouble acquiring some of them. In 1787, Blumenbach appealed to Banks for the skull of an Otaheitan. Banks had to disappoint his German colleague. "I wish it was in my power to procure for you the cranium you enquire after," he wrote, "but since Dr. Hunter here and Dr. Camper in Holland have written so much on that subject those who have possession of the crania of the South Seas have set a high value upon them."⁵ By early 1790, though, Blumenbach's desired skull of an Otaheitan had come into Banks' possession "through the brave and energetic Captain Bligh, on the return from his famous voyage" to bring

⁴ David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science & Empire, 1780-1801* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 17.

⁵ BL Add MS 8096, ff. 387-8. Quoted in Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson, "Exploration, Headhunting, and Race Theory: The Skull Beneath the Skin," in *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010[2004]), 127-48 (especially 131).

back breadfruit from Tahiti.⁶ The Carib skull had been placed into Banks' hands by Alexander Anderson (1748-1811), head of the Royal Gardens on St. Vincent.⁷ In 1789, Anderson informed Banks that besides compiling a catalogue of plants indigenous to St. Vincent, he would do everything in his power to procure the "Craniums of the Yellow Caribs, or Aborigenes." The work was exceedingly difficult, though, Anderson warned Banks, since most of the "Yellow Caribs" had been "extirpated by the Black Caribs" and "any attempt to disturb the ashes of their Ancestors" was seen "as the greatest of crimes." Most likely on Banks' instructions, Anderson ignored these dangers, and he soon unearthed the remains of a Carib chief who had died there eight years previously, forwarding them to Banks in London.⁸ Banks duly transmitted the indigenous skulls to Blumenbach in Göttingen.

⁶ Bligh and his officers frequently encountered human skulls during their stay in Tahiti. In an entry for May 1792, Lieutenant George Tobin of the HMS Providence described finding a "human skull" along with that of a hog "hanging to some carved figures near the Morai." Some indigenous men later brought him the skull of Thompson, one of the mutineers from the HMS Bounty. It is unlikely that the skull mentioned by Tobin is the actual skull in Blumenbach's collection. It was not uncommon for bioprospectors like Bligh and Tobin to encounter human remains on their journeys into the interior and in their encounters with natives. ML A562, CY 1421, f. 183, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Australia. Journal of Lieutenant George Tobin on *HMS Providence* 1791-1793, journal entry for 17 May 1792. See also Blumenbach, "On the Natural Variety of Mankind," 155-8.

⁷ Like Banks, Anderson's interests ranged beyond botany. His unfinished manuscript on the natural history of St. Vincent not only describes the island's fauna and flora, but also provides accounts of the politics and history of its native inhabitants, especially in relation to their encounters and conflicts with Europeans. Anderson particularly commented on the causes and effects of Carib insurrections on St. Vincent. Anderson's unfinished manuscript is published in Richard A. Howard and Elizabeth S. Howard, eds., *Alexander Anderson's Geography and History of St. Vincent, West Indies* (Cambridge, MA, 1983). See Julie Chun Kim, "Natural Histories of Indigenous Resistance: Alexander Anderson and the Caribs of St. Vincent," *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2014), 217-233; and Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997[1995]), 264-308.

⁸ Dawson Turner Copies (DTC) 6, f. 159-60, Botany Library, Natural History Museum, London. Letter from Alexander Anderson to Joseph Banks, 3 May 1789. As did many British curators tending to botanical gardens abroad, Anderson corresponded frequently with Banks, asking for advice and support in their scientific pursuits. See Richard A. Howard, "The St. Vincent Botanic Garden - The Early Years," in Richard Grove, Robert S. Anderson, and Karis Hiebert, eds., *Islands, Forests, and Gardens in the Caribbean: Conservation and Conflict in Environmental History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 122-31.

Over the course of the following decades, Banks continued to facilitate the circulation of indigenous remains as an integral part of his vision for the alignment of scientific and imperial interests.⁹ These included the skull of a female Egyptian “in a dried state” he had acquired through an “Officer of the Bombay Army;” the preserved head of a New Zealand chief “prepared by the natives;” and “a skull from America, supposed to have been that of an Indian warrior.”¹⁰ Since his return from a voyage to Australia, Tahiti and New Zealand with James Cook in 1771 and his appointment as President of the Royal Society in 1778, Banks had become Britain’s most influential promoter of science. Through his connections with the Privy Council and the Admiralty as well as several other private, voluntary, and commercial institutions such as the Royal Society, the Botanical Gardens at Kew, and the East India Company, Banks wanted to enlist science in buttressing British power in the world.¹¹ Collections of indigenous skulls such as the one accumulated by Blumenbach reflect Banks’ continued influence in the global

⁹ The literature on the alliance between science and empire is too large to review here. Useful syntheses include Joseph M. Hodge, “Science and Empire: An Overview of the Historical Scholarship,” in *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970*, ed. Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3-29; Mark Harrison, “Science and the British Empire,” *Isis*, vol. 96, no. 1 (March 2005), 56-63; Roy MacLeod, “Introduction,” Special Issue: Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise, ” *Osiris*, vol. 15 (2000), 1-13; Robert A. Stafford, “Scientific Exploration and Empire,” *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1999]), 294-319.

¹⁰ He presented the Egyptian skull to the Hunterian Museum in 1805. See RCS-MUS/2/1/1, 63-64, 1800-1814, Board of Curators Minutes Book, Vol 1. For Banks’ donation of the skull of a New Zealand chief to the Hunterian in 1808, see RCS-MUS/3/1/1, no. 302, 1802-1809, Donation Book, Vol. 1 and RCS-MUS/2/1/1, 170, 1800-1814, Board of Curators Minutes Book, Vol 1. In 1812, Banks presented to the Hunterian Museum a human skull, presumably that of a Native American. See RCS-MUS/5/1/1, 22, 1800-1830, Museum Letter Book, Vol 1; RCS-MUS/2/1/1, 236, 1800-1814, Board of Curators Minutes Book, Vol 1.

¹¹ More specifically, he espoused a mercantilist program in which science and exploration would contribute to imperial policy by securing access to natural resources to secure Britain’s economic edge. For example, he had been instrumental in securing support and resources for Captain Bligh’s *Bounty* expeditions of 1787-9 and 1791-3, which sought to bring back breadfruit from Tahiti to feed slaves in the West Indies. Emma Spary and Paul White, “Food of Paradise: Tahitian Breadfruit and the Autocritique of European Consumption,” *Endeavour*, vol.28, no.2 June 2004), 75-80; Julia Bruce, “Banks and Breadfruit,” *RSA Journal*, vol. 141, no. 5444 (November 1993), 817-820; David MacKay, “Banks, Bligh, and Breadfruit,” *The New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (April 1974), 61.

exchange of natural history specimens. Moreover, they also illustrate how Banks enlisted science to profit and project British imperial power.

This brief account of Banks' role in the early circulation of indigenous remains highlights several significant aspects of their movement that were critical to its success. The circumstances that conditioned Banks' role in the global exchange of indigenous bodies in the late eighteenth century only intensified in the nineteenth. As the century wore on, indigenous remains became entangled in a global web of scientific, commercial and imperial interests. Like plants, collections of indigenous remains came to embody and shape British imperial power. If the empire was not just a collection of territories, but also a collection of people, collections of indigenous remains in Britain illustrated the success of the British empire abroad.

This chapter examines where and how these global networks of exchange developed, what problems collectors had to overcome to transport their specimens back home, and how the circulation of indigenous remains reflected and shaped Britain's imperial ambitions. First, the circulation of human specimens depended on the resources of the British Empire. British imperialism provided the manpower and the means for the collection and transportation of human specimens. Like other specimens of natural history, human materials circulated within far-flung networks that tied together museums, botanical gardens, apothecary shops, and scientific institutions.¹² In botany, biological taxonomy had already become a global enterprise

¹² Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson, Steven J. Harris, "Networks of Travel, Correspondence and Exchange," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3, *Early Modern Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341-62; Elle Valle, "'The Pleasure of Receiving Your Favour': The Colonial Exchange in Eighteenth-Century Natural History," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, vol. 5, no. 2 (January 2004), 313-36; Brett M. Bennett, "The Consolidation and Reconfiguration of 'British' Networks of Science, 1800-1970," in *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970*, ed. Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30-44; Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Collections, 1815-45: Patronage, the Information revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 31-5. For the significance of networks in the historiography of empire, see

during the eighteenth century. Similarly, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “ethnopropecting,” including the accumulation of indigenous remains, was to provide a global survey of human life.¹³ Due to changes in biological conceptions of human difference at this time, indigenous bodies became part of a global “economy” of natural history specimens that had taken shape over the course of the past two centuries.

The commodification of indigenous remains was must fully achieved on the ships transporting them back to Britain. Here, on board of Britain’s survey vessels and men-of-war, commercial interests transformed indigenous bodies into tradable goods. As the slave trade had done for African bodies, this global economy of human specimens depended on the transformation of human remains into permanent and transmissible objects that could be valued, traded and shipped. The movement of indigenous remains was contingent on the ability of collectors to store and transport their specimens safely back to Britain. Their success depended as much on technological innovations in preservation and transportation as on their ability to call upon a network of like-minded scientists. The same factors that threatened the successful transplantation of seedlings and animal specimens, such as climate and ecology, affected the transport of human remains. In a growing empire, new technologies, such as better preservation fluids and steam navigation, allowed collectors to safeguard the quality, and thus value, of their specimens as well as ensure a steady supply.

Finally, the circulation of indigenous bodies showcases how science contributed the extension of imperialism and globalization in the nineteenth century. As “bone circuits”

Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45-63; and T. Ballantyne, “Empire, Knowledge and Culture: From Proto-Globalization to Modern Globalization,” in *Globalization in world History*, ed. A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), 115-40.

¹³ Justin E. H. Smith writes: “the transformation of the knowledge project of biological taxonomy into a properly global endeavor.” Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, & Human Difference*, 11.

stretched out farther across the globe, scientific institutions across Europe and America soon found themselves competing for these limited human resources. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, changes in ideas about human difference put a premium on human remains. As a result, the exchange between the scientific institutions came to be characterized by competition for rare and unique materials, regional expertise and national prestige. As this chapter shows, these bone circuits were a global phenomenon, existing in uneasy tension with the imperial boundaries they often crossed and the imperial ambitions they often stifled. But such petty interests also influenced the flow of indigenous remains from Britain's colonies to her centers of calculation in London. Mired by competition, and even jealousy the circulation of human remains cannot simply be understood as the steady flow of material culture from colonial periphery to metropolitan center.¹⁴ The exchange of indigenous remains between the scientific institutions in Britain, Europe and the world came to be characterized by competition for rare and unique materials, regional expertise and national interest.

The Circulation of Human Remains

A closer look at the regional and chronological distribution of native human remains in British collections suggests that the circulation of human remains became increasingly intertwined with the fate of British imperialism in different parts of the world. The data suggest two significant changes affecting the early circulation of human remains between 1790 and 1880. First, they show that it is largely a phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century (see Table 2.1). Skin color, hair, stature continued to capture the popular and scientific imagination, but increasingly human difference came to be seen as more than skin-deep. Scientists increasingly

¹⁴ Laura Peers and Alison Brown, "Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-16.

turned to the growing collections of skulls at the Hunterian Museum and British Museum to calculate average cranial capacities; brachy- and dolichocephalic indices; and alveolar, nasal and orbital indices.¹⁵ As we have seen, realizing that indigenous populations were disappearing in growing numbers, men interested in classifications of human difference such as Cuvier in France, and Prichard, Hunt and Flower in Britain, began calling for the accumulation of indigenous skulls around this time.

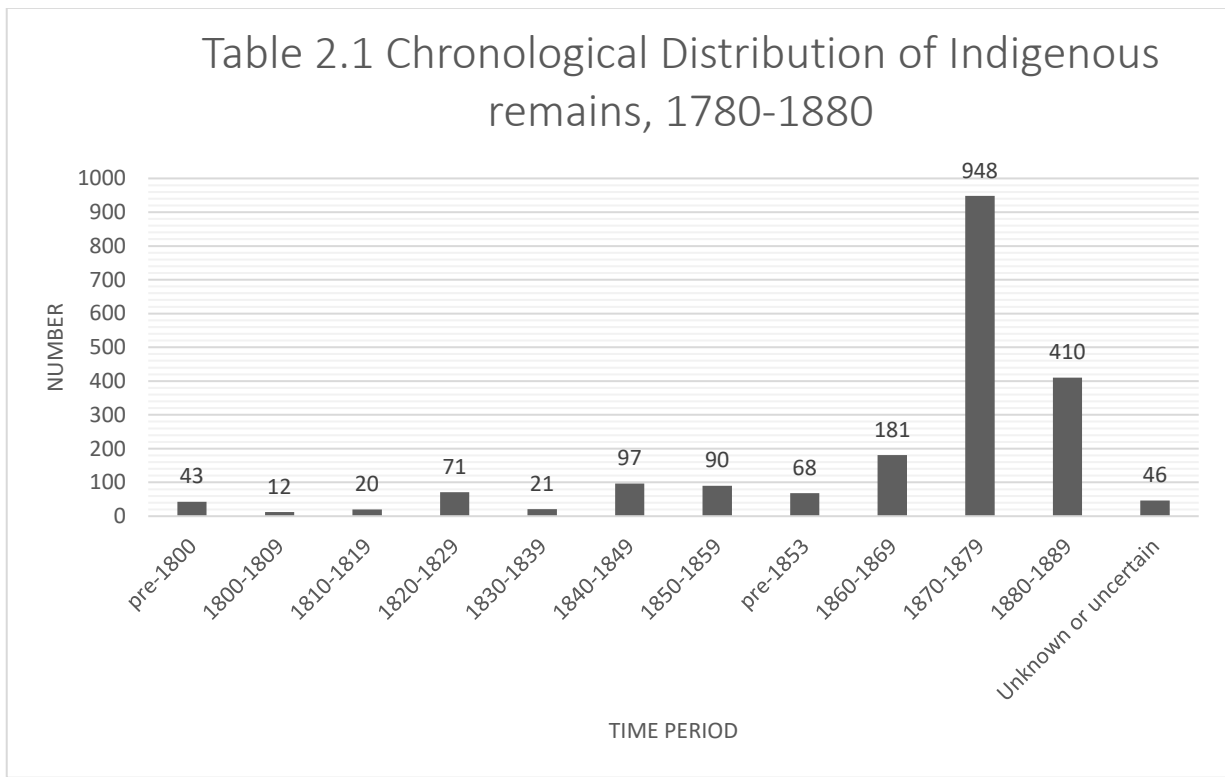


Table 2.1. Chronological Distribution of Human Remains per Decade before 1890. The chart shows the total number of human remains in anthropological collections before 1890, including the collections at the Hunterian Museum, the British Museum/Natural History Museum, Royal Army Munitions Collection (pre-1833) and the Royal Anthropological Institute (pre-1879).

If Blumenbach had been content with a single Carib skull, scientists in the nineteenth century required increasingly large numbers of skulls from the same indigenous peoples. To accurately

¹⁵ See for example, Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

measure the differences in cranial capacity, for example, British scientists like Francis Galton and William H. Flower, following French anthropologists Paul Broca and Paul Topinard, needed large averages.¹⁶ When William H. Flower wrote to Lucien Carr, the Curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, to request a few North American skulls to add to the Hunterian Museum, his American colleague was reluctant to do so. Not only did Carr believe that each national institution should develop its own regional expertise, he was unwilling to part with too many specimens because he feared it would weaken his statistical data. “I cannot help you to any very great extent,” he informed Flower, “You know the value of large averages.”¹⁷ Flower could not disagree. Under his curatorship, the Hunterian had been expanding its own collections (see Figure 2.1).

¹⁶ Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 19-57; Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996[1981]), 105-41; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 83-110.

¹⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.56, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Lucien Carr, Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 26 December 1878.



Fig. 2.1. Woman cleaning skulls in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, at Lincoln Inn's Fields, before 1941. By 1948, the Hunterian Museum had accumulated more than three thousand human skulls. On 1 July 1948, the collection of human native remains at the Hunterian Museum moved to the Natural History Museum, where many of them still reside. Notice also the serial number stamped on the forehead of each skull, identifying it. Source: RCS-PH/00022, Royal College of Surgeon of England.

A crucial development in the early circulation of human remains during this period is the increasing relative contribution of large donations. As Table 2.1 shows, the influx of human remains in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s was already on the rise, but it is in the 1870s and 1880s that the number of human remains in British collections increased dramatically. During this period, British museums acquired several large collections. This was particularly true for regions such as Peru, Bolivia, Chile for South America; India for Asia; Egypt for North Africa; the West Coast of Africa; and Papua New Guinea for Melanesia, where British expansion was rapidly increasing. In 1864, French explorer Paul Du Chaillu, undoubtedly flattered by the support he enjoyed among British anthropologists like James Hunt, offered for sale to the British Museum a collection of ninety-three skulls from Gaboon, on the West Coast of Africa.¹⁸ A decade and a

¹⁸ It was unusual for Owen to deal with offers of human remains. Like all zoological specimens, such offers usually came before Albert Günther, the Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum. Nevertheless, it appears that Du Chaillu singled out Owen specifically to receive the 93 West African skulls in order to describe them in an ethnological

half later, Du Chaillu donated another thirty-two West African Skulls to the British Museum.¹⁹ Du Chaillu's contributions account for 125 of the 136 human specimens from Africa the Natural History Museum (as it had split off from the British Museum) possessed by the end of the 1880s. The fact that these specimens came into British possessions at this time illustrates both the relative strength of French interests in Western Africa at this time and the transnational character of character of the circulation of human remains in the nineteenth century. Several other large collections entered British collections in the 1870s and 1880s, including Reverend Samuel Macfarlane's collection of 48 skulls and 82 lower jaws from Torres Straits Islanders to the Natural History Museum in 1884, W. M. Petrie Flinders' collection of 104 skulls and two scalps from Egypt to the same institution in 1888, John Shortt's collections of 99 crania from India to the Hunterian in the 1870s and 1880s, and Thomas J. Hutchinson's collection of 30 skulls and 150 jaw bones from Peru to the Hunterian in 1879.²⁰

However, the circulation of human remains in the nineteenth century not only illustrates a shift in scientific ideas about human difference, it also reflects a re-orientation in Britain's imperial design (see Table 2.2). If its late eighteenth-century predecessor was centered on mercantilist policies in the Atlantic, its nineteenth-century successor was devoted to conquest,

publication. Owen referred a similar offer by Baron von Hügel directly to Günther in 1879. DF [ZOO/]200/6, 46, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Richard Owen to John Edward Gray, Keeper of the Zoology Department at the British Museum, of 29 November 1864; DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 132-4, no. 1-93, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register; DF [ZOO/]200/16, 341, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from Richard Owen to Dr. A. Günther at the British Museum, 1 May 1879.

¹⁹ DF [ZOO/]218/2/5,303, no. 1-32, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

²⁰ Hutchinson acquired these human remains and presented to the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1873. The Institute later transferred its collection of human remains to the Hunterian Museum, when it could no longer store them. DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 132-4, 303, 345, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register; Flower, *Catalogue*, 108-11 no. 654-673; 155-7, no. 961-990; Stewart, *Catalogue*, 194-197, no. 653/1-34; 197, no. 653/35-6; 198-201, no. 654-673; 201-202, no. 673/1-7; 202-204, no. 673/8-31; 204-205, no. 673/32-43. See also RCS-MUS/7/8/9, 1879 (?), Manuscript List of Skull Obtained from the Anthropological Society in 1879; RCS-MUS/7/8/10, n.d., *Catalogue of Skulls of the Various Races of Man in the Collection of the Anthropological Institute*.

“settler colonies” and direct rule in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.²¹ By the conclusion of the land war in the Iberian Peninsula (1806-14), Britain had established itself as the only unchallenged European naval power, more or less in control of the world’s oceans and its trade.²² Like in the rest of Europe, British expansion in the nineteenth century was the result of the pressures of population growth, industrialism’s growing appetite for raw materials and markets, and imperial competition.²³

²¹ Historians and anthropologists have examined this nineteenth-century transformation in imperial design in terms of “settler colonialism.” A key feature of “settler colonies” is the displacement of indigenous populations not to extract their labour but to appropriate their land. In both instances, however, the presence and non-presence of indigenes is critical. Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an ethnographic Event* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 1-9. See also David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500 - c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 126-9.

²² British naval hegemony was far from complete. Russia maintained a controlling influence in the Baltic and Black Seas. The American Navy continued to control North American waters, and through the Monroe Doctrine established its claim over South America, although it was forced to accept British naval dominance there, too. David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia, 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London, 1977). See also C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 128-32.

²³ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Table 2.2 Geographic Distribution of Indigenous remains, 1780-1880

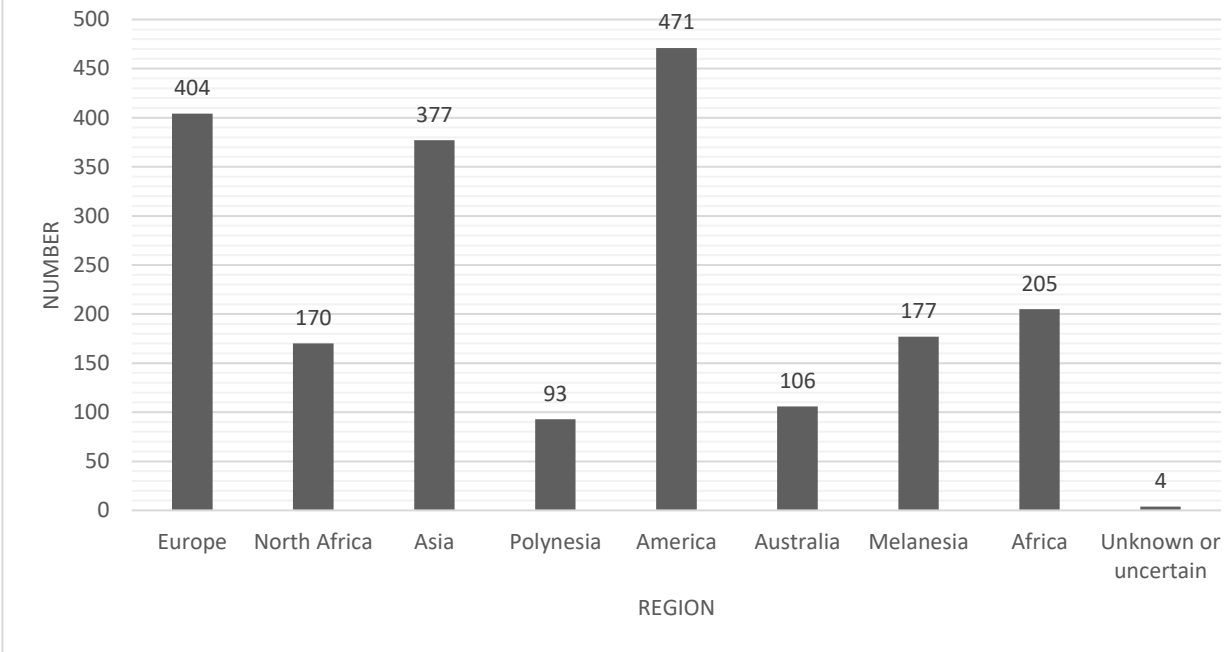


Table 2.2. Geographic Distribution of Human Remains per Region before 1890. The chart shows the total number of human remains in anthropological collections before 1890, including the collections at the Hunterian Museum, the British Museum/Natural History Museum, Royal Army Munitions Collection (pre-1833) and the Royal Anthropological Institute (pre-1879).

Collectors understood that the fate of their scientific pursuits was implicated in the success or failure of Britain’s imperial interests abroad. In 1818, Thomas H. Raffles, the newly-appointed Governor-General of Bencoolen, a British trading post on the west coast of Sumatra since the seventeenth century, wrote to Everard Home at the Hunterian to inform him of his arrival at “the most miserable spot in the archipelago.” The area was prone to earthquakes and the city was ill-suited as a port. Symbolically, Bencoolen was significant as a British incursion into a region dominated by the Dutch, though strategically, Raffles failed to see how “any other nation would be foolish enough to take it.” Spice plantations were the only worthwhile prospect for settlement, and there was only one profitable one. The Dutch, however, were bent on preserving their superiority in the region. “The Dutch are playing the Devil in the Eastern Seas, and it is high

time they should receive a check,” Raffles complained to Home. They were implementing “their old system of monopoly and exclusion, and unless we look about us will ere long shut us out from the Eastern commerce altogether.” Nevertheless, Raffles was glad to inform Home that he would soon be able to go rambling in the interior, and asked for supplies, including “a few dozen large bottles,” “old pickle specimen bottles,” and “casks,” to preserve the specimens.²⁴

Subsequent shipments included elephant bones, skeletons and heads of tigers and monkeys, the skeleton of a female rhinoceros, the skeleton of a Tapir, twenty bottles containing snakes, dugong skeletons, and the cranium of a native from Java.²⁵

While the trends are clear, it is difficult to provide a definite account of the circulation of human remains based on when and how they became part of scientific collections in Britain. It was not uncommon for remains to have been collected several years, even decades, prior to their arrival at scientific institutions. In the possession of private collectors, they often sat on mantelpieces as mementos of time served overseas, as gifts from dear friends, or simply as curiosities acquired during their travels. In 1883, for example, John Lowe presented three skulls to the Hunterian. Among them was one from an “Esquimaux,” obtained by Lieutenant Samuel Gurney Cresswell of *HMS Investigator*, during its survey of the Arctic as part of Maclure’s Expedition in 1848. It is unclear why it resurfaced only then, but since Lowe had received the item from Cresswell’s mother, it is likely that the skull had remained in Cresswell’s possession

²⁴ RCS-MUS/5/6/8, f. 1-4, RCS, 1818, Letters relating to the Museum. Letter from Thomas Raffles to Everard Home, 18 April 1818.

²⁵ RCS-MUS/5/6/9, 211, RCS, 1819, Letters relating to the Museum. Letter from S. Bonham and C. Copland to William Clift, 13 November 1819; RCS-MUS/5/6/10, 270, RCS, 1820, Letters relating to the Museum. Letter and list from H. Raffles to Everard Home, 13 November 1819; RCS-MUS/5/6/19, n.n, RCS, c. 1803-1828, File of letters and papers relating to museum business. Letter from Thomas Raffles to Everard Home, 3 December 1822. No more information is given for this human specimen. Owen, *Catalogue*, 862, no. 5438.

all that time.²⁶ Another problem facing a reconstruction of the movement of indigenous remains is the paucity of information regarding the early specimens. The earliest collectors often provided very little information with the skulls they presented to museums in Britain. In January 1816, Duncan Mckenzie simply announced his donation of a skull from New South Wales “to be placed in the College museum.”²⁷ By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the histories of these remains were critical to the scientific value of the specimens. Curators often wrote back to donors, asking for more details about the provenance of the item.

Despite these issues, it is clear that the circulation of human remains had come into its own by the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The 1870s and 1880s were auspicious times for the collectors of human remains. Hardening ideas about human difference, a re-orientation in Britain’s imperial design, and continued exploration provided both justification and opportunities for collecting. Specimens were now arriving on the doorsteps of British museums almost daily. Sometimes, curators were forced to turn down collections they nevertheless believed to be too valuable to waste. In 1881, Richard Burton had a collection of more than one hundred skulls delivered to the Anthropological Institute. The Secretary of the Institute, however, was unable to receive them given “the very small space at our disposal, the rooms being already crowded with our own property.” Charles Carter Blake then offered them to Richard Owen at the British Museum, but he too had to decline such a large collection. Blake finally offered them to Flower at the Hunterian Museum, explaining that it would “be a pity to lose a collection so large and that may contain valuable specimens.”²⁸

²⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 151, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from John Lowe to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 4 August 1883.

²⁷ RCS-MUS/5/6/6, 107, f. 1, RCS, 1816, Museum Letters. Letter from Duncan Mackenzie to Edmund Balfour, Secretary to the Royal College of Surgeons, 9 January 1816.

²⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 99, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from C. Carter Blake to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 2 May 1881.

Shipping Indigenous Bodies

The extent of the British empire not only facilitated the movement of human remains, it also raised important challenges. The success of collectors depended on their ability to transform these fragile human objects into permanent and transmissible commodities. Foreign climates and environments often threatened to undo the work of the collector. How could they delay, or even stymie, the destructive forces of time? What were the best means of transportation? If preservation failed, the skulls, bones and flesh were useless as specimens and worthless as objects of exchange. It is here, in the storage rooms of Britain's survey vessels that the commodification of indigenous bodies was most effectively achieved.

British collectors frequently applied to scientific institutions for instructions and materials to assist them in preserving their specimens. In April 1819, Robert Keate applied to the curator at the Hunterian to supply him with books on methods of preserving such specimens to forward to a friend in New South Wales, who was about to leave for Bengal.²⁹ Curators at home readily supplied collectors abroad with preservation fluids, containers and equipment. In July of 1876, Thomas Knott thanked Albert Günther at the British Museum for assisting him in procuring such materials, including "two boxes plaster [of] Paris, Two boxes arsenical soap, Four scalpels, four forceps, two pairs of scissors, one clasp knife, one stone for sharpening instruments, Three brushes, and some cotton wool."³⁰ As I will show, collecting required only very few specialized

²⁹ RCS-MUS/5/6/16, n.n., f. 1-2, RCS, 1789-1821, Museum Letters relating to natural history. Note from Robert Keate to William Clift, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 2 April 1819.

³⁰ Ethnoprosectors frequently used plaster of Paris to make casts of native peoples. DF [ZOO/]200/10, 270, NHM, 1876, Zoology Correspondence A-J. Letter from Thomas[?] Knott to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 6 July 1876.

instruments and supplies (the only significant one was preservation fluid), making collecting of indigenous remains available to those with limited training and means.

Climate, storage conditions on board, and time were the collector's main concerns. When in 1825 the director-general of the army medical department issued a call to all his medical officers stationed abroad to collect anatomical specimens for British collections, prevailing opinion questioned whether it would be possible to collect and transport anatomical specimens in such difficult circumstances and across such vast distances. John Davy, a medical officer in the Army and collector of human remains, rejected these concerns in a privately circulated paper. True, Davy admitted, hot climates such as those he had experienced in Ceylon in 1816-1820 presented the collector with conditions inimical to the preservation of animal and organic matter. Especially the combination of heat and humidity threatened to spoil wet specimens. However, Davy argued, the difference between temperate and hot climates was one of degree, with changes in the specimens taking place more rapidly as temperatures rose. As a general rule, he advised, "the rapidity of change of animal matter must be met with proportional quickness and energy of the conservative processes of art opposed to the destructive ones of nature," emphasizing "quickness, great neatness, and cleanliness."³¹ In the first of two papers on preserving such specimens, Davy suggested using "a solution of the sulphurous acid gas in water." This method, Davy argued, was cheaper, more durable, and better suited to preserve wet specimens than any other.³² As for dry specimens, the preservation of human remains required even fewer resources

³¹ John Davy, "Some Directions for making and keeping Anatomical Preparations in Hot Climates," *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. 27 (1827); reprinted in his *Researches, Physiological and Anatomical*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1839), 414-425.

³² The need for specialized preserving fluids was great among collectors who wished to preserve fleshy substances. In 1875, Wykeham Perry, a naturalist on board the *HMS Pearl* required some advice on how to preserve the bright colors of the fish specimens he had caught. "They are often so strangely and in harmoniously variegated with bands and spots," he wrote to Günther, "it would be useless for me to attempt to mark their colors on paper." Their colors

and less skill. Nevertheless, ethnoprospectors had to compete with the same natural forces associated with climate and decay. Hot climates rarely presented the collector with the ideal combination of heat and dryness for preservation. The specimens were to be boiled first, to remove the skin and muscle tissue. Then, if exposure to “dry” winds, usually those having passed over “an extensive tract of land,” is not possible, the specimens were to be exposed to the direct rays of the sun, or “the dry heat of a charcoal fire.” Finally, the dry skulls and bones were to be varnished and wrapped up in “dried paper in a box of tight construction to be sent home by the first opportunity.”³³ Collectors in the field often made do with a vat for boiling down the flesh, a container to pack them in, and little more.

These methods of preservation turned natural history transmissible and tradable commodities. Their value often depended on the quality of preservation. Moreover, the technologies developed to thwart the effects of decay had commercial applications as well. Davy alluded to the potential “economical uses of the acid” in preventing fermentation, the changing of wine into vinegar, and the spoiling of common vegetable acids.³⁴ The collector’s struggle against time not only preserved the specimen’s epistemic value, it also held commercial promise beyond its immediate application.

faded “almost immediately after they are placed in spirit.” DF [ZOO/]200/6, 122, f. 6, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the *HMS Pearl*, to the British Museum, of 19 May 1875.

³³ Davy, “Some Directions,” 414-425.

³⁴ John Davy, “On a new method of Preserving Anatomical Preparations for a limited Time,” *Transactions of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 3 (1826-1829), 230-251; reprinted in his *Researches, Physiological and Anatomical*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1839), 355-375. The process was simple and required little skill and limited resources. It consisted of burning sulfur over distilled or rain water until impregnated with the sulfur. Then all that remained was to filter it so as to render it transparent. During his residence in Malta, more specifically in 1828-29, Davy also conducted experiments to ascertain the “fitness of boiling, as an aid in the preservation of anatomical preparations.” He found that the procedure was especially suited to prepare those morbid parts containing large quantities of blood. See John Davy, “On the Effects of Boiling Water, and of Boiling, on the Textures of the Human Body after Death,” *Researches, Physiological and Anatomical*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1839), 313-330.

For Davy, collecting anatomical specimens was one of the most democratic of scientific pursuits. It required little skill or training and few precious resources. “Very moderate skill is sufficient,” Davy advised, “such as every medical man ought to possess, and must possess, if he is fond of his profession, and only tolerably zealous in the pursuit of it.” Nor did it require a great expense in packaging and containers. “One or two glass vessels,” he suggested, “are amply sufficient for holding all the preparations a professional man is likely to be able to collect in one year in the course of his ordinary practice.” Combining several specimens in a single vessel of a gallon, clearly marked by a paper slip inserted into the bottle and accompanied by a descriptive list would be “particularly well adapted for sending preparations to England, on account of its economy, the little spaces required, and its security.”³⁵

Carrying indigenous remains across the vast distances separating Britain’s colonies from its metropolitan centers of calculation represented a real test of the skills of the collector. Even for a seasoned collector like Davy, the preservation and shipment of human remains was not without risk. In April of 1821, having just then returned from his sojourn in Ceylon, Davy forwarded a box containing a few wet specimens from Ceylon, including a few examples of the Ceylon leech, “which is so troublesome in that Island, to which it is almost peculiar,” and a Hooded snake.³⁶ The shipment was accompanied by a note in which Davy stated his wish that the specimens were intended for a local anatomist and friend of his, Dr. Leach. Davy also promised to present to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons a series of human skulls from Ceylon, which he had not yet had the time to unpack.³⁷

³⁵ Davy, “Some Directions,” 278.

³⁶ RCS-MUS/5/6/11, 264, f. 1-3, RCS, 1819, Museum Letters. Letter from John Davy to William Clift, 30 April 1821.

³⁷ RCS-MUS/3/1/3, no. 1037, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3.

When in 1827 William Clift, the curator of the Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, was reviewing the donations books of the museum, he discovered a reference to twelve unmarked human skulls among the records of the museum. They had arrived without any information as to their provenance, but Clift suspected that they had come “from Dr. Leach or his friends, as one of them was phrenologically mapped.”³⁸ The phrenologist, Clift noted, had left England earlier in 1827 to recover from a serious illness. Looking upon the human remains, he suggested in the margins of the donations records that they might be the skulls Davy had alluded to in his note dating from 1821. Yet, the remains were in such a poor condition, having been kept in “a hamper received ... in a mouldy and almost rotten state in wet straw, that had evidently been lying long in the Warehouse.” In August of 1831 Clift made the connection with the skulls Davy had promised in 1821, though he remained unsure. “What the skulls were which Dr. Davy alludes to is of course unknown,” he writes, “but if from him, he must have been more ill than Dr. Leach, to send them in the way they were sent.”³⁹ Decay remained a problem well into the final quarter of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ If preservation succeeded, human materials acquired permanence and transmissibility. If successful, they became valuable commodities. If, however, the forces of decay prevailed, the specimens were both useless to science and worthless as objects of exchange.

The value collectors placed on human remains is hard to reconstruct. Human remains were part of a larger trade in natural history specimens. Collectors often sold entire collection of

³⁸ RCS-MUS/3/1/3, no. 1037, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3.

³⁹ RCS-MUS/3/1/4, no. 1315, 1823-1833, Donation Book, vol. 4.

⁴⁰ When the Reverend Thomas Bridges sent a collection of Fuegian skeletons to the Hunterian Museum in 1883, an official of the Falklands Company, F. W. S. Coleman, informed Coleman that “the bags were so rotten that some of the bones have come out.” He requested that William Flower send someone over so that “more safety” could be had “that every little bit of bone is secured.” RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 152, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from F. W. S. Coleman, official of the Falklands Company, to William H. Flower, Conservator at the Hunterian Museum, 4 August 1883.

ethnological materials and natural history specimens rather than offer them as individual pieces. In 1879, the Italian naturalist and explorer Luigi Maria D'Albertis offered to sell an extensive collection of ethnological and natural history specimens to the British Museum. The collection included twenty skulls without lower jaw, twenty-seven complete skulls, two adult skeletons, the complete skeleton of a child from a village on the Alice River, and a "Child preserved in spirit, from Moatta, at the mouth of Kataw River," though "the skin is a little damaged by decomposition." The collection was to be sold as a single lot. D'Albertis asked for £250, though he was willing to give a discount if the British Museum also purchased two other ethnological collections, one of which included a "human-stuffed head, bone implements, ... women and men dresses in grass, fibres, or human hairs,... , etc. etc.," and several other collections, including 120 birds, 4000 beetles, 400 reptiles and 100 mammals preserved in spirits, 30 land shells and 40 sea shells, and 17 eggs. If the British Museum bought all of these collections, D'Albertis was willing to lower his price from £1,510 to £1,300.⁴¹ Interestingly, D'Albertis had tried to sell a collection of 50 skulls and crania, and 4 skeletons from New Guinea, Torres Straits and Australia, to the Hunterian Museum for £350 a few months earlier.⁴²

Collectors often included rare and exotic human specimens in order to enhance the appeal of their collections. When in July of 1884 an Australian collector named Banfield offered "a small but I think rather unique collection of Natural History specimens," including a shield crab,

⁴¹ The prices for the two ethnological collections were £150 and £250. Together, the three collections cost £650, but D'Albertis was willing to part with them for £600. DF [ZOO/]200/15, 6, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K. Manuscript catalogue of skulls, ethnological materials and natural history specimens for sale, from L. M. D. D'Albertis to the British Museum, [1879].

⁴² He offered 20 skulls without lower jaw for £60; 30 complete skulls for £180, 3 skeletons from the Fly River for £120, and one skeleton from Cape York, Australia, for £30. The total amount was £390, though he was willing to lower the price to £350 should he be able to dispose of the entire collection at once. RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 56, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Luigi Maria D'Albertis, Botanist, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, [December 1878].

a burrowing fish, a one-day old alligator, crayfish from the New Hebrides Islands, a band snake, a coral fish, and “a very fine South Sea Islander’s mask” from New Hebrides, to the Secretary of the British Museum, he offered to throw in the “skeleton of a Cleveland Bay aboriginal, which I shall be happy to present your institution should the ‘curios’ specified be purchased.”⁴³

In those instances in which it is possible to reconstruct it, it appears that uniqueness, purity and state of preservation all determined the value of a human specimen. European interest in human materials from New Zealand stemmed from a widely shared belief that “a few more years will probably see the entire extinction of the New Zealander.”⁴⁴ In the case of extinct peoples, the value even transferred to plaster casts and busts. In 1879, a Mr. Coote from Hobart Town, Tasmania, wrote to the Secretary of the Natural History Museum offering for sale the cast of William Lanné, or Lanney, also known as “King Billy,” who “was the last of the whole race of Tasmanians, and the only one of the race who ever had their bust taken.” It was currently at the Sydney Exhibition, and he had ensured it for £100. Coote considered the item truly “unique,” and requested to know what “value your institution would place upon it.”⁴⁵ Compared to the cost of real human remains, the price for King Billy’s casts was high, even for that of an extinct race.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Richard Owen recognized the significance of Coote’s offer, though he was already looking for ways to lower the price. He suggested to Günther that Coote might have a

⁴³ DF [ZOO/200/26, 20-20a, f.1, NHM, July-Dec. 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from [?] Banfield to the Secretary of Natural History Museum, 3 July 1884.

⁴⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, p.17, f. 2, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Samuel Cobb to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 6 April 1869.

⁴⁵ DF [ZOO/200/15, 101, f.1-2, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K. Letter from Audley[?] Coote to the British Museum, 6 October 1879.

⁴⁶ In 1874, a C. C. Smith offered “2 or 3 skeletons of an extinct tribe of aboriginals” from Australia, for £10 each. Compare the price of these human specimens of an extinct Australian tribe to those the same individual required for the skeletons of a grown and an unborn Dugong at just over £7 each. DF [ZOO/200/8, 227, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence Sm-Z. Letter from C. C. Smith to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 7 September 1874.

mold made in order to “multiply the casts, and be able to supply a museum, requiring one, at a lower rate than £100.” He acknowledged the significance of the specimen, though his reasoning was constrained by financial considerations. He considered “evidence of the now extinct race of the lowest type of Australian aborigines, viz, the Tasmanian one, ... most desirable,” but only if it were “reasonably procurable.”⁴⁷

Another factor influencing the value of human remains was their purity. Specimens from unmixed individuals better displayed human difference. When A. G. Nordvi offered for sale a collection of ten skulls of “ancient pagan Lapps” to the Hunterian, the translator of his letter commented that the suggested price of £2.5.0 each depended “on the probability of them being of unmixed race.” Pure specimens of Lapp individuals were hard to find. The Lapps, he claimed, had been “in constant connexion with other races and no doubt often intermarry with them.”⁴⁸ Four years later, Nordvi concurred with the assessment of his translator, but he had found a way to be reasonably sure of the purity of the remains. “It is only in heathen tombs that genuine types of skulls of Lapps are to be found,” he assured Flower, “the Lapps at present in most places being mixed with other nations.” Nordvi also added that the price of the skull would vary “according to the quality of the skulls,” ranging from £4 to £6.⁴⁹ In 1885, he offered more authentic Lapp skulls for sale, as well as two skeletons taken from “taken in old heathenish

⁴⁷ DF [ZOO/200/15, 101a, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K. Letter from Richard Owen to Dr. A. Günther at the British Museum, 16 December 1879.

⁴⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 55, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from A. G. Nordvi [to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum], 12 February 1878; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 52, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Translation of letter from A. G. Nordvi by C. A. Gosch to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 February 1878.

⁴⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 123, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from A. G. Nordvi to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1882.

tombs in Varrangerfjord, Ostfinmark, Norway, under my many years voyage (33 years) in Lapland.”⁵⁰

While the British outlawed the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in 1833, the idea that human bodies could be broken down into its parts, to be assessed and valued, proved particularly resilient. In putting a price on indigenous remains, sellers were deploying the same strategies that slave traders used to value and dispose of their human cargo. If health, strength and placidity determined the value of a slave in the Atlantic slave economy, quality, purity and rarity decided the worth of indigenous specimens in the global marketplace of scientific exchange. The definition Walter Johnson provides for the commodification of African slaves in Louisiana in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may well have been about indigenous body parts. This process, he writes, saw “the distant and the different translated into money value and resolved into a single scale of relative prices, prices that could be used to make even the most counter-intuitive comparisons.”⁵¹ The same took place at West Africa’s littoral, where African slaves acquired their most relevant social feature: their “exchangeability.”⁵² The damaged skull of an extinct Tasmanian with the lower jaw missing, could still be more valuable than a pristine specimen from Africa. As with slaves, the histories of the specimens mattered too. The accounts

⁵⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 14, RCS, f. 1, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from A. G. Nordvi to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 15 November 1885

⁵¹ Johnson details how Louisiana slave traders assessed the value of their human goods, ranging from sex and age to physical prowess and even emotional state, tabulating their estimations in order to reduce risks and increase value. Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 58. For a similar analysis of the commodification of African slaves in Africa, see Joseph C. Miller, *The Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 40-70.

⁵² Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 35. For a recent account of how slavery depended on and gave shape to modernity in America that fragment’s the slave body into its constitutive elements, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York and London: Basic Books, 2016).

of their retrieval were often the only guarantee for their provenance. These histories were the only sources that established a specimen's purity and corroborated the sellers' claims about its rarity. At its most basic level, what the circulation of indigenous specimens had in common with the trade in African slaves was its ability to turn the human body into a trade good, to be assessed and exchanged in a marketplace. In sum, what these forms of exchange shared was the power to strip the indigenous body and the slave alike of their humanity.

However, the significance of human remains as biocapital cannot fully be captured in terms of their permanence or price. Besides circulating in a global economy of exchange, they were often part of a more informal economy in which the value and meaning of human remains was more ambiguous, or at least less easily calculable, and only fully intelligible to the participants of the exchange. When Governor R. T. Farquhar regretted to inform Everard Home at the Hunterian Museum that he had not been able to send any natural history specimens "that could possibly advance the progress of science," he sent over "a New Zealander's head in good preservation" instead. Farquhar emphasized that it had not "been for want of good will," and assured Home that he had sent out two naturalists to acquire more. Farquhar was aware that the preserved head from New Zealand had little scientific value since he was sure that the Hunterian Museum already possessed many specimens like it. For him, the head was "a memorandum of that esteem and regard" he felt towards the Museum.⁵³

Human remains also circulated within reciprocal relationships best understood in terms of gift-giving rather than pure economic exchange. When Thomas Huxley requested permission to use a series of skulls "for illustration" from the Hunterian Museum, he promised to provide the

⁵³ RCS-MUS/5/6/19, n.n, f. 1-2, RCS, c. 1803-1828, File of letters and papers relating to museum business. Letter from R. T. Farquhar, Mauritius, to Everard Home, 24 December 1821.

Museum some “valuable crania in my possession” if the College was “disposed to award it.”⁵⁴ Huxley’s exchange of human remains as gift rather than commodity was not unprecedented. In the Spring of 1864, Leonard J. Sanford, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut, and his friend, Dr. W. L. Bradley, visited the College of Surgeons of England. During their visit, both men did not pass up the opportunity to observe in person “the magnificent collection of specimens belonging to your own College” in Hunterian Museum. Three years later, Sanford wrote a letter to thank the Flower and his colleagues for the “favor” they had received during their visit. In particular, Sanford singled out the efforts of William Henry Flower, Conservator at the Hunterian Museum, for his assistance in securing a catalogue of the specimens in the museum. The volumes, he ensured Flower, “are highly prized by the government of our college” and “by the hundreds of young men who have access to them from year to year’ in the library, where they “occupy a conspicuous place.”⁵⁵ But why did Sanford wait three years to express his gratitude to the Flower and the other gentlemen at the Royal College of Surgeons?

The answer lies in the exchange that took place in the wake of Sanford’s visit to London. In return for securing catalogues of the Hunterian Museums collections, William Henry Flower asked Sanford for “the skeleton of a pure-blooded negress” to place in the museum’s collection. Sanford had waited almost three years to send his letter of gratitude not because he “had forgotten my obligation and had had little appreciation of your kindness,” but because he had been laboring hard to find the specimen Flower had requested. It had taken Sanford a while to

⁵⁴ CS-MUS/5/2/1, 83, f. 1-3, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter from Thomas Huxley to Chairman of the Hunterian Museum, 3 May 1866, requesting to borrow skulls from the Museum.

⁵⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, 120, f.1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter from Leonard J. Sanford to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 August 1867, regarding skull of a “negress” from the U.S.

find “one which had sufficient of the African about it to answer your purpose.” The skeleton, which had apparently belonged to a 16 year-old “negress,” was not perfect. Her youthful age, Sanford wrote to Flower, made it harder to clean the skeleton, which made “all the typical peculiarities [...] not perhaps as distinctly marked as you may have seen.” Nevertheless, Sanford pointed out, “I have never seen them more perfectly developed.” He assured Flower that the “subject” had been “of almost ebony blackness, and had the general configuration, as well as the local external characteristics of the pure-blooded negress.”⁵⁶ The purity of the specimen reflected the sincerity of his gratitude.

The example of Sanford’s gift shows that, even between scientists, human remains could mean different things at the same time. Much like the catalogues now residing in the Library of Yale College, the skeleton of the “negress” was a prized scientific object. Stripped of its flesh, it was now suited to illustrate “sufficient of the African about it” to the gentlemen across the Atlantic. But for Sanford and Flower, the skeleton also embodied proper scientific decorum. In terms of Marcel Mauss’s analysis of the gift, Flower’s kind reception of the two American visitors and his efforts in procuring for Yale College copies of the catalogues of the museum’s collections had resulted in an obligation to reciprocate.⁵⁷ Unlike the sale of human remains, this human skeleton’s value was not expressed in terms of money. The quality of the skeleton, its identifiability as African, stood in direct relationship to Sanford’s sense of gratitude. Once, however, the skeleton entered the collections of the Hunterian Museum, the solidarity,

⁵⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, p.120, f.1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter from Leonard J. Sanford to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 August 1867, regarding skull of a “negress” from the U.S.

⁵⁷ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, expanded edition, ed. Jane I. Guyer (Chicago: Hua Books, 2016). Anthropologist J. Frow has since refined Mauss’s concept of the gift as a “loan,” rather than a gift. See J. Frow, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

relationship and responsibility behind it were no longer clear to anyone but Sanford and Flower. Its epistemic value, again, overshadowed its personal one.

The meaning of human remains in the nineteenth century was thus far more ambiguous than the term commodity suggests. Made permanent and transmissible by the process of preservation, they became objects of exchange. Their value, however, was far from settled. The arithmetic of uniqueness, purity and quality ultimately cannot account for this ambiguity. Instead, their meaning is best understood in terms of the anthropologist Kaushik Sunder Rajan's "biocapital." He suggests that human materials draw their significance from the economic markets in which they circulate. The British empire exported along with its settlers and goods, a kind of "technoscientific capitalism" (to borrow Sunder Rajan's term), which transformed native human remains into biocapital. Correspondents, collectors and curators were remaking the meaning of these human materials as they preserved, shipped and exchanged them. They were thus simultaneously, and to varying degrees, objects of both epistemic and economic value.⁵⁸ But at times, even these values did not fully cover the meaning of a human specimen. The movement of human remains across the globe only enhanced the unsettled meaning of these human materials.

The preparation and preservation of human specimens were only the first barriers collectors had to cross. Once they had been stripped and packed, they needed to be conveyed across thousands of miles of ocean. The movement of human remains depended on the ability of ethnopropectors to store and transport their specimens safely back to Britain. The same factors

⁵⁸ Sunder Rajan has traced this development in contemporary biotechnologies such as genomics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). See also Tomomi Kinukawa, "Learned vs. Commercial? The Commodification of Nature in Early Modern Natural History Specimen Exchanges in England, Germany, and the Netherlands," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 5 (November 2013), 589-618.

that threatened the successful transplantation of seedlings and animal specimens, such as climate and ecology, threatened to ruin these human resources. As David Mackay has shown, in the wake of James Cook's voyages into the Pacific, the Royal Navy began outfitting ships for the purpose of collecting specimens of natural history. Convinced of both the utility and profit of bioprospecting, administrators at the Royal Navy consulted Joseph Banks, and followed his advice on how best to secure the survival of seeds and plants on board Her Majesty's ships. The *HMS Investigator*, for example, or later the *HMS Challenger*, were survey vessels equipped with a vast array of collecting materials and storage space to transport natural history specimens.⁵⁹

But not all vessels were so well suited to receive vast collections of natural history. On most ships living quarters were cramped, storage space was limited, and equipment wanting. As he waited on one of the "hulks," old prison ships, in Portsmouth for the *HMS Rattlesnake* to be outfitted for her journey, Thomas Henry Huxley sent a sketch of his quarters to his brother George, depicting a hunched sailor, wedged between two bunk beds, unable to stretch his legs. He wrote an inscription underneath, which read "Am I not a man and a brother" (see Figure 2.2).⁶⁰ It is clear that Huxley was drawing on his strong antipathy towards the slave trade and slavery, likening his own confinement to that endured by millions of slaves on board British slavers. Huxley's image is not without irony. In collecting remains of the indigenous dead, Huxley was participating in the commodification of the indigenous body. In comparing the cramped conditions on board to those of the slave trade's human cargo, though, Huxley bemoaned that he had himself become such a commodity.

⁵⁹ David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science and Empire, 1780-1801* (New York: St. martin's Press, 1985), 3-9; Anthony Rice, *Voyages of Discovery: Three Centuries of Natural History Exploration* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1999).

⁶⁰ Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1997), fig. 6, and p. 45-6.

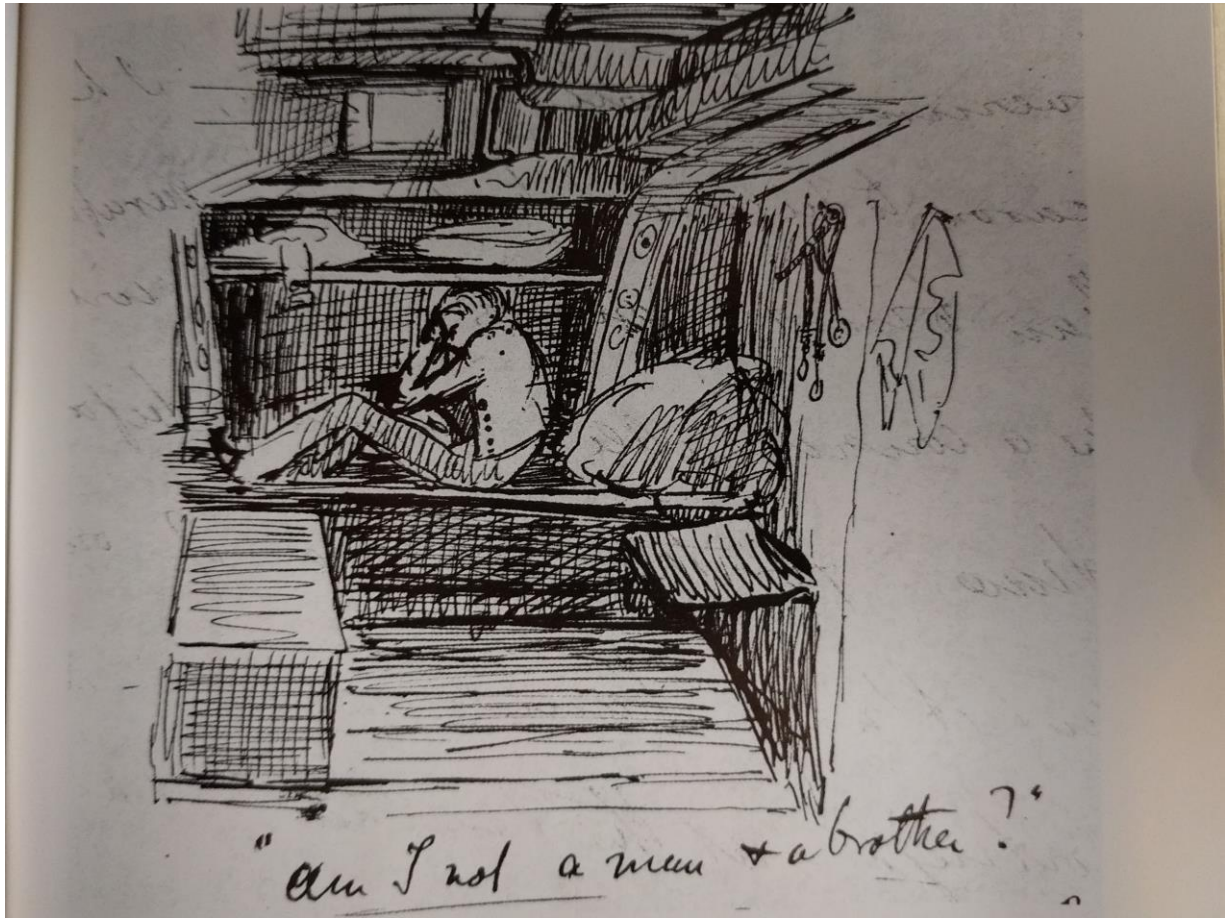


Figure 2.2. Thomas Henry Huxley as a newly commissioned sailor on the eve of his departure with the *HMS Rattlesnake* in 1846. This image shows the cramped space Huxley encountered as he was billeted in one of the “Hulks” (old prison ships) in Portsmouth as the *Rattlesnake* was being outfitted for its journey. The caption reads: “Am I not a man + a brother.” From: *Sketch by T. H. Huxley: Family Correspondence, Archives, Imperial College, London*, reproduced in Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil’s Disciple to Evolution’s High Priest* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1997), fig. 6.

Such cramped and harsh conditions were common in Her Majesty’s Navy. After returning from the surveying voyage of the *Rattlesnake*, Huxley published a review of John Macgillivray’s *Narrative of the Voyage of HMS Rattlesnake* (1852).⁶¹ As the ship’s naturalist, Huxley claimed, MacGillivray had given an admirable account of the scientific side of his voyage, but he had neglected to tell the human one. “We hanker for something more,” he wrote, we desire “to know

⁶¹ John MacGillivray, *Narrative of the H. M. S. Rattlesnake, Commanded by the Late Captain Owen Stanley During the Years 1846-50...*, vols. 2 (London: T. W. Boone, 1852).

something of the mode of existence, with all its pains and pleasures, of the flesh and blood which obtained them.” More importantly he saw in the voyage of the *HMS Rattlesnake* a “curious illustration of the manner in which official science is carried out in this country.” The ship had left Portsmouth in “a disgraceful state of unfitness,” her lower deck “continually under water during the voyage.” The British government had not given them any instructions on how to conduct their scientific work, nor had the Admiralty provided funds for the necessary reference works to be carried on board. Moreover, despite having pledged its commitment to “the collection of information on scientific subjects ... by the medical officers of Her Majesty’s Navy,” the Admiralty had failed to promote any of the scientists serving on board the *Rattlesnake*. “These are the *facilities and encouragements* to science afforded by the Admiralty,” Huxley lamented. Both the Captain and the officers serving under him had shown a lack of interest in science. “Science is not the Service,” Huxley concluded.⁶²

A rich harvest was often not a problem, Huxley warned his fellow scientists at sea, but where to store it was another matter. Alfred Corrie, serving as ship surgeon on the *HMS Pearl* at the Australian Station, complained about the difficult conditions that thwarted his efforts to put together a large collection of natural history specimens to send home. “I should have collected more,” he wrote to Dr. Alfred Günther at the British Museum in 1876, “but doubtless you know the difficulties that one has to encounter in collecting on board a ship of this class, where the space allotted to one is somewhat limited.”⁶³ His colleague on board the *Pearl*, William Wykeham Perry, similarly deplored the limited space on board a “man o’ war.” There is “hardly

⁶² Huxley, “Science at Sea,” 100, 104, 107-8, 112, 117.

⁶³ The *HMS Pearl* was a 21-gun corvette class ship, measuring just over 200 feet long. DF [ZOO/]200/9, 85, NHM, 1876, Zoology Correspondence A-J. Letter from Alfred Corrie, Surgeon on H. M. S. Pearl, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 30 June 1876.

any convenience for storage on board,” he deplored, so “I must content myself with the smaller sorts.”⁶⁴

Collectors found space where they could. H. B. Guppy, surgeon on board *HMS Lark* informed Günther in 1883, that “the floor of my cabin and my sleeping bunk were almost useless to me during the greater portion of our stay of eight months in the islands,” despite his choice to collect geological specimens, which “require less room and preserving materials.” Among the specimens Guppy had crammed into his cabin were six skulls he had collected around Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands. To free up some space he sent them back to England along with several other items of natural history in February of 1883.⁶⁵ But not everyone was willing to part with his specimens so easily. Having previously sent a consignment of two seal skins and one skull of the “fur seal of Commores,” John MacGillivray, serving as naturalist on board the *HMS Herald* in Australian waters in 1855, preferred “retaining the spiritual things of Fiji and the Solomon Is[lands] on board,” until he departed on another cruise.⁶⁶ It is unclear what these “spiritual things” were, but among them may have been the two human skulls from Fiji and the one from the Solomon Islands MacGillivray sent to the British Museum in 1855.⁶⁷

MacGillivray likely found these specimens too valuable to deposit in the hands of someone else.

⁶⁴ DF [ZOO/200/6, 119, f. 4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from [Leham?] Perry, member of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to the British Museum, of 10 December 1873.

⁶⁵ DF [ZOO/200/23, 162, f. 2, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of H. M. S. “Lark”, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, [?] February 1883.

⁶⁶ DF [ZOO/200/146, 126, f. 2, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2. Letter from John MacGillivray to John E. Gray, at the British Museum, 5 March 1855.

⁶⁷ These skulls appear to be part of part of a larger collection from the Solomon Islands, Fiji Islands, Australia, Albany Island, San Cristobal, Guadalcanal, etc., including various snakes, birds, and mammalia, totaling 49 specimens, presented by John MacGillivray in 1855. His letter to John E. Gray at the British Museum of 5 March 1855 mentions some “singular reptiles” among the collection. DF [ZOO/218/2/4, 73, NHM, 1854-1861, Vertebrata accessions register; DF [ZOO/200/146, 126, f.2-3, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2. Letter from John MacGillivray to John E. Gray, at the British Museum, 5 March 1855.

Nevertheless, when the *Herald* left for another cruise in Australian waters, he could no longer hold on to them and sent them to the British Museum.

Commercial shipping companies offered an alternative but costly and risky mode of sending human remains home. In April 1876, John Shortt, surgeon in Madras, India, complained to Flower about the difficulty of sending human specimens home in the hands of friends: “it is the sending home that puts me out.” He had a dozen native skulls ready to ship, but he hoped that “some of the Councillors [might] know any of the Directors of the P & O Steam Navigation Company” and facilitate the shipment. Two years later, he sent twenty native skulls to the Hunterian through traders in Madras. He had recently resigned from the Madras Medical Service and hoped to “have more leisure now and will be very glad indeed to help you further if you will let me know what particular specimens you would like to have for the College Museum.” Retired from the army and serving as Deputy Surgeon General, Shortt now dedicated his time to collecting human remains. He developed a network of “friends” in order to “to collect as many skulls as I can from the various districts of this Presidency.” By January 1880, Shortt’s plea to the Hunterian Museum for help in securing the services of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company had paid off, and he now sent 27 Indian skulls via steamer to Britain. Shortt asked only to be reimbursed for expenses related to shipping, though he was confident that “if the ship owners are appealed to, they might to make no charge for the freight.” He believed that the Hunterian was “a national Museum,” and therefore saw it as a duty for shipping companies “to aid in adding to the value by conveying specimens, ... free of charge.”⁶⁸

During the final quarter of the century, entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to profit from the increased circulation of human remains. The development trade routes, and later the

⁶⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 80, f. 3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from John Shortt (1822-1889) to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 21 January 1880.

proliferation of steam ships, in the nineteenth century tied London to the edges of the British empire. However, relinquishing human specimens into the hands of shipping companies might have solved one problem, but it gave rise to new ones as well. Even if the specimens had been properly packed, collectors had no guarantees that they would arrive at their destination intact. When in 1812, the Danish born naturalist Nathaniel Wallich dispatched a “box of specimens” to the Hunterian on board the *HMS Monarch*, the curator William Clift was unable to find any trace of it. He later concluded that they “were lost or destroyed on the voyage from inattention, and never reached this country.”⁶⁹ By the end of that year, Clift was able to acknowledge the receipt of a human cranium from Wallich.⁷⁰ But having safely reached London docks, specimens were far from in safe hands. Upon landing, specimens often ended up in customs warehouses, where officials would inspect the contents of the cases. When C. Müller wrote to John Gray about a collection of “sundry things,” which included a shipment of seven Greenland skulls, his brother William had sent over, he was worried that “something easily might be broken or disarranged” by customs officials.⁷¹

Collectors especially welcomed the development of commercial steam navigation in the mid-nineteenth century. Likening the British empire of the 1880s to a human body, contemporary historian John Robert Seeley believed science had given the “political organism” of empire a “new circulation, which is steam.”⁷² Colonial officials in Western Africa in the

⁶⁹ RCS-MUS/6/5/3, 64, f. 2, RCS, 1812, Museum Letters. Letter from Nathaniel Wallich, surgeon, Lerampore, to Curators of the Royal College of Surgeons, 2 March 1812.

⁷⁰ RCS-MUS/6/5/3, 79, f. 1, RCS, 1812, Museum Letters. Letter from Nathaniel Wallich, surgeon, Lerampore, to Curators of the Royal College of Surgeons, 8 December 1812.

⁷¹ DF [ZOO]/200/145, 257, f. 1, NHM, 1819-1845, Foreign Letters volume 1, part 2. Letter from C. Möller to John Edward Gray, at the British Museum, 17 May 1843.

⁷² John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England; Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 87.

1830s and 1840s continually demanded steamers to aid them in their civilizing mission. By the second half of the nineteenth century, state supported steamers were regularly servicing ports in the northern Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and via the Suez isthmus and the Red Sea connecting India, China and the islands in the western Pacific.⁷³

Steam navigation was crucial to the empire as a collection of people. In March of 1887, the trading company Burns, Philp & Co. Ltd, informed William Henry Flower, then working at the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, that Her Majesty's Special Commissioner for the Protectorate of British New Guinea had given them permission "for the establishment of steam communication along its coast, and the founding of trading stations at various points for the purpose of opening up friendly intercourse with the coastal and inland tribes." The Crown's "latest acquisition," they suggested, represented an "unworked field for the collection of Ethnological and Natural History specimens," and they would make the collecting and shipping of such specimens "a specialty." A network of traders and agents spread out along the coast would facilitate the collecting of specimens. Once collected, they would be packed and shipped, with "Cost, freight, and charges being payable on delivery."⁷⁴

Collectors welcomed the reliability and profligacy of steam navigation since they often lacked the space to store their specimens for any length of time. In November of 1884, H. B. Guppy, naturalist on board the *HMS Lark* informed Alfred Günther at the British Museum that he had sent two cases of specimens on board a ship called the "Mizzapore," owned by the

⁷³ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 17-57; Robert V. Kubicek, "The Colonial Steamer and the Occupation of West Africa by the Victorian State, 1840-1900," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 18 (January 1990), 9-32. See also Freda Harcourt, "British Oceanic Mail Contracts in the Age of Steam, 1838-1914," *Journal of Transport History*, vol. 9 (March 1988), 1-18.

⁷⁴ DF [ZOO/200/31, 63a, f. 1-3, NHM, Jan.-June 1887, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from Burns, Philp & Co. Ltd. A trading company, to Dr. W. H. Flower, Director of Natural History Museum, S. Kensington, 24 March 1887.

Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company. When in 1881, Dr. Emin Bey offered to collect human skulls during his journey to the Congo and detailed the means through which he would send the specimens to Britain. First, he would use steam navigation to send the remains to Khartoum from the Congolese interior, where he had made arrangements with the Austrian “Consul Hansal, my old and trusty friend in Khartoum,” to take charge of the specimens and forward them to the British General-Consul at Alexandria, Egypt. The expense would be limited to the carriage from Khartoum to Alexandria, which he anticipated, would be “a trifle.” The leg from the Congolese interior to Khartoum would cost nothing since “government steamers do not refuse a little box from a government officer.”⁷⁵

The journey by steamer was infrequent and precarious, though. By June 1882, Emin Bey was still at Khartoum, where “administrative business has deprived me of the pleasure to look at collecting for you.” He was nevertheless hopeful that his journey into the interior would produce an interesting collection as “Human skulls in these countries do never be wanting.”⁷⁶ By March 1883 Emin Bey was able to send two “Monbuttu” skulls from the African interior through his trusted friend Mr. Hansal at Khartoum. Bey was eager to accept in return publications from the Zoological Society, the Anthropological Society and “whatever scientific pamphlets you may not need of.” He was unable to acquire them at the Egyptian Post in Sudan and was therefore forced to be “a beggar for them.” Bey was not the only one who felt the need for scientific literature on the margins of empire. In order to thank the Reverend Thomas Bridges for his contributions of Fuegian skulls and skeletons, Flower forwarded him a “a present of books” in Ushuaia in 1884. Bey was also weary of the line of transportation on which he depended. He

⁷⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 102, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Emin Bey [to William Henry Flower], 10 July 1881.

⁷⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 131, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Emin Bey [to William Henry Flower], 22 July 1882.

trusted only his friend Mr. Hansal in Khartoum and advised Flower not to pay for any shipments in return in advance. The prospect of accounts being settled upon delivery was, Bey believed, the only “guarantee for the safe arrival” of the goods.⁷⁷

Bone Circuits

Over the course of the nineteenth century, indigenous remains increasingly circulated within global networks of correspondents, curators and collectors. As they moved along these bone circuits, they became entangled in intricate webs of imperial and professional competition. As the introduction to this chapter has shown, Banks’ position as the President of the Royal Society and his influence at Kew Gardens made him a key figure in the circulation of scientific materials in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Over the course of the nineteenth century, curators at the British Museum and the Hunterian Museum provided similar support for collectors in the field. Before leaving, collectors would often call on curators to enquire as to which specimens were likely to interest them. Such instructions were not misplaced, for travelers often had misguided ideas about what was valuable to collectors at home.⁷⁸ Many of the collections that arrived at the doorsteps of these museums were not worth keeping. In August of 1879, E. W. Palin approached Günther with a “a consignment of Natural History curiosities from Borneo - Eastern Archipelago.” The shipment contained several orangutan skeletons and skins as well as the remains of other mammals, birds, shells, butterflies, and also a “Dyack” skull. Palin

⁷⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 5, f. 1-2, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from Emin Bey [to William Henry Flower], 20 March 1883.

⁷⁸ DF [ZOO/200/16, 383, f. 2, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from Arthur Russel to Albert Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM/NHM, 30 June 1879.

had received the shipment “to oblige a friend,” though he had “not the least idea where to dispose of them.”⁷⁹ Günther kept only the butterflies.⁸⁰

In order to avoid such eclectic and haphazard collections taking up too much of their time, curators often obliged travelers’ requests for instructions. On the eve of accompanying Commodore Goodenough and Alfred Corrie on the fatal voyage of the *HMS Pearl* to the Australian Station, William Wykeham Perry called on Günther for advice. He asked for “instructions on the best mode of collecting and preserving specimens of Natural History, together with a few notes with reference to places in Australia and Polynesia whose fauna &c. are least known.”⁸¹ Günther duly provided Perry with some reference works and catalogues, as well as a “long and very lucid letter” regarding his request. Perry promised to repay this kindness with “the collection of some interesting specimens in the waters of Oceania, which I will endeavour to forward to you by every available opportunity.”⁸²

Curators and administrators of scientific societies, botanical gardens, hospitals and museums abroad often shared the scientific interests of their colleagues at home and eagerly assisted them in acquiring vegetable, animal and human specimens. In December of 1828, the Chairman of the Committee of Correspondence of the Royal Asiatic Society Alexander Johnston

⁷⁹ DF [ZOO/]200/16, 354, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from E. W. Palin to Albert Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM/NHM, 7 August 1879.

⁸⁰ It is unclear what happened to the rest of the specimens he offered. It is likely that they disappeared into a private collection or were sold abroad. DF [ZOO/]200/16, 355, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from E. W. Palin to Albert Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM/NHM, 8 August 1879; DF [ZOO/]200/16, 356, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from E. W. Palin to Albert Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM/NHM, 13 August 1879.

⁸¹ DF [ZOO/]200/6, 116, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from William Wykeham Perry, naturalist of the *HMS Pearl*, to Dr. Günther, the British Museum, of 15 May 1873.

⁸² DF [ZOO/]200/6, 117, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from William Wykeham Perry, naturalist of the *HMS Pearl*, to Dr. Günther, the British Museum, of 21 May 1873; DF [ZOO/]200/6, 118, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from William Wykeham Perry, naturalist of the *HMS Pearl*, to the British Museum, of 6 June 1873.

proposed to exert his influence “with most of the scientific Individuals resident in the Territories of the East India Company” in order to procure for the Hunterian Museum “such objects of natural history, to be obtained in the East, as would tend to render the Collection more complete.” Seven years before, Johnston had presented “two small Egyptian Mummies” to the Hunterian.⁸³ Hoping that Johnston might do more for them, the Board of Curators accepted Johnston’s offer and duly dispatched him several “copies of a Pamphlet published by the Board, containing directions for the Preservation of Objects of natural history, and a List of the more important Specimens still wanting in the Museum.”⁸⁴ Botanists in charge of botanical gardens across Britain’s colonies, too, supplied British museums with human remains. In 1877, William R. Guilfoyle, Director of the Botanic Gardens at Melbourne, hoped to dispose of a “the skeleton of a Papuan” for one of his collectors.⁸⁵

Medical men staffing in Britain’s colonial hospitals had access to a more readily available source of human specimens. The remains of natives who died in these hospitals often made it into collections in Britain. In 1878, James E. Coward, the District Surgeon of Middelburg, South Africa, sent three skulls, one from a “Kaffir” and two from “Hottentots,” to Flower at the Hunterian Museum. Coward had acquired all three in the line of duty. The Hottentot skulls had belonged to his patients in the local hospital. The “Kaffir” skull he had procured during a postmortem examination of a person struck by lightning in order to ascertain

⁸³ RCS-MUS/5/1/1, 99, 1800-1830, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter [from Edmund Belfour, Secretary to the RCS,] to Sir Alexander Johnston, 24 September 1821, re the donation of two Egyptian mummies.

⁸⁴ RCS-MUS/5/1/1, 150-151, 1800-1830, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter [from Edmund Belfour, Secretary to the RCS,] to Sir Alexander Johnston, 5 December 1828, re Johnston’s offer to assist with collecting and a catalogue of specimens wanted and pamphlet specifying collection.

⁸⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 46, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from William R. Guilfoyle, Melbourne Botanic Gardens, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Museum, 22 February 1877. For the role of botanical gardens such as the one at Kew as institutions of imperial policy, see Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion*; Drayton, *Nature’s Government*.

the rate of decomposition after a lightning strike.⁸⁶ Medical men like Coward were able to provide detailed information about the individuals to whom the remains had belonged. They carefully recorded the names, gender, age, and locality of the persons they acquired the remains from and provided detailed descriptions their physical appearances and the circumstances of their deaths. Curators in Britain welcomed such details for they enabled them to classify the remains more accurately.

Curators of colonial museums across the British empire represent a useful case study to gauge the ways in which human remains circulated as biocapital on a global scale. As I have suggested, the movement of human remains was often part of a larger circulation of natural history specimens between British and colonial museums in which the objects circulated as both specimen and specie.⁸⁷ Curators abroad not only shared their colleagues' interest in natural history, but their desire to expand their own collections often provided both an impetus to exchange specimens as well as the means to do so. Between 1869 and 1886, the German emigré Julius von Haast, curator of the Canterbury Museum, in Christchurch, New Zealand, regularly appealed to the British Museum and the Hunterian Museum to add to the collections of his "infant museum." Among other specimens of natural history, Haast promised the remains of Maori and Moriori peoples in return for specimens.⁸⁸ Despite his efforts to procure them, Haast

⁸⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 55, f. 1-7, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from James E. Coward to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 20 June 1878; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 55, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from James E. Coward to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 17 July 1878.

⁸⁷ Historian Sverker Sörlin has explored how natural history specimens became "hard cash," circulating in an economy, whose value was determined by a "stock-exchange" of scientific materials. See Sverker Sörlin, "Ordering the World for Europe: Science as Intelligence and Information as Seen from the Northern Periphery," Special Issue: Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise, *Osiris*, vol. 15 (2000), 51-69 (especially 64).

⁸⁸ Moriori skulls in particular were much valued items, since these inhabitants of the Chatham Islands were "nearly extinct." Among the specimens he requested were large quadrupeds not found in New Zealand, including a giraffe, an arctic bear, a bison, an Irish elk, an orangutan and a gorilla. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 42, f. 1-2, RCS, 1868-1873,

frequently had to disappoint his colleagues in Britain. Yet, in the meantime, Haast did serve as a broker for human remains. In 1871, frustrated by his own inability to procure human materials, Haast wrote to Flower about friend, who offered to collect Maori and Moriori skulls for the Hunterian Museum.⁸⁹ Four years later, he informed Flower that another friend had “found in some sandhills in the Northern Island quite a cemetery and that I thus shall be able to send you some fine things of our Maories.”⁹⁰

Like many of his colleagues in other colonial museums across the British Empire, Haast was rich on ambition but always short on money. His pecuniary woes likely added to the image he had of himself as a missionary for science, a harbinger of civilization in an otherwise backward part of the world. “It is [a] hard uphill march in a new country,” he wrote to Flower in 1870, but it is “very pleasing to think, that one is allowed to lay the foundation stone for the future centres of science, the great civilizer of all ages.” The exchange of native fauna for foreign specimens was often the only means of adding to his “little museum.”⁹¹ One of Haast’s main

Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 4 August 1869; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 81, f. 7, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 24 October 1870; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 29, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 29 July 1875; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 52, f. 1-4, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 February 1870; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 95, f. 2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 September 1871; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 28, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 June 1875.

⁸⁹ The Museum Committee declined the offer on 15 September 1875, likely due to the high prices asked for the specimens. Travers charged £20 for Moriori skeletons and £7 for skulls, and £15 for Maroi skeletons and £4 for skulls. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 19, f. 1-2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Henry H. Travers, Wellington, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 28 June 1871;

⁹⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 29, f. 2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 29 July 1875.

⁹¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 93, f. 2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 26 July 1871; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 65, f. 1-6, RCS,

struggles was to justify the expenses associated with the establishment of a colonial museum and the prejudices settlers had against such scientific pursuits in general. “I am sure that you in your turn will assist science here,” he wrote to Flower, “where we have such hard uphill fights against colonial ideas.”⁹² Nevertheless, Haast was confident that he would be able to overturn those prejudices. In December 1871, just 21 years after “the first emigrant stepped on shore,” he informed Flower that the Canterbury Museum was adding a new wing to the building “according to our motto ‘Advance Canterbury’.” By then he was still looking for “some large stuffed quadrupeds in order to satisfy the popular taste,” and proposed to get the “skins of an Elephant, Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus or any other large quadrupeds” to “form the centre piece in our Museum.” He again offered Maori and Moriori skulls in return.⁹³

In March 1872, Haast was pleased to learn that soon a gorilla would arrive to take its place as “the greatest ornament and attraction to our museum.”⁹⁴ Three months later Haast received news of the safe arrival of the gorilla skin and he was now ready to ship a Moriori skull along with three or four incomplete skeletons of the same race in return.⁹⁵ Haast’s wishes to add the remains of large quadrupeds to the museum by offering human remains was an effort to cater to the tastes of his colonial public. British settlers in New Zealand were anxious to see lions, gorillas and hippopotamuses they had heard and read so much about from British explorers in

1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator of the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 26 April 1870.

⁹² RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 95, f. 3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 September 1871.

⁹³ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 97, f. 1-6, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 16 December 1871.

⁹⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 100, f. 1-4, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 13 March 1872.

⁹⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 105, f. 3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 7 May 1872; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 105, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 1 June 1872.

Africa and Asia. Colonial museums as well as national institutions profited from the circulation of human remains within the British Empire. Both played to their strengths. Colonial museums lacked access to specimens foreign to their environment. National institutions drew on their vast networks to expand the breadth of their collections by providing in the wants of their colonial colleagues.

But the generosity of colonial curators had limits. Curators of colonial museums like Haast depended on the assistance of their colleagues in the large national institutions to enrich their collections with foreign specimens, but Haast soon learned that not all curators shared his enthusiasm for exchange. In 1873, his relationship with the British Museum soured. He had become frustrated with the Alfred Günther's reluctance to send valuable specimens in exchange for the ones he was sending them. Haast indicated his frustration to Flower at the Hunterian Museum. When he learned that Flower had just received a large collection of Peruvian skulls and mummies, he hoped Flower would "not [be] so greedy as a certain large institution in London," which is only "willing to let other smaller museums at the antipodes have some of your crumbs."⁹⁶ The following year, he directed his ire at Alfred Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum. "I fail to see how your great national institution should not be able to return valuable exchanges like all the Museums," he wrote, "as you ought to have more chances to obtain them, than any other Museum in the world."⁹⁷ Although he had always had the utmost admiration for those in charge of the British Museum (he even named a mountain range in New

⁹⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 131, f. 2-3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 21 October 1873.

⁹⁷ DF [ZOO/]200/4, 2, f. 1, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence H-K. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 28 July 1874.

Zealand after Günther's predecessor John Gray), he had grown frustrated at the reluctance of his colleagues at the British Museum to send duplicates in return for a collection of moa bones.⁹⁸

His disappointment at the treatment of the British Museum was rendered even more painful by the fact that other European institutions had shown a greater willingness to exchange specimens. When Haast sent a collection of moa bones to the Paris Museum, though of lesser value than the one he had sent to the Günther, the curators in Paris responded by sending several cases "with a magnificent lot of things and amongst them many of our desiderata and with a promise to obtain others for us." Upon hearing of the liberality of the curators in Paris, the Trustees at the Canterbury Museum, whom Haast described as "unscientific men" and "new to science," pressured Haast to forward more collections to Paris. But Haast remained loyal to the British Museum, and "it was only after great trouble that I managed to obtain their permission to leave it with you and accepting, to get at least some thing," including "ethnological collections of all kinds." The whole ordeal shook Haast's confidence in his British colleagues: "I think it is bad policy to treat a little museum, which has had and has still hard struggles to exist with anything but generosity, because even if I should like to send you the things without being sure of an adequate return, I shall have always to hear the tale about how ungenerously the British Museum treated us about this fine Moa skeleton."⁹⁹

Haast's dedication to the exchange of natural history specimens, however self-serving, continued to go unanswered at the British Museum. When in 1876, he forwarded a New Guinea

⁹⁸ The moa is a kind of flightless bird, indigenous to New Zealand. Haast had named the range after Gray whilst exploring the area in 1863 "so that you were Godfather in New Zealand, without knowing it." For Haast's influence in naming the Gray mountain range in New Zealand, located on the West Coast, north of the River Haast and south of Mt. Hoakes, see his letter dated 27 February 1869. DF [ZOO/200/146, 86, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2. Letter from Julius von Haast to John Gray, at the British Museum, 27 February 1869.

⁹⁹ DF [ZOO/200/4, 2, f.2-3, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence H-K. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 28 July 1874.

mummy to the British Museum, as the late John Gray had suggested, Günther not only rejected and sold the specimen on, but he refused to hand it over to its new owner unless his own expenses were covered. In the end, Haast offered to send a post-office order to cover the charges. At the same time, he reaffirmed “my offer to procure you any specimens you want from New Zealand as I have always a collection at my disposal and shall only be too glad to do what I can for the great national institution.”¹⁰⁰ Despite his growing frustration, Haast realized that he could not so easily sever ties with the British Museum if he hoped to grow his own collections.

As Haast’s exchange with the Paris museum suggests, the movement of human remains from British colonies was not limited to the British institutions. Curators in fledgling colonial museums sought to capitalize on their strengths by engaging with institutions from other European nations, whose curators sought to add exotic specimens to their own collections. Haast exchanged natural history specimens, including Maori and Moriori remains, with institutions across Europe and the United States, though he always preferred to trade with institutions in Britain, particularly Flower at the Hunterian.¹⁰¹ By the mid-1870s, Haast was able to deposit a line of credit for £700 with William Flower at the Hunterian Museum, acquired through exchanges with the natural History Museum in New York. He instructed Flower to use for the

¹⁰⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 191, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 13 December 1876; DF [ZOO/]200/11, 192, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 8 March 1877.

¹⁰¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 18, f. 1-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 18 December 1874; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 33, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 10 January 1875; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 34, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 23 October 1875.

acquisition of specimens for his museum in Canterbury.¹⁰² By December 1876, however, his funds had dried up. Unfortunately, he deplored “Such windfalls are rare.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Haast found “French Museums, and Paris principally,” among “the most generous museums in the world.”¹⁰⁴

Ironically, the growing European appetite for human remains not only created windfalls for colonial curators, it also threatened the collections of indigenous specimens in colonial museums. During the second half of the nineteenth century, European demand, colonial policy, and the disappearance of native populations in New Zealand created a shortage of indigenous human specimens in the colony. In July 1871, Julius von Haast asked Flower at the Hunterian whether “Is it not possible to get a preserved head Maori head in England?” Government officials had been so successful in suppressing the violent native custom of preserving heads, that it had become impossible to find them in New Zealand.¹⁰⁵ In December 1872, Flower confirmed that he had found a Maori head for Haast at the Brighton Museum.¹⁰⁶ In June 1873,

¹⁰² RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 18, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 18 December 1874; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.29, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 29 July 1875.

¹⁰³ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 44, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 12 December 1876.

¹⁰⁴ One of Haast’s most fruitful connections outside Britain was Prof. Gervais at Paris, who in 1876 sent Haast “5 large cases with a series of large mammal skeletons, among them, Giraffe, Rhinoceros, Camel, etc.” and in 1877, “72 skeletons & 197 species of vertebrate fossils.” RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 44, f. 1-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 12 December 1876; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 50, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 22 September 1877.

¹⁰⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 93, f. 3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 26 July 1871.

¹⁰⁶ Haast promised to send the skeleton of an Apteryx and Moa in return. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 116, f. 6-7, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 23 December 1872; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, p.123, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2.

Parisian naturalist A. C. Bouvier informed William Flower that he was also willing to provide Haast with the head of a Chief, “strong, well-preserved, and with more complete tattoos than the ones procured by the expedition of Dumont D’Urville,” for £50.¹⁰⁷ Other colonial curators in New Zealand experienced a similar shortage of native human specimens. During a series of exchanges of human and animal specimens between 1878-80, Thomas Cheeseman in Auckland informed Flower that it had become impossible to collect “Maori preserved heads” in New Zealand. Fortunately, he recalled a large shipment of preserved heads heading for Britain in the past and hoped Flower would be able to recuperate one or two for him.¹⁰⁸ By June 1883, several preserved Maori heads had arrived in Auckland, along with specimens of a tiger, polar bear and camel. Cheeseman was delighted with the new acquisition of Maori heads. “They are ghastly looking objects,” he wrote, “but possess an interest here, as illustrating a remarkable Maori custom.”¹⁰⁹

Haast’s experiences raise questions about the free exchange men like Banks facilitated and profited from. Petty interests and jealousy seriously jeopardized the exchange of valuable specimens between colonial museums and metropolitan centers of calculation. Colonial curators were torn between allegiance to their colleagues in London, on whose generosity they depended, and their commitment to developing a “creole” scientific culture.¹¹⁰ Like the trade in plants, the

Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 June 1873.

¹⁰⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 125, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from A. C. Bouvier, Paris naturalist, to W. H. Flower, Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 20 June 1873 [in French].

¹⁰⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 83, f. 2-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Thomas Frederic Cheeseman to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 1 March 1880. See Chapter Six “A Bone to Pick with Colonialism” for more on the relationship between colonial violence and the collection of human remains.

¹⁰⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 149, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Thomas Frederic Cheeseman to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 19 June 1883.

¹¹⁰ I explore the emergence of “creole” scientific cultures through the efforts of long-term residents further in Chapter Five.

circulation of human remains in the nineteenth century was a global phenomenon. These bone circuits depended on vast networks of correspondents, curators and collectors whose scientific, commercial and professional interests were sometimes aligned and sometimes at odds. National institutions like the British Museum and the Hunterian Museum profited from these networks by gaining access to exotic and rare specimens. In return, colonial museums benefited from the vast stores and financial resources of these national institutions to expand their own budding collections.

However, these exchanges were not devoid of self-interest, or even enmity. Both national and colonial museums jealously guarded the most prized specimens for their own “Embryo collection[s].”¹¹¹ Nor was this circulation confined within neat imperial boundaries. Curators on the margins of empire sought to capitalize on their access to rare and unique human specimens, trading with institutions across Europe and America in order to enrich their own collections. By the second half of the nineteenth century colonial curators felt the strain of European demand on their own resources, as more and more specimens were shipped back home. As a result, in some cases the movement of human remains was reversed. Maori heads found themselves on ships bound for their native soil. And, the rapid depletion of human resources on the edges of empire sent European institutions into a frenzy for human remains. But larger jealousies awaited beyond the horizon.

The Skulls Race

¹¹¹ Among the specimens he requested were large quadrupeds not found in New Zealand, including a giraffe, an arctic bear, a bison, an Irish elk, an orangutan and a gorilla. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 52, f. 1-4, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 February 1870; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 95, f. 2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 September 1871; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 28, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 June 1875.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, scientific progress marched across the globe in lockstep with imperial power. A sense of patriotism permeated scientific pursuits. At the end of his 1842 Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS), Lord Francis Egerton told his audience of gentlemen that scientific discoveries “elevate the country in which they originate in the scale of nations, and gratify the most reasonable feelings of national pride.”¹¹² Richard Owen agreed with Lord Egerton’s assessment, though in 1840 he still believed Britain lagged far behind its continental rivals in the field of comparative anatomy. Like Cuvier, Owen believed that access to large scientific collections was the key to scientific progress. So when in June of that year he heard from a member of the Bristol Philosophical Institution that an African trader was disposing of a chimpanzee skeleton, he immediately tried to acquire it for the museum of College of Surgeons. There was a sense of urgency about his plea, and when the Museum Committee appeared to waver on the purchase, he pointed out to them that “with the Founder of the Collection, money would have been of no consideration.” Above all, he feared that “unless an offer be promptly made, these specimens will pass into the hands of dealers and find their way to Paris, Leyden or Berlin, where their value is well known, and where they have long been great desiderata.”¹¹³

Owen’s informant in Bristol warned him that the captain had “very extravagant notions of their value,” but there was no time to waste since “several dealers are about them.”¹¹⁴ The

¹¹² Francis Egerton, “Address,” in *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (1842), xxxi-xxxvi (quote from xxxvi).

¹¹³ RCS-MUS/5/6/21, n.n., f. 1-4, RCS, 1810-1844, Bundle of letters relating to the affairs of the Museum and College, especially donations. Letter from Richard Owen to Robert Keate, 25 June 1840.

¹¹⁴ RCS-MUS/5/6/21, n.n., RCS, 1810-1844, Bundle of letters relating to the affairs of the Museum and College, especially donations. Letter from [?] Stutchbury to Richard Owen to Robert Keate, 25 June 1840.

Museum Committee now moved quickly and secured the skeleton for £60. Owen was keenly aware that British resources were in danger of being lost to foreign collections. After visiting several fossil collections in the Continent, Philip Egerton implored to Richard Owen to take up the study of fossils in British collections immediately because he was “so fearful of the harvest being gathered by a Foreigner.”¹¹⁵ Patriotism, competition, even jealousy were powerful undercurrents in the exchange of natural history specimens between European men of science. The prestige that accompanied scientific discoveries engendered international competition in the acquisition of, access to and study of collections in Britain and abroad. Scientists like Owen realized that comparative anatomy was impossible without access to new and unique specimens, including human remains. In the nineteenth century, British prospectors fanned out across British possessions to secure these human resources for British institutions.

French, German, Italian, American and Swedish collectors had been rambling for indigenous remains for some time before British collectors joined the global search for human remains in earnest. In November 1877, Charles Thomas lamented the absence of British interest in collecting in South America. “The different institutions in the United States and other countries are constantly sending out representatives to collect all kinds of specimens,” he wrote Flower, “and why does not the British do the same.”¹¹⁶ Thomas was apparently unaware that in the 1830s and 1840s Richard and Robert Schomburgk had been exploring Guyana in search of a British “El Dorado,” sending to Britain countless specimens of natural history, including the “skull of an Arawak Indian” as well as twelve plaster masks of South American tribes and the

¹¹⁵ Egerton to Owen, 26 October 1840. Quoted in Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 324.

¹¹⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 51, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Thomas to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 November 1877.

casts of a hand and foot of a “carmetski Indian.”¹¹⁷ But more human remains had been taken out of Peru by the time Thomas urged Flower to take an interest in the region. Thomas J.

Hutchinson, the British Consul at Callao, had already been collecting indigenous remains in Peru. In 1873, Hutchinson had presented a collection of more than one hundred skulls and 150 lower jaws from Peru to the Anthropological Society of London. The Society kept only sixteen of Hutchinson’s skulls, disposing of the rest with the Hunterian Museum.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, Thomas’ sense of urgency was not unfounded. In 1877, he informed Flower that he knew an Englishman residing in Lima, Peru, by the name of Charles Bryant, who had a “a splendid specimen of a Titicaca skull, a better or larger specimen that you have in the Museum R. C. of S.” Thomas had tried to acquire it himself, but Bryant had refused to sell. Now, Thomas believed, it was in danger of being lost, and “it is a pity it should be destroyed or carried away to the United States or some other country when it could be secured for our own.”¹¹⁹

Thomas’s apprehension was not ill-founded. American ethnoprospectors were increasingly turning to South America for human raw materials, resulting in large collections of human crania

¹¹⁷ RCS-MUS/3/1/5, f. 8 of Physiology Donations and f. 25 of Osteology Donations, 1833-1858, Donation Book, Vol 5; RCS-MUS/3/3/15, f. 3, 1858, Papers re human crania; RCS-MUS/5/1/2, 89, 1831-1850, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. For the exploration of Richard and Robert Schomburgk, see D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 67-118 and 199-254.

¹¹⁸ The records of donations of human remains for the Anthropological Society of London and the later Institute are incomplete. When the Institute sold its collection of human skulls to the Hunterian Museum, it provided two manuscript catalogues, which provided varying degrees of detail. George Busk described Hutchinson’s collection in the journal of the Institute in 1874. RCS-MUS/7/8/9, no. 9-18, MS catalogue of specimens obtained from RAI (1879?); and RCS-MUS/7/8/10, f. 51-3, 56, MS catalogue of specimens of the various races of mankind of the RAI (n.d./c. 1879). See also George Busk, “Remarks on a Collection of 150 Ancient Peruvian Skulls, presented to the Anthropological Institute by T. J. Hutchinson, Esq., &c.,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol.3 (1874), 86.

¹¹⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 51, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Thomas to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 November 1877.

in the hands of American anthropologists.¹²⁰ In 1881, Lucien Carr, assistant curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, informed Flower that he had just received a collection of over 300 skulls from Cusco, Peru, and twenty from caves near Coahuila, Mexico.¹²¹ American ethnoprospectors were becoming more active elsewhere too. In September 1871, Gustav Duben from Stockholm informed Flower that “the English are invading the country [Lapland] and the Americans coming after them.” He also claimed to have met the French “Gorilla-man Du Chaillu” there.¹²² Nevertheless, Thomas was convinced that Bryant would be willing to part with it “gratis” should Flower appeal to his national pride. But Flower’s efforts were in vain. Bryant refused.¹²³

Once large or unique collections of human remains were offered for sale, national governments tried to make sure that these collections would come to reside at national institutions. When Joachim von Nathusius inherited “various collections” from his father, he applied to dispose of them to the British Museum. The collection consisted of “about 200 skeletons and 2500 skulls of mostly domestic animals;” of which “the most valuable part are the Series of the different Races,” alongside “many thousands of pictures, 5,000 works, and thousands of wool specimens.” But the British Museum was not the only interested party. “Our government at Berlin insists upon a first offer,” von Nathusius informed Flower, and they had already sent Germany’s most renowned anthropologist Prof. Virchow from Berlin to inspect the

¹²⁰ American ethnoprospectors like Aleš Hrdlicka and T. Dale Stewart continued prospecting in Peru well into the early twentieth century. Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 69-125.

¹²¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 96, f. 2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Lucien Carr to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 17 January 1881.

¹²² RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 93, f. 1-4, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Gustave Duben to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, [5 September 1871].

¹²³ Only two remained, Thomas believed, one in the hands of Charles Bryant and the other in an American collection. RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 51, f. 1-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Thomas to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 1 December 1877.

collection.¹²⁴ A few days later, von Nathusius again wrote to the British Museum, alerting the Committee that the government in Berlin “desires my decision for the end of this month, because of the state budget.” He set the price of the osteological collection at 4,000 guineas, though he asked that “Should a higher prize be offered, than the British Museum is willing to give, you will not blame me for accepting it.”¹²⁵ There is no record of the collection entering the British Museum. Nevertheless, governments encouraged national museums to preserve prestigious collections of human remains within their boundaries. These collections embodied both a sense of scientific progress and national pride.

But more was at stake than simply keeping a valuable collection within national boundaries. The circulation of human remains in a global economy of natural history specimens existed in tension with the desire among curators to develop regional expertise. The expertise of the Hunterian Museum, for example, coincided with the regions of British superiority abroad. Requesting several skulls of native peoples to exhibit in France in 1881, Paul Topinard was particularly interested in Flower’s specimens of Tasmanians and Australian, since “You have in hand the greatest collection of both there is in the world.”¹²⁶ Topinard was eager to add their casts to his own collection, since he had only a few specimens in his own collection.¹²⁷ But curators of national institutions were anxious to preserve their regional expertise. In December of 1878, Lucien Carr, Assistant Curator of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and

¹²⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/16, 319, f. 1-4, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from Joachim von Nathusius to the British Museum, 4 August 1879.

¹²⁵ DF [ZOO/]200/16, 321, f. 1-3, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from Joachim von Nathusius to the British Museum, 12 August 1879.

¹²⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 103, f. 5, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Paul Topinard to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 9 July 1881.

¹²⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 104, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Paul Topinard to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 19 July 1881; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 110, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Paul Topinard to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 20 September 1881.

Ethnology at Harvard University, wrote to William Flower to inform him of a study he had been conducting of some 150 crania from the Santa Barbara Islands, off the Southern coast of California. Flower's work on the natives of the Pacific Islands was proving to be very useful to Carr.¹²⁸ He proposed an exchange of "two or three from California and as many from the mounds of Tennessee if you desire them, taking in exchange therefore specimens from Australia and Melanesia if you can spare them." But Carr remained reluctant to part with his new specimens. "Frankly though, I think it would be better policy for us to hold on to what we have like grim death," he wrote to Flower, "and to continue strengthening ourselves, each in our own line rather than by an exchange of a few specimens, weakening ourselves to that extent and not increase our working strength of the other."¹²⁹ Carr's reservations as to the development of regional expertise made sense scientifically. Curators of scientific collections accumulated as many skulls as possible in order to increase the accuracy of average measurements for each racial type.

The appetite for human remains among national institutions in Europe grew apace over the course of the nineteenth century. In November 1869, Joseph Barnard Davis informed Flower at the Hunterian that Dr. Nicolucci of Italy was intent on selling "a good collection of Roman and Greek skulls," numbering about one hundred in total, "all authentic, and mostly in good

¹²⁸ Among the skulls he had found on the most southern island, there was one that was radically different from any of the others. It was a mystery that puzzled him, and he hoped that Flower's work on the Melanesian natives might prove useful. This work was most likely Flower's lectures on *The Aborigines of Tasmania: An Extinct Race* (Manchester: John Heywood, [1879]), delivered in the Hulme Town Hall, Manchester on 30 November 1878.

¹²⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.56, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Lucien Carr, Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 26 December 1878.

condition.”¹³⁰ The collection would include a total of 166 skulls, for a price of £120.¹³¹ Davis had peaked the interest of the Museum Committee, and in February 1870, he wrote to Flower again, indicating his support for the purchase.¹³² Having received ancient European skulls from Nicolucci for his own collection, Davis was convinced that the collection for sale “is in as good a condition as a collection containing so many *ancient* skulls can be.” Moreover, the British anthropologist had absolute faith in Nicolucci’s credentials as a man of science, referring to him as the “Dr. Prichard of Italy.”¹³³ George Rolleston, Linacre Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, agreed. Dr. Nicolucci’s reputation guaranteed the quality of the collection.¹³⁴ In the meantime, Thomas Huxley had broached the subject of Dr. Nicolucci’s collection during a meeting of the Ethnological Society, and informed Flower that it had been “agreed upon all hands that it could be eminently desirable to secure it for this country.”¹³⁵ The support of such eminent scientists was all the Museum Committee needed to act and it instructed Sir Edwin Saunders to inspect Nicolucci’s collection in Italy.

By 20 March 1870, the circumstances of the exchange had become more complicated. Saunders had been unable to visit Dr. Nicolucci in person at his home midway between Rome

¹³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 45, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 28 November 1869.

¹³¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 65, f. 2-3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 1 May 1870.

¹³² RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 51, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 6 February 1870.

¹³³ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 52, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 9 February 1870.

¹³⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 47, f. 1-3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from George Rolleston to William Henry Flower, Curator at the Hunterian Museum, [?] 1870.

¹³⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 47, f. 1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Thomas Huxley, on behalf of the Ethnological Society, to William Henry Flower, Curator at the Hunterian Museum, 28 January 1870. See also RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 49, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Thomas Huxley, on behalf of the Ethnological Society, to William Henry Flower, Curator at the Hunterian Museum, 21 June 1870.

and Naples due to the distance and the danger of brigand bands roaming the Abruzzi mountains.¹³⁶ Making matters worse, the Italian government had heard of the sale and insisted on procuring the collection for a new anthropological museum in Florence. Nicolucci now wrote to Davis to inform him that if the Museum Committee was unable to make an offer soon, he would be obliged to sell his collection to the Italian government. Davis decided not to wait for the confirmation of the Committee. He informed Nicolucci that “I will take the collection on the terms proposed,” even though he did not have any room to store it.¹³⁷ A week later, Davis wrote to Flower to inform him that the collection would arrive in London by steamer from Naples. But Davis was still unsure of the outcome. “I shall not be quite sure of the skulls till they reach England,” he confided to Flower. The whole ordeal reminded Davis of Sir James Edward Smith’s efforts to acquire Carl Linnaeus’ collection from his widow in 1784. Smith had managed to load Linnaeus’ collection onto a ship in Stockholm, but when the Swedish government discovered the news, she sent out a vessel to overtake the ship. The Swedes would have succeeded then, Davis wrote, “If a little more expedition had been used.”¹³⁸ He feared the same could still happen now. By 10 April 1870, Davis was “pretty sure to get them, and that before long.”¹³⁹ By May 1870, the collection had arrived safely.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 62, f. 1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from Sir Edwin Saunders in Florence to the Hunterian Museum, 10 April 1870.

¹³⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 58, f. 1-4, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 20 March 1870.

¹³⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 59, f. 1-3, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 27 March 1870.

¹³⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 62, f. 2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 10 April 1870.

¹⁴⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 68, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 22 May 1870; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 80, f. 2, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from J. Barnard Davis to the Hunterian Museum, 18 January 1871.

European institutions joined the race for British collections as well. By the end of the decade, Joseph Barnard Davis himself was ready to dispose of his own collection of more than fifteen hundred skulls.¹⁴¹ In March 1878, Davis, having lost “my very dear companion,” first suggested to Flower he was interested in relinquishing his own collection. Davis had heard that Flower had recently taken up “the comparative anatomy of the races of mankind.” Though it was still “a very obscure subject and full of difficulties,” Davis was confident that Flower would be successful, and “I expect ultimately, like Baron Cuvier, you will become the founder of a new science.”¹⁴² But Davis was still unsure about where to dispose of his collection. He was considering selling his collection to the Anthropological Institute, the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, or even disposing of it to Dr. Topinard in Paris. Even the Swedish government had expressed interest, but Davis had heard nothing from them since their initial probe. However, a close friend of Davis’, Dr. Archibald Walker, had heard of the plan to send the collection to Paris, and “alluded to a purchase by subscription, rather than it should go abroad, and begs he would gladly [contribute] to prevent it from going so.”¹⁴³ In October 1879, it was clear Davis wanted the collection to remain in England, and he had now received an offer from the Anthropological Institute for £1,000. Since his wife had died, his “circumstances are materially altered.” Davis now felt he could no longer simply deposit the collection in the

¹⁴¹ Joseph Barnard Davis, *Thesaurus Craniorum: Catalogue of the Skulls of the Various Races of Man, in the Collection of Joseph Barnard Davis* (London: Printed for the Subscribers, 1867).

¹⁴² RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f.1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to [William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum], 7 April 1878; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to [William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum], 24 April 1878.

¹⁴³ When the Swedish government expressed an interest in the collection, the price was £3,000. Now the price was 1,600 Guineas, about £1,700. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 70, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 23 October 1879.

Hunterian Museum.¹⁴⁴ By December 1879, the collection was bound for the Hunterian Museum for the same amount, and Davis confided to Flower that “I shall never more be exceedingly satisfied to leave my collection in such good hands, knowing that it is the best result that I could have desired.”¹⁴⁵

The successful addition of Nicolucci’s and Davis’ collections enhanced the international renown of the Hunterian Museum. A year later, the German anatomist Adolf Bernhard Meyer at Dresden heard of the acquisition of Davis’ collection and wrote to Flower that “your coll[ection] of crania will be the richest now.”¹⁴⁶ The acquisitions of Nicolucci’s and Davis’ collections added considerably to the Hunterian’s expertise in European skulls. But for some it was not enough. By the late 1880s one correspondent recommended the purchase of an Austrian collection of mostly European skulls on the grounds that the European races were still underrepresented in the Hunterian Museum.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

Like in geology and botany, the growing circulation of human remains during the nineteenth century both reflected and reinforced Britain’s expansionist drive.¹⁴⁸ British bioprospectors took

¹⁴⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 70, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 24 October 1879.

¹⁴⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 75, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 14 December 1879.

¹⁴⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 81, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Adolf Bernhard Meyer, Dresden, to William H. Flower, 9 February 1880.

¹⁴⁷ J. G. Garson recommended purchasing the Austrian, Swiss, Greek, Hungarian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Tyrol, Spanish and Etruscan skulls, considering the Eskimo, Malay, Egyptian and Swedish skulls as less valuable to a collection containing already so many specimens of these. RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 39, f. 1-3, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from J. G. Garson to [?], [?] 1888.

¹⁴⁸ The emergence of commercial monopolies in botany and pharmacy during the early modern and modern periods has been well-documented. See, for example, Francisco Guerra, “Drugs from the Indies and the Political Economy of the Sixteenth Century,” *Analecta Medico-Historia*, vol. 1 (1966), 29-54; Roy Porter and Dorothy Porter. “The

to the alliance of science and empire with uncommon zeal. The discussions of distributions patterns of plants and animals in the works of Charles Lyell, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, Janet Browne suggests, are evidence that colonial activities determined the terms of scientific exploration and collection. “The ethos [of colonization] gave purpose to naturalists’ endeavors,” she argues. “It provided metaphors and a rationale; the raw materials and a way to understand.”¹⁴⁹ The collection and circulation of indigenous human remains projected the British empire as a collection of people rather than simply territory or influence. The remains of native populations did not simply embody imperial power, they were constituents of it. Solutions to the problems associated with shipping these human materials to Britain marshalled the resources of empire. In the process, indigenous human remains became commodities, traded and exchanged between institutions and individuals. Their circulation both drew on and sustained global networks of scientific exchange. And like all raw materials, European empires sought to acquire them for themselves. Here too, the resources of empire, its personnel and its naval technologies, ensured that British ethnoprospectors could compete with their European rivals in most parts of the world. But these networks often also undercut neat imperial boundaries. Colonial curators in particular saw in native human remains an opportunity to expand their budding museums with duplicates from British, continental and American museums.

Rise of the English Drug Industry: The Role of Thomas Corbyn,” *Medical History*, vol. 33 (1989), 277-295; Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine: A German Pharmaceutical Network in Eighteenth-Century North America* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Timothy D. Walker, “The Medicines Trade in the Portuguese Atlantic World: Dissemination of Plant Remedies and Healing Knowledge from Brazil, c. 1580-1830,” *The Social History of Medicine*, vol. 26, no. 3, Special Issue: *Mobilising Medicine: Trade & Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (2013), 401-431.

¹⁴⁹ Janet Browne, “Biogeography and empire,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 304-321 (quote from 320); Janet Browne, *The Secular Ark: Studies in the History of Biogeography* (London, 1983); Robert A. Stafford, “Annexing the Landscapes of the Past: British Imperial Geology in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Imperialism and the Natural World*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 67-89.

At every stage in their journey from the edge of empire to its nucleus, and sometimes back, human remains became entangled in increasingly intricate and intimate webs of scientific, imperial and even personal interests. Commercial exchange, imperial jealousy, and personal ambition existed as powerful counterweights to the free exchange of scientific knowledge and specimens in the nineteenth century. Collectors operating in these bone circuits were not simply conduits of scientific knowledge and materials. Collectors abroad were not immune to appeals to their patriotism. In 1881, Fraser S. Crawford at the Surveyor General's Office informed William Flower of having obtained "a skull of a black fellow" from Australia and "the greater portion, if not the whole, of the bones of another." The bones had been found by the coroner of Adelaide, Australia, Thomas Ward. Initially, Ward had intended to sell the skull to the Berlin Museum, but Crawford "appealed to his patriotism, and secured it for" Flower instead. In addition, Crawford suggested that Flower might be able to persuade Ward to do more for the Hunterian Museum. The coroner, Crawford recalled, was "a particularly fussy little man," who "would move heaven and earth to obtain for you all the skulls and bones in South Australia, Black, White & Mongolian, if his vanity were only tickled."¹⁵⁰ For collectors of indigenous remains like Thomas Ward, scientific curiosity dovetailed well with national pride and imperial ambition. On the margins of empire, scientific collecting offered these men an opportunity to contribute to the twinned causes of science and empire. What vanity indeed!

¹⁵⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 111, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Fraser S. Crawford to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 8 September 1881.

CHAPTER THREE

Bodies of the Weak

Introduction

Bone circuits carried indigenous remains back to Europe, but they also disseminated European obsessions across the world. When James Cook visited Tonga in October 1773 he discovered that the curiosity of his men had become an obsession. Their desire for exotic object was clouding their judgment. “It was astonishing to see with what eagerness everyone caught at every thing they saw,” Cook recorded in his journal. But Cook was not the only one to whom this rampant acquisitive passion had been obvious. The incessant rambling and bartering of European visitors baffled even their indigenous interlocutors, who seemed to ridicule Cook’s men. Their mockery expressed itself in a kind of feigned assistance, offering anything they could find to these ravenous foreigners. “It even went so far as to become the ridicule of the Natives,” Cook realized, “by Offering pieces of sticks, stones and what not to exchange, one whaggish Boy took a piece of excrement on a stick and hild [sic] it out to every one of our people he met with.”¹ The mocking gestures of the indigenous individuals, and even worse, their children, forced Cook to recognize that their appetite for the curious had sent his men into an acquisitive frenzy. European collectors had become so ravenous for exotic objects that in the eyes of Tongans, they would be willing to give something valuable in exchange for something vile.

¹ James Cook, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure*, in *The Journals of James Cook*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Hakluyt Society, 1955-67), vol. 2, 254.

This chapter is about how those at the beginning of the “bone circuits” acquired the objects of their obsession and the men, women and children from whom they acquired them. It seeks to shed light on that *modus operandi* of collecting indigenous skulls Cuvier dismissed as “any manner whatever.”² Exploring the strategies these collectors employed to claim their prizes, I wish to uncover how these visitors gave in to their obsessions and took possession of the indigenous body. Not only in “bone circuits,” but also in burial grounds, in forests and villages, the search for the remains of the indigenous dead took place in a web of “colonial entanglement.”³

Over the course of the nineteenth century, this acquisitive obsession of British visitors traveling in the wake of James Cook came to include the bodies of the weak. Changing ideas about human difference in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put a premium on specimens of indigenous tribes on the brink of extinction. As I have discussed in Chapter One, the accumulation of these human objects dovetailed with calls for the preservation of knowledge about the races of humanity. Increasingly, curators and scientists in Britain asked travelers to bring back skulls, skeletons and other human materials to study and classify the diversity of humanity. Ransacking burial grounds, rummaging through refuse heaps, and bargaining with villagers, British collectors not only sought to satisfy their obsession, they also sought to put the human terrain in order. But, as I will show in this chapter, indigenous men, women and children were not so easily swayed. In sudden flashes of open violence as well as in more piecemeal ways, they resisted this regime of classification.

This is, thus, a story not about collections, but about the act of collecting itself. It is about what Walter Benjamin calls “the thrill of acquisition,” as opposed to “the mild boredom of

² Cuvier, “Note instructive,” 70-1.

³ See Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 1-6.

order.” Collecting, Benjamin reminds us, is also a creative moment. The acquisition of objects invites the collector to give into his “deepest desire” to “renew the old world.”⁴ In this sense, collectors see the acquisition of an object as its rebirth. Remains of the indigenous dead littered the landscape as icons of indigenous savagery or simply as human waste. Taking possession of a skull, skeleton or a pile of bones constituted the transformation of human scraps into indigenous specimens. This creative component of collecting, I argue, extends beyond the transformation from human debris into prized object. Through the acquisition of indigenous remains, British collectors were not only taking something away, they were also importing a new classificatory regime that supplanted the spiritual with the material and, in the process, fixed the indigenous individual’s place in that new order.⁵

At the same time, however, the movement of human matter/specimens from their indigenous ecologies into the hands of British collectors transformed not only the meaning of these objects but unsettled the very identities of the individuals through whose hands these objects passed. The remains of the indigenous dead were what I call “contact bodies.” The practice of collecting human remains both highlighted and blurred the boundaries between colonizer and colonized. On the one hand, the presence of human remains in the indigenous environment confirmed the worst about the indigenous in the eyes of British collectors. On the other, British collectors and their indigenous informants had to negotiate new kinds of relationships to get what they wanted. In doing so, the participants in these exchanges transformed themselves. In the process, they also reshaped the contours of scientific curiosity. If

⁴ The book collector, the German critic suggests, experiences collecting as a “balancing act of extreme precariousness.” His desire to collect compels him to contend with the need for order and the pull to confusion. Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 58-67 (especially 59, 60, 61).

⁵ Wolfe, *Traces*, 9.

scientific endeavor at home was characterized by disinterestedness, reason and respectability, collecting in the field was anything but. Here, acquisitiveness, obsession and obscurity ruled. It is, thus, also a study in the modes of accumulation and affect.

The acquisition of indigenous bodies, I argue, also constituted a creative moment for the indigenous men and women from whom British collectors acquired their specimens. Although at times the indigenous openly resisted British collectors' efforts to acquire the remains of their tribesmen, at other times, they resisted them in more piecemeal ways. British obsession with the remains of their ancestors represented an opportunity to deploy different forms of resistance. Hidden in their acts of concealment and comedy we catch a glimpse of the everyday forms of their resistance. The most often recorded reaction of indigenous individuals, though, was open resistance or even violence. British collectors had to tread carefully, for most indigenous tribes they encountered had strict rules about the remains of their deceased. Only in a few cases were British collectors able to exploit indigenous prejudices against each other to acquire their coveted specimens. Violent resistance, however, stands apart from the everyday forms of resistance to which the title of the chapter refers.

These other forms were often quiet, undramatic, or even petty.⁶ One such form, as Cook learned, much to his own embarrassment, was the comic mode of resistance. While British collectors liked to dismiss this mockery as another example of indigenous ignorance, it is certainly plausible that indigenous individuals wanted to make fun of these rambling foreigners and their classificatory regime. A closely related response was mimicry, which was often, though not always, intended as another jibe at British obsessions. Yet another reaction was concealment.

⁶ For this analysis, and the term "bodies of the weak" through which I try to capture these forms of resistance, I am indebted to James C. Scott's analysis of the ways in which peasants in a small Malay village resisted dominant political forces through everyday forms such as footdragging, lateness, unpredictability and noncommunication. See Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak*.

Some indigenous individuals refused to share the location of their tribe's deceased or sent British collectors on wild goose chases. Sometimes, however, the indigenous simply gave British collectors the cold shoulder. Indigenous indifference towards their acquisitive obsession could be a subtle commentary on the behavior of the collector, one the visitors often misunderstood. But at times it also resulted in the loss of precious specimens. A final response I discuss in this chapter was deceit. Some indigenous individuals attempted to trade random remains, passing them off as those of their loved ones. Others tried to peddle unknown skulls as authentic indigenous specimens. Taken together, these acts of concealment and comedy constituted "everyday" forms of indigenous resistance. As I will show in the following pages, they were subtle nullifications of the very classificatory project through which colonialism operated. In the hands of their descendants, these "bodies of the weak" became instruments to ridicule, resist, and at least for a moment, reverse British domination.

Working with letters, travel accounts and accession records, I seek to uncover not so much the truth about bone collecting on the margins of empire, as how collectors saw and narrated their efforts to acquire indigenous bodies. Unfortunately, the indigenous peoples they encountered left very few – if any – records of these encounters in their own words, except in the words of their British interlocutors, and I have been forced to rely on British sources. Rather than truthful recordings of native thoughts and actions, historians and ethnohistorians have shown that European representations of native voices are best understood as an act of ventriloquism on the part of European observers.⁷ Given the absence of indigenous sources to contradict or amend

⁷ Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 26. For discussions of authors' claims to empirical observation and distortions, see also Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), introduction; and Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18 (1991), 93-114.

these biased re-tellings, it is quite impossible to separate truthful accounts from fictionalized ones. In fact, the safest course of action is to approach all accounts of indigenous thoughts, words and actions with suspicion. Nevertheless, these mediated sources recover some of their usefulness when we turn them against their authors, when, in other words, we use them to uncover how British ethnopropectors thought about, spoke to, and misunderstood the indigenous men, women and children they encountered.

The texts I examine in this chapter are therefore windows into a colonizing and collecting mindset, rather than proof of what British prospectors saw or what indigenous individuals thought about the events in which they participated. English observers of new worlds described what they wanted, or expected, to see and hear. Their preconceptions about British superiority, and their prejudiced or *impromptu* understandings of indigenous beliefs, customs and actions, warped the information provided by natives and by their own eyes.⁸ Some contemporary commentators and travelers, however, were aware of such distortions. As the Frenchman Jean de Léry wrote in 1580, travelers to distant lands have acquired a “‘license to lie’ since they cannot be contradicted.”⁹ Just a few years earlier, the editor of Hans Staden’s captivity narrative complained that “travelers with their boundless falsehoods and reports of vain and imagined things have so wrought that honest and worthy people returning from foreign countries are now hardly believed.”¹⁰ In some instances, the fantastical nature of these accounts even cast doubt

⁸ Important studies that have tried to unravel such processes of “myth-making,” include Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Myth-making in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 104-35, and his *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

⁹ Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, transl. Janet Whately (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992[1580]), lx.

¹⁰ Hans Staden, *Hans Staden: The True Story of his Captivity, 1557*, transl. Malcolm Letts (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1929), 23.

over the existence of the traveler himself. A few years after the Frenchman Louis-Armand Lom d'Arc had published an account of his passage through French Canada under the fictional moniker Baron de Lahontan in 1703, the German philosopher Leibnitz had to reassure a friend that "the Baron de Lahontan is a real man, not a fiction and that his travels are as authentic as he is."¹¹ Such questions re-emerged as nineteenth-century travelers began to penetrate deeper into the interior lands revealed by European exploration in the eastern and western hemispheres. Despite these doubts about authorship and authenticity, British accounts of native attitudes towards the human materials continue to be useful. They contain not only vivid images of the British collector's obsession with the bodies of the weak, but also, scattered like the objects these men so craved, subtle traces of how indigenous individuals ridiculed and resisted the order that that obsession imposed.

Human Matter Out of Place

In eyes of British ethnoprospectors, indigenous ecologies were teeming with fragments of the indigenous dead. Trips into the interiors of Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the islands of the Pacific, revealed forests, deserts and valleys filled with human debris. Stumbling over an arm or a leg, their eyes catching a glimpse of a skull dangling from a nearby tree, British collectors emphasized the "savage" circumstances of their encounter with these objects, often suggesting that these human remains had been carelessly disposed of, or simply neglected, by the descendants of the deceased. John Davy, for example, while traveling from the British port Colombo in Ceylon into the interior region of Ouva in 1816, describes a vision "of a melancholy

¹¹ Leibnitz quoted in Louis-Armand Lom d'Arc, Baron de Lahontan, *Dialogues curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bons sens qui a voyagé, et curieux Memoires de l'Amerique septentrionale*, ed. Gilbert Ghinard (Paris, 1931), 53, fn. 2.

kind.” Making their way along the river Kotmalé ganga in the Upper Ouva region, Davy and his company stumbled upon the decomposing body of a native lying untouched by the side of the path. It had been lying there for quite some time since it had been “reduced almost to a skeleton.” Davy felt compelled to contemplate the fate of these remains and imagined them belonging to an indigenous individual trying to escape starvation.¹² Another prominent collector, Richard Francis Burton, noted numerous encounters with indigenous remains during his journeys in Africa and the United States. “Here, too, the graves of the heathen meet the eye;” he observed, “in all other parts of Eastern Africa a mouldering skull, a scattered skeleton, and a few calcined bones, the remains of wizards and witches dragged to the stake, are the only visible signs of mortality.”¹³ In the southwestern United States as well, reports of a human remains peaked Burton’s interest. He recalled hearing of a place called “Skull Valley,” where “the remains of Indians ... are found scattered about a fine spring in the southern parts” and “the mortal remains of bison ... lie like pavement-stones or cannon balls in the Crimean Valley of Death.”¹⁴ To these men, the remains of the indigenous seemed out of place.

Elsewhere, however, indigenous remains had already found a proper place. Burton, again, this time traveling in western and eastern Africa, described the collections of human remains of African kings in some detail. His account of *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome* (1864), for example, contains several dozen descriptions of human skulls, kept as what he

¹² John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants, with Travels in that Island* (London: Longhorn, Hurst, Rees and Brown, 1821), 456.

¹³ Richard F. Burton, “The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa, with Notices of the Lunar Mountains and the Sources of the White Nile,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 29 (1859), 66; see also his *The Lake Regions of Central Africa, A Picture of Exploration* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), vol. 1, 57.

¹⁴ Richard F. Burton, *The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (London: Longman, 1859), 454.

considered trophies, fashioned into trinkets and worn as ornaments around necks, through ears, or used as instruments.¹⁵ In Brazil, too, he witnessed the use of human skulls to decorate doorways, vaults, and caves.¹⁶ Burton explicitly compared his own interest in these human objects to that of indigenous individuals. As he noted about the disposal of human bodies slain in battle in eastern Africa: “In all cases their skulls, which here are prized as much as by the Anthropological Society of London, are subsequently removed, and are probably afterwards exhibited as the trophies of heroic deeds.”¹⁷

What is a historian to make of these accounts of scattered remains? Why were nineteenth-century European collectors so obsessed with human remains casually strewn about the landscape? And what did they make of them as they rummaged through forests and graveyards? There is a deeper message in the relationship between object, subject and place. Lingering along pathways and valleys, suspended from trees and doorways, and even worn by natives as ornaments and fetishes, human remains became icons of indigenous indifference, irrationality and ignorance in the imagination of British travelers. In the interior of Timor-Laut, Henry Ogg Forbes was met by the gruesome sight of tree-huts with dead bodies suspended below. These “dangling remnants of humanity,” along with the “orgies” of half-cooked meat, the “strongest and coarsest” spiritous drink, and loud and wild dancing, presented him with a “drunken and demoniacal scene,” in which the Timorese “appear as pure savages.”¹⁸ In the eyes of the British visitor, then, these human materials embodied the savagery of the “other.” Moreover, scattered

¹⁵ Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome* (London: Tinsley Borthers, 1864), vol. 1, 218 fn., 256-8, 290 fn., 292, 314, 318, 323-355, 379, 383, 385; vol. 2, 1, 13, 25, 35, 43, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 107-8, 120, 142, 169, 218-9, 222-3, 224, 340, 369.

¹⁶ Richard F. Burton, *Explorations of the Highlands of the Brazil* (London; Tinsel Brothers, 1869), vol. 1, 129, 371 fn.

¹⁷ Burton, *Dahome*, vol. 2, 107-8.

¹⁸ Henry Ogg Forbes, *A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago; A Narrative of Travel and Exploration from 1878 to 1883* (New York, Harper & brothers, 1885), 436.

throughout these native ecologies, the remains of their ancestors appeared out of place, part of scenes whose disorder, confusion and violence both titillated and unsettled his passion for acquisition.

British collectors did not create this relationship between object, subject and place *ex nihilo*. In England, the corpse had been commonplace in the ritual lives of ordinary men and women for centuries.¹⁹ High mortality rates well into the nineteenth century, for example, gave rise to the middle-class Victorian ideal of the “good death” and the domestic death scene.²⁰ The poor and the working class, especially, lived close to the corpse, keeping the remains of loved ones in their homes to protect them from grave robbers or to “lay them out.”²¹ Moreover, the period’s visual and print culture frequently featured human remains as well. In the nineteenth century, a growing middle-class seeking to satisfy a desire for the new medical knowledge consumed more corpses in anatomical exhibitions and prints than ever before.²² As the nineteenth century’s successor of earlier cabinets of curiosity, medical museums catered to the voyeuristic needs of the pleasure-seeking masses.²³

But human remains intruded into the lives of English men and women in more unsettling ways. Overcrowded churchyards, for example, forced Londoners to confront the corpse more

¹⁹ Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: Harper Collins, 2003); P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²¹ J. Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²² Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, second edition (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2000), 30-51; Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 274-312.

²³ Mark Dery, “Anatomy Lesson: The Visceral Pleasures of Medical Museums,” in *Flesh Eating Technologies*, ed. Sara Diamond and Sylvre Lotringer (Banff, Canada: Semiotext[e]/The Banff Center, 1999). See also, Christine Quigley, *Dissection on Display: Cadavers, Anatomists and Public Spectacle* (London: Mcfarland, 2012); and Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978).

viscerally in the streets and squares of the city. There were the corpses of criminals hanging from the trees at Tyburn or Newgate, whose remains became objects of contention between loved ones, hangmen and surgeons.²⁴ Even in the nation's capital, the dead were everywhere. London, one journalist wrote in 1843, does not bury, but "stores and piles up 50,000 of its dead, to putrefy, to rot, to give out exhalations, to darken the air with vapours."²⁵ Anatomists left behind a trail of body parts through the city. In 1832, the Anatomy Act had tried to regulate the anatomy trade in human cadavers, but fragments of the dead refused to go away that easily. On the contrary, a satirical article in *Figaro in London* on 29 April 1837 drew people's attention to "more mutilation" (1837), and reported people stumbling over a nose or finding an arm. When a report came in of a lost arm, the editors of the publication denied that it was a case of "*a female having come to harm*," but rather that of an "*arm having come away from female*."²⁶ Abuses in the anatomy trade filled the imagination with scenes of human body parts left about the urban landscape as waste.²⁷ The human catastrophe that was unfolding in British Jamaica, similarly

²⁴ Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, E. P. Thompson (London: Pantheon Books, 1975), 65-119. Thomas Laqueur has argued against Linebaugh's reading of these riots as instances of contention and critique of authority by London crowds. Instead, Laqueur suggests, spectators consumed hangings as "light entertainment," reveling in the "exquisite pleasure of venting power on the powerless." See Thomas W. Laqueur, "Crowds, Carnival and the State in English Executions, 1604-1868," in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine and James Rosenheim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 305-55. See also V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868*, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 56-89. For an analysis of the spectacle of capital punishment in France, see Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165-94.

²⁵ *The Builder* (8 April 1843), 104. George Alfred Walker and Edwin Chadwick similarly condemned the unhygienic conditions of urban burials. See George Alfred Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards: Particularly those of London* (London: Ayer Co. Publications, 1839); Edwin Chadwick, *A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* (London: W. Clowes, 1843). See also J. S. Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (London: David & Charles, 1972), 35.

²⁶ "More Mutilation," *Figaro in London*, vol. 282, (1837), 1, column 1.

²⁷ Elisabeth T. Hurren, *Dying for Victorian Medicine: English Anatomy and Its Trade in the Dead Poor, c. 1834-1929* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 60-73.

confronted colonists and slaves alike with the remains of their family and friends. Death was so pervasive, Vincent Brown has argued, that the dead continued guide people in their daily lives, allowed people to contest authority and mediated social identity.²⁸

Such associations were not lost on a collector like Richard Burton. On leave from his adventures in Africa, Burton took aim at the abuses of the anatomy trade. His long poem tells the tale of the young women in the service of a gentleman's household who, pregnant with the child of her employer, is forced to leave. She now aborts the child and falls into poverty. And finally, "She dies in Magdalen or jail." But soon her body is sold to an anatomist, who uses it to train his students:

And, when he's learned to cut and maim,
The pauper's-corpse no friends will claim.
The scalpel's work when past and done,
They shove pieces, not of one,
But half-a-dozen dead –
One arm, three legs, and dubious head.²⁹

True to his rejection of Victorian class distinctions, Burton indicts professional anatomists as well as social elites. But more importantly, both the remains of the poor in Britain, who were often described as "savages," and the indigenous dead conjured up images of human waste in the imagination of Burton. The fate of their bones seemed to connect the laboring masses in Britain to indigenous peoples in Africa, the Americas and the Middle East.

As in Britain, indigenous ecologies littered with human remains threatened the boundaries between waste and specimen in the imagination of nineteenth-century British collectors. Yet despite a shared cultural sensitivity, they responded to encounters with the

²⁸ Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Richard F. Burton, *Stone Talk, Being Some of the Marvellous Sayings of a Petral Portion of Fleet Street, London* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1865), 50.

indigenous dead in different ways. If Davy was moved to melancholy by the sight of human remains by the side of the road, others were not so easily unsettled. To some seasoned travelers, human remains scattered throughout the native landscape neither upset their sensibility nor deprive them of a good night's rest. Travelling among the Dyaks of Borneo, a tribe known for headhunting, Alfred Russel Wallace recorded sleeping "very comfortably with half a dozen smoke-dried human skulls suspended over my head." Wallace went even further, expressing admiration for the ways in which the natives of Celebes turned human skulls into "great ornaments" in the houses of the chiefs.³⁰ Yet, despite such diverse reactions, the sight of human remains "scattered" around indigenous ecologies stirred the imagination of collectors. They did not simply catch the eye of the traveler. His acquisitive gaze locked onto them as objects whose significance and usefulness were linked to the environment in which they appeared and the company they kept.

The conspicuous presence of human remains in indigenous societies conjured up a variety of associations in the minds of British collectors. At times, the fragmented and dispersed remains of the native dead were also terrible reminders of the indigenous propensity towards wanton violence. They simply saw the decorative uses of human remains among African tribes as evidence for their prejudices about cruelty and pervasiveness indigenous violence. Travelling with her husband to Tior-Laut, Anna Forbes was reminded of the excesses of indigenous warfare by the sight of a dismembered arm and "recently gibbeted heads and limbs."³¹ Similarly, Burton recalled how the entrances to some of the villages are "often decorated with a dozen poles,

³⁰ Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, 2 volumes (London: MacMillan and Co., 1869), vol. 1, 110, 380.

³¹ Anna Forbes, *Insulinde: Experiences of a Naturalist's Wife in the Eastern Archipelago* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1887), 143.

placed in a wide semicircle to support human skulls, the mortal remains of ill-conducted boors.”³² In Dahome, Burton was reminded of a custom among the ancient Persians. They were known to build “skull minarets.” After they had concluded a massacre, Persians kings would assemble the heads of the slain foes and build them up into a tower using lime.³³ In the mind of travelers like Anna Forbes and Francis Burton, the ubiquitous presence of human remains in the landscape was evidence of indigenous savagery in waging war and keeping the peace.

These images of dismembered indigenous bodies provided a resilient trope in discourses about the indigenous other. Visitors believed that they were witnessing evidence of a pervasive system of violence. While traveling from the British port Colombo in Ceylon into the interior region of Ouva, John Davy stumbled upon the remains of a native offender. In his journal he recalls encountering “dwellings, here and there in ruins, paddy-fields neglected, and a human skull that lay by the road-side, under a tree, to which the fatal rope was still attached.” The gruesome sight, he continues, “gave us the history of what we saw, in a language that could not be mistaken.”³⁴ To Commodore James Goodenough in 1875, the presence of indigenous remains dotted around the landscape seemed a “pantomime,” a wordless, physical language. When he encountered a hand hanging from a tree, he surmised that its owner must have been a thief and suspected that he had been clubbed and eaten.³⁵

The references of Davy and Goodenough to language, either verbal or physical, reveal a powerful logic operating at the heart of their conceptions of indigenous “otherness.” When he referred to body parts as a kind of language, Davy had inverted a metaphor of the seventh and

³² Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 1, 367 and 405; see also “The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa,” 191-2.

³³ Burton, *Dahome*, vol. 1, 293 fn. See also

³⁴ Davy, *Ceylon*, 403.

³⁵ James Goodenough, *Journal of Commodore Goodenough* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876), 332.

eighteenth centuries about the nature of language. “Words on paper,” Bernard Lamy wrote in 1675, “are like a dead body laid upon the ground.”³⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, language had become crucial to European observations of non-European cultures. During early modern encounters with indigenous peoples, European observers thought language and reason were inextricably linked, and the babbling of their indigenous interlocutors was often seen as evidence of arrested development. By the 1750s, the lacunae in translation between native tongues and European languages came to convince observers of the “incommensurability” of native and European cultures at large.³⁷ To the minds of Davy and Goodenough, indigenous bodies had become like words on paper. Discarded human bones spoke the idiom of the savage, one in which every syllable echoed their propensity for violence, unreason and unbelief. In the encounter with native remains, the book of the body appeared written in a language that proved incommensurable with the languages of Europe.³⁸

Some, however, tried to understand that language on its own terms. For all of Burton’s flaws as an observer of indigenous customs (and there were many more), he showed a desire to understand these scenes as the indigenous did. In the sleeping chambers of the King of Dahomé, Burton believed he had stumbled upon more evidence of indigenous violence and headhunting. The room had been “separated from the court in which it stood by a breast-high wall, the top of which was stuck full of human jaw bones” and “paved with the skulls of neighbouring princes

³⁶ Bernard Lamy, *La rhétorique, ou l’art de parler* (Paris, 1757[1675]), 5.

³⁷ Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 120.

³⁸ If naturalists considered nature a book, from the sixteenth century onwards, so did anatomists consider the body a *liber corporis*. Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 129-40. For the idea that the natural world is a book, see Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book* (London: Macmillan Press, 1971).

and chiefs, placed there that the king might trample upon them.”³⁹ The king preserved the crania of his enemies in three “calabashes” suspended in his court. And while “A European would imagine these relics to be treated with mockery,”⁴⁰ Burton wrote, “the contrary is the case.” He also cautioned against drawing exaggerated and inaccurate conclusions from the evidence. On visiting the palace of King Gezi of Gelele, Burton was relieved to discover that “here there are no strews of skulls and skeletons,” though he did discover “a cranium, nailed together with a white flag” to a tree.⁴¹ Yet, the king’s possessions, including calabashes, war-drums and standard, were adorned with human skulls.⁴² The spectacle was different at Great Benin, where “I saw three violent deaths in three days, though the yearly ceremonies had ended, and the large open space before the palace was strewned with human skulls and bones.” Though he admits that accounts of such carnage are generally exaggerated, Burton believed that “the annual destruction of human life is terribly great.”⁴³

On other occasions, however, British collectors almost instinctively linked heaps of human remains to indigenous cannibalism. No less than with their prejudices about indigenous violence, their fears about cannibalism were rooted in preconceptions that had been formed in Europe and traveled with European visitors across the Atlantic and throughout the Pacific. When Thomas Huxley added to MacGillivray’s scientific account of the voyage of the *HMS Rattlesnake* a “human” side, he added descriptions of the indigenous use of bracelets made out of human jaws and collar-bones. Uncertain as to whether this was “the memorial of a deceased friend, or the trophy of a slain foe,” Huxley and his fellow officers decided to “fairly give the

³⁹ Burton, *Dahome*, vol. 1, 213 fn.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 256.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 307-8

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 314-, 318, 323.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 24.

Papuans the benefit of the doubt, and to consider this singular piece of *bijouterie* as a mourning ring.”⁴⁴ Others, though, were less sanguine about the native uses of human remains. When the naturalist Wykeham Perry presented a human skull he had taken from Cook’s Bay, Mallicollo Island, to the British Museum in 1876, he described finding “numbers of these skulls lying among refuse, under the trees near the houses of the natives.” Contemplating the carelessness with which he believed the bones had been discarded, he suggested that the human materials were either “the remains of cannibal feasts, or thrown aside after decorating some hut.” Since he could not find a burial site nearby, Perry concluded that “it seems probable that they eat their own dead,” a conclusion later supported by the fact that “they acknowledge themselves by signs to be cannibals.”⁴⁵

Suspicious of cannibalism were crucial to accounts of scattered human matter from collectors like Thomas Huxley and Wykeham Perry. It allowed them to distinguish between two different kinds of consumption of human body parts. On the one hand, there was the figurative consumption of human remains as objects of science; on the other, there was the real consumption of human flesh as an act of savagery. One deserved admiration; the other elicited abjection. The same logic appears in one of Burton’s accounts of the scraps of human feasts. In his account of wanderings in western Africa, Burton included an elaborate description of a “juju-house,” a house where the indigenous stored the remains of those sacrificed (see Fig. 3.1). He offered this elaborate description of it:

The Juju-house, now a heap of ruins, was a wattle and dab oblong of 30 to 40 feet. At the head of the room rose a kind of altar, with mat eaves to throw off the rain, and concave, bulging out behind. Across the front, underneath the roofing, in lines impaled together, were fleshless human skulls, often painted and decorated: one had a thick black imitation beard, doubtless a copy of life. Between these two rows were lines of goat’s heads, also streaked with red and white, whilst an old bar shot, probably used as a club for felling the

⁴⁴ Huxley, “Science at Sea,” 117.

⁴⁵ DF [ZOO/218/2/5, 247, no. 2, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

victims, hung from a corner. Near the ground there was a horizontal board, striped like the relics, and a sweep of loose thatch from below it formed a base to the altar, and left a central space in which was a round hole, with a raised rim of clay, to receive libations and the blood of victims. There were scattered skulls and spare rows of crania, impaled like Kababs, and planted with their stakes against the wall. As there had been no prisoners of late, I saw none of those trunkless heads ‘which placed on their necks, with their faces towards the Juju house, present a dreadful and appalling appearance, as of men rising from the ground.’ To a small framework of sticks outside, were nailed those relics which the Abyssinians prefer as trophies.⁴⁶

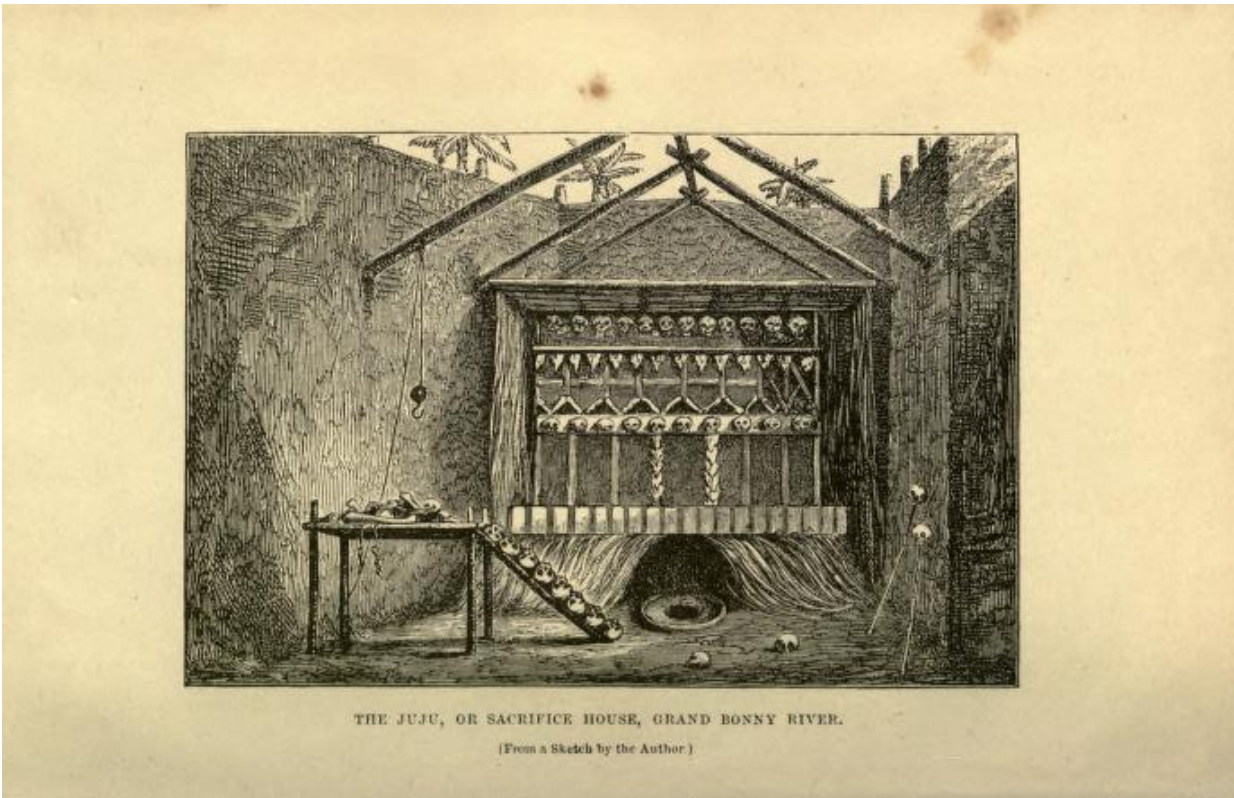


Fig. 3.1. “The Juju, or Sacrifice House, Grand Bonny River.” From: Richard F. Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa, From Liverpool to Fernando Po* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863), vol. 2, opposite title page.

In the mind of Burton, the Juju-house raised well-established images of indigenous cannibalism.

But unlike many of his fellow travelers, Burton eased the burden of condemnation on the

⁴⁶ Richard F. Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa, From Liverpool to Fernando Po* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863), vol. 2, 282-3.

shoulders of the indigenous by claiming Europeans were capable of the same savagery.⁴⁷ “I saw in the Jujuhouse their skulls, which were suspiciously white and clean, as if boiled, and not a white man doubted that they had been eaten,” he wrote. But, he added, “the fact is that they cannot afford to reject any kind of provisions, and after a year or two amongst the people, even a European would, I suspect, look somewhat queerly upon a fat little black boy.”⁴⁸ Yet, despite Burton’s sympathy for indigenous customs, he was far from alone in observing in the presence of human remains in indigenous societies positive proof of cannibalism.

Encounters with non-European “cannibal scenes” have been a staple of ethnographic writing and the European imagination of the other since the second voyage of Columbus in 1493. Yet, as Peter Hulme suggests, such scenes of heads used as drinking cups, limbs hanging from the rafters, and body parts boiling in caldrons are mostly composite imaginings of indigenous cannibalism, not truthful images of real events.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, nineteenth-century ethnographers as well as some modern anthropologists have sustained the stereotype of the cannibalizing other. Percy Smith, for example, recounted how one traveler visited a Maori battlefield at Mau-inaina in 1844, where twenty-one years earlier some thousand Ngati-Paoa had fallen. Smith recorded

⁴⁷ Burton’s biographer Dane Kennedy has suggested that his uncertain heritage – there were rumors that he was of mixed Gypsie heritage, which Burton himself helped cultivate – made him an outsider, allowing him to look more critically and self-consciously at his own European heritage. It allowed him to claim both a profound sympathy for the East and an ambiguity towards his own affinity to Europe. Moreover, the prolonged stay abroad during his youth further instilled in him a penchant for criticizing European ways. “In consequence of being brought up abroad, we never thoroughly understood English society, nor did society understand us.” An acute absence of belonging permeates Burton’s writings about his early life. Not belonging to any parish, Burton considered himself “a waif, a stray; ... a blaze of light, without a focus.” Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 15-6. See also Isabel Burton, *The Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 32. Richard authored the first chapters of this biography.

⁴⁸ Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa*, vol. 2, 285.

⁴⁹ Peter Hulme, “Introduction: The Cannibal Scene,” in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Parker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-38 (especially 18-9).

how the traveler saw with his own eyes how “the bones of 2,000 men still lay whitening on the plain, and the ovens remain in which the flesh of the slaughtered was cooked for the horrible repasts of the victorious party.”⁵⁰ Such generalizations and exaggerations have uncritically made it into the accounts of cannibalism by modern anthropologists. Ross Bowden has suggested that they provide an “abundance of valuable historical and ethnographic evidence for the practice.”⁵¹ More recently, however, historians and social scientists have challenged such uncritical readings, arguing that while the consumption of human flesh was likely a real practice, it was only sparingly practiced, and even then, within the strict boundaries of ritual. Accounts of its widespread application, they suggest, have simply recycled past exaggerations and reproduced their prejudices. Instead, they believe that the evidence merely shows cannibalism as a European *idée fixe*, not a native custom.⁵² To move beyond such facile readings of ethnographic evidence, Hulme claims, we need to distinguish between cannibalism as a European obsession (later adopted by indigenous peoples) and anthropophagi as historical practice.⁵³

⁵⁰ R. Percy Smith, *Maori Wars of the Nineteenth Century: The Struggle of the Northern Against the Southern Maori Tribes Prior to the Colonisation of New Zealand in 1840* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1910), 190. Similar accounts of rampant violations of bodies appears in Edward Tregear, *The Maori Race* (Manganni, New Zealand: A. D. Willis, 1926), 357.

⁵¹ Ross Bowden, “Maori Cannibalism: An Interpretation,” *Oceania*, vol. 55, no. 2 (December 1984), 82.

⁵² For the revisionists. See William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagi* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially 80-7; and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), especially 1-23. I am indebted to Obeyesekere’s discussion of these arguments. Historians and social scientists critical of these revisionist analyses have accused their authors of denying cannibalism in the same vein as negationists denying the Holocaust. See Marshal Sahlins in a review of Arens’ book in 1979, “Cannibalism: An Exchange,” *New Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 4 (22 March 1979), 45-53; and Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, transl. Rosemay Morris (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵³ Peter Hulme, *Cannibal Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Routledge, 1986), 86. Seen as a European obsession, the collection of indigenous remain by European collectors can itself be identified as a form of cannibalism. See my Conclusion.

British collectors in the nineteenth century did not see this distinction. They appear to have inherited an obsession with human remains as evidence of indigenous cannibalism from older texts. The consumption of human flesh separated the indigenous “savage” from the European observer. It set him apart as wild, monstrous, alien, as opposed to the European, who was rational, civilized and human. Such an image, historians have argued, was already complete when Europeans embarked on their voyages of discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Margaret Hodgen, for example, suggests that medieval representations of human monsters and wild men provided templates for the savages encountered in the New World.⁵⁴ Cannibalism had thus become part of the imagined opposition between civilization and savagery even before European travelers met their indigenous subjects in the Americas, Africa and in the indigenous societies of the Pacific Ocean. Moreover, Patrick Brantlinger has shown how Britain’s civilizing mission, the nation’s moral and imperial imperative, was commensurate with the idea of “taming cannibals.”⁵⁵ Human remains, their ecology and consumption, became part of this imperial rationale that defined one in opposition to the other.⁵⁶

Evidence supporting modern assessments that many indigenous societies abhorred cannibalism as much as Europeans also appears in the accounts of nineteenth-century collectors. Indigenous suspicion of European cannibalism appears to have been almost as widespread as

⁵⁴ Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1964), 409. See also, Hayden White, “The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea,” and “The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish,” in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 152-82; 183-96; and Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁵⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Races and the Victorians* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 18-19.

⁵⁶ Similarly, Roy Harvey Pearce has argued that Puritan settlers in America saw native Americans in opposition to themselves as people of reason, progress and religion. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* similarly argues that the European imagination came to define the other as non-Europeans. See Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979).

European fears of indigenous anthropophagy. In April 1839, George Grey's exploration party was running low on food supplies. Trekking through the desert, Grey and his native guide Kaiber felt relieved when they stumbled upon several hidden caches of "By-yu nuts" of the *Zamia* tree. Grey, however, was reluctant to raid the food source lest this "unprovoked act of pillage and robbery" should taint "the first approach of civilized man to this country of a savage race." But their situation was dire and Kaiber convinced Grey to take just one of the caches, leaving the rest untouched. Kaiber explained his reasons for doing so in terms of native beliefs about fair-skinned strangers. "Hungry people [referring to Grey's party] have been here," Kaiber ventriloquized the indigenous response, "they were very empty, and now their bellies are full; they may be sorcerers; now they will not eat us as we sleep."⁵⁷

Both in their observations of landscapes littered with human remains or villages filled with what they considered to be the leftovers of human feasts, British collectors believed they saw human matter out of place. British collectors saw in them evidence of a savagery that needed to be collected, classified, put on display, but ultimately also, displaced. They had come from a culture that considered the appearance of human remains outside the realms of Christian ritual and scientific curiosity "of the utmost abjection," conjuring up associations with waste and images of native savagery, including wanton violence and cannibalism.⁵⁸ The preservation or assembly of human remains in social spaces whose meaning was defined by Christian ritual or whose physical limits were determined by science salvaged the integrity of the bourgeois identity British collectors so desperately sought to safeguard and obtain for themselves. Outside these

⁵⁷ Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North West and Western Australia, during the years 1837, 38, and 39*, ..., 2 vols. (London: T. and W. Boone, 1841), vol. 2, 64-5.

⁵⁸ As Julia Kristeva has suggested, "the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is of the utmost abjection." Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 4.

frameworks, exposed, as it were, to a gaze unmediated by limits of these social spaces, human remains became the grotesque embodiment of natural disorder and indigenous savagery.⁵⁹

The acquisition of human remains was therefore in a sense also about putting human matter in its proper place.⁶⁰ They not only ransacked the environment for the raw materials of their classifications, they also re-ordered that environment, removing from it those elements that seemed anomalous, offensive or abject. The acquisition of indigenous remains was therefore not simply an act of accumulation, or even colonial appropriation. It was, at the same time, an act of classification, a re-ordering of the human terrain. It made clear, in no uncertain terms, where these objects, and the people they came from, belonged. As such, collecting indigenous remains was itself a constitutive element of the colonial project. It was the first and most invasive act of the “classificatory regimes” European colonialism exported to its colonies. It was, in the words of Patrick Wolfe, one of the means by which “colonialism refashions its human terrain.”⁶¹

Contact Bodies

British collectors thus saw collecting as an act putting in order the human landscape. However limited their understanding of their localities was, they tramped through, intervened in, and were shaped by the environment they sought to observe, describe and classify. Native burial grounds,

⁵⁹ I am drawing here on an analysis of the regulation of the public body by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. In their discussion of the transformation of social spaces like the seventeenth-century theatre or the eighteenth-century coffee-house, they suggest that physical space was “an important instrument in the regulation of the body, manners and morals” of those that frequent it. See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 80-124 (especially 95-6).

⁶⁰ The anthropologist Mary Douglas writes: “Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.” Conversely, the inclusion of certain objects in such a pattern constitutes an act of cleaning up, which in itself is the recreation of order. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 40.

⁶¹ Wolfe, *Traces*, 9-10.

forests and refuse heaps became social spaces where collectors and their indigenous informants met, interacted and articulated the terms of their relationships.⁶² As Mary Louise Pratt has suggested, the relationships that emerged in these “contact zones” were often profoundly uneven, distorted by colonial intrusion, racial inequality and various forms of violent contestation.⁶³ But besides exploitation and destruction, these contact zones also constituted spaces of negotiation and creation. As Londa Schiebinger has pointed out, however, the concept of “contact zones” may implicitly acknowledge the divide between Europeans and non-Europeans. It runs the risk of establishing the contact zone as the privileged and bounded space of interaction between the colonizer and the colonized.⁶⁴ In Chapter Five I provide a detailed analysis of such a transgressive space along the South African frontier: the battlefield. Here, I explore how the actions of British collectors and their indigenous assistants exposed these facile distinctions as figments of the imperial imagination. What I will show here is that British and indigenous participants in these spaces often blurred, transgressed and even exploded the boundaries between Europeans and non-Europeans. The strategies British ethnoprospectors employed to acquire human remains forced them to assemble in makeshift social spaces where these identities ceased to retain any certain.

The participants in these social spaces deliberated relationships that went beyond the binary opposition between subjugation and imposition.⁶⁵ In a similar sense, new relationships between British collectors and indigenous individuals formed through the process of acquisition.

⁶² These constitute only one set of “biocontact zones” where British ethnoprospectors and natives encountered each other. In Chapter Five I discuss head taking in the context of the battlefield. There, collecting heads assumed a particular set of meanings and elicited a specific set of responses different from, though not unrelated to, the ones I discuss here.

⁶³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7-8.

⁶⁴ Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 83-4.

⁶⁵ See Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson, eds., “Introduction,” in *Colonial Discourse/ Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 6-7.

Indigenous individuals guided British collectors to local burial grounds and traded the remains of their loved ones with them. British collectors were often at the mercy of their indigenous informants, relying on them for safe passage and trusting them when they presented them with a specimen that they claimed, was an authentic one. In this sense, the remains of the indigenous dead may be better understood as “contact bodies.” These objects of negotiation and contention reflected and shaped the very identities of those who handled them.

Indigenous assistants were instrumental to the success of a collecting expedition. They spoke the language, had an intimate knowledge of the terrain, and knew the people. When George Grey visited Santa Cruz, Tenerife, on his way to Australia, he learned from an old inhabitant of the existence of “La cueva de los Guanches,” a cave located three miles to the North-East of Santa Cruz, filled with the remains of the ancient inhabitants of the island. Impossible to reach by land, his informant told him that from the sea it “could be observed to be full of bones.” Although it was a Sunday and he was to set sail later that afternoon, Grey found that “the inducement was too strong to resist.”⁶⁶ This passion for acquisition also got the better of G. M. Giles. In March 1886, the naturalist exploring Chitral in India, forwarded a box with five native skulls to Charles Stewart at the RCS. He was proud to announce that he was part of only the second European foray into the region. The prospects for collecting skulls, therefore, were good, but it was a dangerous enterprise. “Body snatching of this sort, in a country w[h]ere folks seldom think twice about cutting the throat of anyone with whom they may differ in opinion,” he wrote to the curator of the Hunterian Museum, “has to be done also on the quiet.” The threat was

⁶⁶ Grey does speculate on the origins of the bone cave. Perhaps, he wonders, a party of Guanches, “so oppressed, and cruelly treated by the Spaniards,” took refuge there by way of a small pathway running alongside the cliffs. When the Spanish then destroyed that pathway, they had no means of returning and perished there. Grey, *Journals*, vol. 1, 20-22.

very real, he assured his correspondent in London. “You can hardly go a mile along the road without coming across the grave of some traveller ‘poli[s]hed off’ and thrown under a heap of stones.”⁶⁷

For Giles, the thrill of acquisition was as much about finding specimens as it was about the act of taking possession of them in dangerous circumstances. Disregarding these threats to his own life, Giles was committed to acquiring at least a few skulls during a passage through “Kafiristan.” To succeed, Giles depended on his indigenous assistant. Giles had noticed that some of the coffins in a local graveyard had fallen apart and “skulls were lying about in a tempting manner.” He instructed his indigenous guide to distract the locals by showing off his photographic camera. With the locals pre-occupied, he picked up a skull and concealed it in his coat. Unfortunately, Giles was abruptly interrupted because “the lazy brute got tired of exhibiting” the oddity and some locals had taken notice of his interest in the remains. Hoping to avoid being discovered as a graverobber, he threw his prize “down as if I had but taken it up from curiosity and that like Hamlet, ‘My Gorge rose out it’.”⁶⁸ Giles not only depended on his indigenous guide for safe passage through this region of India, he had also enlisted the “brute,” as he called him, in his ruse to acquire indigenous specimens. Giles’ apprehension about being discovered as a collector of human remains was part of a larger strategy of concealment. Members of the party could not publish an account of their findings at any time during the expedition. The organizers of the mission were worried that news of their collecting would jeopardize its success and safety. Giles, himself, failed to “understand the reason of this

⁶⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 18, f. 2-3, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from G. M. Giles to [Charles Stewart,] Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1886.

⁶⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 18, f. 3-4, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from G. M. Giles to [Charles Stewart,] Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1886.

prohibition as the mission is avowedly scientific as well as diplomatic in its object,” but complied with its restrictions nonetheless.⁶⁹ As I will show later, British collectors often failed to understand indigenous attempts to keep information from them, while they took British secrecy and deception for granted.

It was not uncommon for British collectors to employ indigenous assistants in their search for specimens, either human or otherwise, but most of them employed these aides in less nefarious ways than Giles. Indigenous assistants also provided the manual labor collectors needed. Richard Burton relied on a small army of indigenous laborers during his expedition into the Holy Land in 1870-1. Syria proved a remarkably fertile stomping ground for Burton and his companion Charles Carter Blake, and they could count on the assistance of local laborers to unearth the human riches buried beneath the sand. Approaching the market-town of Yabrád, the bone collectors were “anxious to inspect certain skulls and mortuary lamps lately found in a tomb near the settlement, and kept for us by the energetic young schoolmaster Ibrahim Katibah.”⁷⁰ Among the human remains they took from Palmyra were seven skulls, three-and-a-half jaws, and several parcels of bones.⁷¹

In May-June of that year they ventured into the Hauran Mountain range. The first eight days of their journey was uneventful, but on the ninth day they collected some 120 inscriptions, including three from “the Burj or mortuary tower at Shakkah, a ruin long since identified as the Saccsea of Ptolemy.” In the basement of the structure they found several human skulls and

⁶⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 18, f. 3-4, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from G. M. Giles to [Charles Stewart,] Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1886.

⁷⁰ Richard F. Burton, *Unexplored Syria* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), vol. 2, 107.

⁷¹ Richard F. Burton, “Catalogue *Raisonné* of an Anthropological Collection made in Syria and Palestine between April 15, 1870, and August 6, 1871.” Reprinted Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, vol., 2, 231. Other items included several parcels of mummy cloth, mortuary lamps, pottery, and coins.

bones, which Burton and Carter later donated to the Anthropological Institute.⁷² At Palmyra, halfway between the Mediterranean and Hindustan, Burton and Blake had just five days to “try the fortune of exploration.” Fortune favored them. They were able to hire forty-five “coolies” for less than sixpence a day per laborer, though their equipment was rudimentary. They had “nothing but diminutive picks and hoes, grain-bags and cloaks, which they converted into baskets for removing sand and rubbish.” Digging started on 15 April 1870 near the southwestern group of buildings at Palmyra. But indigenous assistance did not guarantee success. These “Fellahs” managed to find only a few remains since these spots “had been ransacked before.”⁷³

The indigenous also served as collectors of specimens. In Australia, for example, the Reverend Samuel Macfarlane, busy establishing a new mission at Somerset on Cape York in 1876, had been disappointed with his own collections and frequently used indigenous individuals to make up for his disappointment. He ordered them to collect snakes, lizards, beetles and butterflies around Cape York. Moreover, Macfarlane envisioned expanding his network of indigenous collectors along with the mission. “We here succeeded in establishing branches of our mission at South and East Capes,” he wrote to Günther in May of 1878, “where I can get natives to collect, as I shall for some time be spending a good deal of my time in that locality.”⁷⁴ Everywhere he went, Macfarlane engaged indigenous collectors. Upon returning from Cornwallis Island, he informed Günther that “on the island I have had some natives collecting for

⁷² Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, vol. 1, 160-1 fn. Charles Carter Blake describes these skulls in an appendix to the second volume.

⁷³ Richard F. Burton, “On Anthropological Collections from the Holy Land. By Richard F. Burton (late her Majesty's Consul at Damascus), With Notes on the Human Remains. By Dr. C. Carter Blake, F.G.S.” Paper read at the meeting of the Anthropological Institute on 20 November 1871. Reprinted in Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, vol. 2, 234-5. At least two of the seven calvaria they found proved to be of modern origin.

⁷⁴ DF [ZOO/1200/14, 351, f. 2, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, 20 May 1878.

me.”⁷⁵ Macfarlane was not only busy making Christians out of the indigenous. He was also turning them into collectors. And in doing so, he was exposing them, however superficially, to a distinctly European way of seeing the natural world, one in which each living thing, including the indigenous themselves, could be collected, labeled and classified. Macfarlane, it seems, was gathering unto Him a flock of collectors as well as converts.

There were also limits to the usefulness of indigenous assistants for scientific collecting. British collectors frequently cited laziness and lack of understanding scientific methodology as causes of poor collections. For one, the natives were unfamiliar with the procedures of preservation and the requirements of careful documentation. As I have mentioned earlier, the Reverend Samuel Macfarlane frequently employed indigenous collectors to ramble around his Australia and New Guinea missions. When he sent home several jars of snakes, lizards and beetles, he apologized that his indigenous collectors had mixed up the labels indicating their origins, and he promised to “guard against this in future.”⁷⁶ He tried instructing them in preserving and labeling specimens properly but failed. In 1879, a collection of specimens Macfarlane had acquired in New Guinea arrived in England in a “spoiled” state. He again apologized to Günther, explaining that “there were some, I remember, that the natives had not kept covered in spirits.”⁷⁷

Indigenous unfamiliarity with the methods and conventions of collecting forced British collectors to look elsewhere for assistance, and they turned to their own. Serving as a naturalist on board the *HMS Pearl* in Australian waters in 1873, Wykeham Perry wanted to send a species

⁷⁵ DF [ZOO/200/14, 352, f. 1-2, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, [?] June 1878.

⁷⁶ DF [ZOO/200/14, 351, f. 1, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, 20 May 1878.

⁷⁷ DF [ZOO/200/17, 283, f. 4, NHM, 1880, Zoology Correspondence L-Z. Letter from revd. S. MacFarlane to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 5 November 1879.

of bat from Fiji, though he had been unable to do so because the indigenous were “too lazy to get them for me.” Work on board the man-of-war occupied most of his time, and he was disappointed with his own collections so far. He vowed to make up for his “own shortcomings” and those of the indigenous by enlisting “the sympathies of some of the Offi[cers] of the other ships cruising near the outlying islands to collect all they can.”⁷⁸ Eight months later, he found himself and the crew of the *Pearl* “wasting all our time at Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania, where there is not much to be done.” He was looking forward to returning to Fiji and, from there, continuing on a cruise to the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, where the prospects for a collector were more favorable. In the meantime, he had “endeavoured to interest my brother officers in other ships,” and provided them with “a copy of the instructions which you were kind enough to give me and try to make [them] collect.”⁷⁹

Despite such misgivings about indigenous collectors, British collectors found different ways to enlist the help of the indigenous. Some collectors soon discovered that they could exploit pre-existing notions of difference between the various tribes to procure assistance. In Timor-Laut, Henry Ogg Forbes had great difficulty in obtaining human remains. As among the Malay of Sumatra, the natives of Timor-Laut held deeply-rooted beliefs about the human body and its parts. At one point, Forbes observed a native clipping his finger nails, carefully collecting the clippings afterwards to prevent someone from using them against him. A similar anxiety surrounding the treatment of the remains of the deceased. When Forbes purchased a native skull

⁷⁸ DF [ZOO/200/6, 119, f. 4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to the British Museum, of 10 December 1873. Recall also the exploits of G. M. Giles, “lazy brute” of an assistant almost got him caught trying to procure native remains from a graveyard. RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 18, f. 2-4, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from G. M. Giles to [Charles Stewart,] Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1886.

⁷⁹ DF [ZOO/200/6, 120, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to the British Museum, of 9 August 1874.

from the deceased's son, the seller exhibited "a superstitious dread of any part of their person being in possession of another." Before handing over the skull, the son placed an areca-nut between its teeth and recited "a long and devout incantation."⁸⁰

Henry's wife, Anna, recorded a similar dread among the indigenous that a part of their body would belong to another. Henry had asked her to preserve a lock of hair from one of the natives. The latter duly allowed Anna to cut a piece of his hair, but when she was about to hand it over to her husband, "the man broke into piteous tears."⁸¹ Taboos about touching the dead body presented a serious obstacle to the usefulness of indigenous collectors. But Forbes soon found a way to circumvent these taboos. Fascinated by the nomadic people called Kubu in the interior of Timor-Laut, Forbes set out to procure a cranium and a complete skeleton of one of their deceased. Although the Malay were prohibited from touching or handling a dead body, Forbes noticed that they had no such reservations in disinterring the remains of a Kubu (see Figure 3.2).⁸²

⁸⁰ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 309.

⁸¹ Forbes, *Insulinde*, 161.

⁸² Forbes, *Wanderings*, 242.

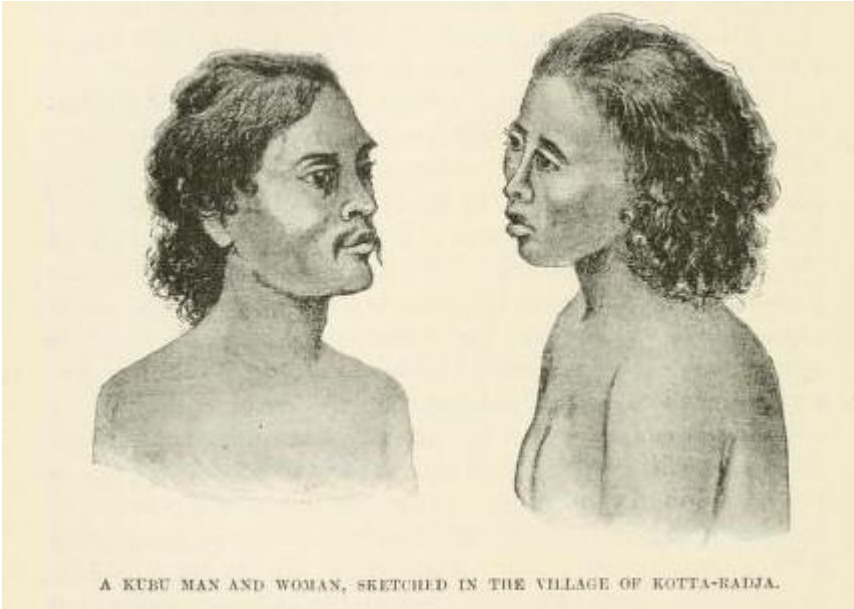


Fig. 3.2. “A Kubu Man and Woman, Sketched in the Village of Rotta-Raina.” From: Henry Ogg Forbes, *A Naturalist’s Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago; A Narrative of Travel and Exploration from 1878 to 1883* (New York, Harper & brothers, 1885), 234. Such sketches were not easy to make. Anna recalls an instance during which Henry was sketching a native. When the latter realized what was happening he burst into tears and several others fled. See Forbes, *Insulinde*, 207.

Some indigenous individuals, however, were less sanguine about parting with the remains of their deceased family members, though it appears that some sense of secrecy about the exchange was still required. Like many other explorers, Forbes acquired many specimens, including the remains of indigenous dead, through trade. On his travels through Timor-Laut, near the village of Waitidal, Forbes was willing to dispose of some items of clothing and other goods in exchange for “provisions, carved work, and ethnological objects.” Soon after, a man approached him, “with the usual secrecy,” offering to sell Forbes the “fine skull” of his father. Such offers were not uncommon. Anna recalls a native from Waitidal offering half-a-dozen human skulls from Ritadel for sale.⁸³ Coming from Waitidal, she assumed, the man showed no respect for the dead of that part of the island.⁸⁴ But Forbes was reluctant to acquire it.

What happened next illustrates just how reciprocal the exchange of indigenous remains on the margins of the British world had become. When Forbes pointed out to the man that he believed the lower jaw did not belong to the cranium, the indigenous responded that he

⁸³ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 240, 242.

⁸⁴ Forbes, *Insulinde*, 206.

remembered “quite well when my father was alive he had just this sort of under jaw.”

Unconvinced, Forbes rejected the offer and the individual left disappointed. A few hours later, he returned with the same cranium but was now carrying a different lower jaw. The skulls of his father and his brother had been put on the same slab in his home, he explained, and he had confused the jaws. Satisfied with this explanation, Forbes concluded his transaction with this “dutiful son” and the indigenous man handed over the skull, but not before placing a pinang nut between its teeth and reciting a solemn incantation. “That son’s welfare,” Forbes added triumphantly, “is regulated now from the Mammalian Gallery of the British Museum.”⁸⁵

Part of what made Forbes so successful in this exchange was his ability to communicate with the individual offering him the skull of his father. Knowledge of the local language was often crucial to the success of British collectors, and when indigenous interpreters could not be found, British collectors had to rely on makeshift forms of communication. In 1870, Louis A. Peers, a resident of the Murray River region in Australia, contacted Günther to offer his services as a professional collector. He emphasized that his intimate knowledge of the area, his long-standing acquaintance with the natives and his ability to speak their language enabled him “to obtain specimens which are otherwise difficult to get.”⁸⁶ An inability to communicate often resulted in delays and confusion. When in June 1879, J. P. MacLeod, naturalist aboard Coppinger’s *HMS Alert*, informed Flower that he had sent a box of indigenous bones to the British Museum, he added that they had a “a native from Picton Channel” on board. He was not sure, but the individual appeared to be a Fuegian. MacLeod had been increasingly frustrated by the indigenous’ inability to provide information about his language. They had been trying to

⁸⁵ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 329.

⁸⁶ DF [ZOO/200/6, 109, f. 1, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Louis A. Peers to the Curator of the British Museum, of 24 October 1870.

learn some words from him, but the indigenous “habit of imitation” was proving to be a “great difficulty in obtaining [information] from the natives.”⁸⁷

Some collectors sought to mitigate such misunderstandings by learning indigenous languages themselves, while others did so by employing native interpreters. Richard Burton was a notorious polyglot, and his affinity with languages provided him access to local information and circumvent the effects of native resistance in places like Syria. George Grey translated Maori myths to help him in his negotiations with Maori chiefs, who frequently made references to these texts.⁸⁸ Forbes had gone to great lengths to learn the Malay language. Upon returning from the Cocos-Keeling Islands to Java, Forbes was delighted to receive permission to collect plant and animal specimens on the freehold farm of Alexander Fraser, on the western side of the Bantam province. There, “still within the reach of civilization,” he could “become acquainted with, and gain some practical experience of the necessities and modes of tropical life and camping, of which the novitiate traveller has such crude ideas.” He had chosen this spot, so he could insulate himself from European contact while mastering the Malay language. After just a few weeks, Forbes was able to “converse in the Malay tongue with an amount of freedom that surprised me.” His knowledge of the language allowed Forbes to follow their conversations and he soon discovered that the indigenous peoples of the region were “marvelously observant and intelligent.” They proved themselves valuable sources of information and naturalists in their own right. Forbes soon learned that they had names for every “single tree or plant or minute shrub,” and he was surprised to discover that they could often recall its “history.”⁸⁹

For most ethnoprospectors, however, language proved a serious obstacle. They often had to rely on native interpreters to safely navigate the foreign landscape and indigenous customs. When they did employ the services of interpreters, British collectors often developed a deep appreciation for their companions and even lasting friendships. John Davy, for example, lauded the services of his friend, translator and go-between Dr. De Saram, whom he considered “a native of a cultivated and enlightened mind, equally conversant with English and Singalese, and perfectly qualified as an interpreter on any subject of enquiry.”⁹⁰ British collectors understood that mastery of the local language, either through learning or interpreting, was a powerful political tool in their search for human specimens. It provided access to local knowledge, but above all, it helped create and sustain reciprocal bonds of affection that formed the basis of a lasting relationship of cooperation and even friendship. But some indigenous men, women and children were less accommodating to British obsessions.

⁸⁷ For example, when MacLeod pointed to his hand and vocalized the word “hand,” the native simply imitated his sound. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 61, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from J. P. Macleod to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 June 1879.

⁸⁸ I discuss George Grey’s devotion to indigenous languages in some detail in Chapter Four. Grey saw knowledge of indigenous languages as a political tool. He was convinced that a knowledge of their language and myths would enable him to establish more effective bonds of diplomacy and even friendship.

⁸⁹ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 51, 53, 54. By “history,” Forbes meant that the indigenous were often able to relate from where the specimen had come and how it had arrived at its present location. Moreover, he noticed that indigenous names of some plant and animal species so much resembled Latin, that “it has been accepted by Western naturalists as if it had been so.” One example Forbes includes, is the large treeshrew, which the natives call *tupaia tana*. European naturalists accepted its name without modification and it is still used today.

⁹⁰ Davy, *Ceylon*, vii-viii.

Indigenous Forms of Resistance

The search for the bodies of the weak to stock the storerooms of museums in Europe entangled colonizer and colonized in an uncomfortable and fickle web of cooperation and dependence. These “contact bodies” became the focal point of unstable and unsettling relationships. British collectors depended on the information and assistance of indigenous individuals, and at times, they enlisted them in their deceptions. Their indigenous aides, in turn, often profited materially from this collaboration. Nevertheless, indigenous assistance did not always pay off, and specimens were lost. Incompetence was one way in which the indigenous, almost always unintentionally, thwarted the efforts of British collectors. There can be no such doubts about their intentions when the indigenous took up arms and chased British collectors out of their villages. Like James C. Scott, I do not consider conflict an “everyday” form of resistance. Rebellion and other forms of violence constituted an open challenge to British power. Although they sometimes produced short-term results, it was usually impossible to sustain the short-lived relief they brought. British power was simply too overwhelming. But besides open conflict, concealment and comedy provided everyday forms of resistance. These quiet and subtle acts of resistance, however, resulted in more piecemeal and sustainable forms of resistance.⁹¹ But let me begin with the most obvious form of resistance, the one Giles so callously ignored at the beginning of the previous section.

Traveling in “Kafiristan,” Giles, like many of his fellow collectors, was acutely aware that he was not safe. In fact, the prospect of violence cast a long shadow over many of the contact zones in which British collectors operated. John Davy arrived in Ceylon in 1816 on the

⁹¹ Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak*, xvi-xvii.

eve of the Third Kandyan War (1817-1818). He estimated that around that time 1,000 British soldiers were stationed in a Kandyan Interior populated by 300,000 natives.⁹² Encountering more signs of natives in Australia in 1814, George Grey, too, was forced to contemplate the safest course of action. “I sat down under the nut tree to consider what was my best plan to adopt,” he recalled. “From the signs around us, the natives were evidently much more numerous than I had expected...; and although from the superiority of our weapons over theirs, I entertained but little doubt as to the issue of any contest we might be forced into.”⁹³ Charles Carter Blake, Richard Burton’s companion in Syria during the expedition of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1870-1, had many violent encounters. “I have not found the Holy Land a bed of roses,” he told his audience at the Anthropological Institute in 1871. During the expedition, he recalled, undoubtedly with some embellishment, he had been shot at by more than forty men, “who, fortunately, could not shoot straight,” and pursued by more than three hundred Bedouin assassins.⁹⁴ Indigenous violence could easily rouse collectors from their imperial slumber.⁹⁵

Ultimately, however, indigenous numerical supremacy was no match for British technology. The risk of injury or even death weighed heavily against the possible rewards of scientific enquiry, and some British travelers feared not only for British lives. Writing some years after accompanying Captain Stanley on board the *HMS Rattlesnake*, the naturalist Thomas Huxley recalls the Captain’s reluctance to venture into the interior, resulting in the “absence of any very great addition to our knowledge of the interior of New Guinea.” Observing the growing hostility among the natives on the beach, Captain Stanley refused to send more landing parties ashore. “I am sure you will agree with me in thinking,” Stanley justifies his reluctance, “that all

⁹² Davy, *Ceylon*, 107-108

⁹³ Grey, *Journals*, vol. 1, 103-4.

⁹⁴ Burton, “On Anthropological Collections from the Holy Land,” 228-9.

⁹⁵ I was reminded of this while reading Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 6. See also Colley, *Captives*.

the specimens that we could have procured, however rare, would have been dearly purchased by the sacrifice of one human life.” Stanley feared not only for the lives of his men, but for those of the natives as well, who “seemed to have no idea whatever of the use and effect of fire-arms.”⁹⁶ Indigenous peoples all over the world came to learn this lesson the hard way. Despite such a technological advantage, collectors did well not to underestimate the resilience of indigenous peoples.

Few imperialists came to understand this better than Commodore James Goodenough, although he did not live to benefit from what he had learned. Hubris and avarice in collecting compelled collectors to take risks, even among indigenous populations with whom they had had no previous contact. In June 1875, the surgeon-naturalist on board the *HMS Pearl* surveying Australian waters around the New Hebrides, Alfred Corrie was hopeful that his trip would yield a rich harvest of natural history specimens.⁹⁷ Not too long afterwards, however, that hope turned into despair, when he informed Günther of “the melancholy death of Commodore Goodenough” at the hands of the “treacherous” indigenous of Santa Cruz. The Commodore’s death confirmed the timeless savagery of these islanders. These “savages,” he proclaimed, were “as cold, Hordish and unchristian like as they appear to have been in the days of the old Spanish Navigators.” Corrie himself had been ashore with the Commodore, rambling, when the attack occurred, but was fortunate enough to make “a most providential escape.”⁹⁸

The ship’s naturalist, Wykeham Perry, provides more details about “the death of our good Commodore.” He had only just returned from “a botanizing ramble on the beach” when a

⁹⁶ Huxley, “Science at Sea,” 111-2.

⁹⁷ DF [ZOO/200/2, 61b, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence C-D. Letter from Alfred Corrie, Surgeon on H. M. S. Pearl, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 4 June 1875.

⁹⁸ DF [ZOO/200/2, 61c, f.2-3, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence C-D. Letter from Alfred Corrie, Surgeon on *HMS Pearl*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 2 September 1875.

group of Santa Cruz natives attacked the party, which included Corrie and the Commodore. Goodenough was “mortally wounded” by “a poisoned arrow,” and died of tetanus a few days later. Though the death of his commander upset Perry, he appeared to have been at least as upset, if not more, upon realizing that yet another opportunity for collecting had been cut short. “I have thus a second time been debarred from visiting the Solomon Islands, and the islands about New Guinea,” he complained to Dr. Günther at the British Museum.⁹⁹ What is striking in Perry’s account is that the treachery of the natives appears in stark contrast to the honest motives of the botanizing collector. Even in the failure to collect indigenous remains, the “savagery” of the indigenous becomes apparent.

Commodore Goodenough had been an ardent collector of human specimens himself. In 1876, his widow presented through the hands of Lane Fox Pitt Rivers a collection of seven skulls from natives of Cook’s S. W. Bay, Mallicollo Island, in the New Hebrides group. Commodore Goodenough had collected them “during his last cruise in *HMS Pearl* in the year 1875,” and after his death, the Commodore’s widow had handed the macabre reminders of her husband’s violent fate over to Lane Fox.¹⁰⁰ Collecting specimens appears to have been on the Commodore’s mind from the beginning. On the eve of his departure for the Australia Station, which included New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland as well as most of the Polynesian islands, Goodenough addressed a letter to Albert Günther at the British Museum. He wished to make the journey “a profitable one” and expressed his interest in “(among other things) collecting and preserving

⁹⁹ DF [ZOO/200/6, 125, f. 1-4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the *HMS Pearl*, to Dr. Günther at the British Museum, of 1 November 1875.

¹⁰⁰ Flower, *Catalogue*, 213-5, no. 1154-1158 and 1165-1166; and Stewart, *Catalogue*, 356-357, no. 1154-1158; 361, no. 1165-1166. The skulls in Goodenough’s collection are also described in George Busk, “Notes on a Collection of Skulls from the Islands of Mallicollo and Vanikoro, in the New Hebrides Group,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 6 (1877), 200-8.

specimens of Natural History.” As was customary for naval officers with such an interest, he asked for reference works that might assist him in identifying the most useful and valuable specimens as well as instructions on how to collect and preserve them.¹⁰¹ Günther obliged a few days later, sending him several books and advice on how to collect.¹⁰²

Two other collectors joined the Commodore on board the *Pearl*: the surgeon Alfred Corrie and the naturalist Wykeham Perry. Together, the three collectors presented fifteen skulls from the Solomon Islands to institutions in Britain. As mentioned earlier, Goodenough’s widow donated to the Hunterian Museum seven through Lane Fox in 1875. Corrie presented three from the Solomon Islands in 1875 and one from Fiji in 1877.¹⁰³ Perry presented four skulls from the Solomon Islands to the British Museum in 1876.¹⁰⁴ Perry, apparently, had collected one of his skulls during an expedition into the interior of Santa Cruz.¹⁰⁵ A month before the encounter with an indigenous party during which his friend was killed, Perry had managed to buy a human skull and a cutting instrument made of human thigh bone from a native.¹⁰⁶ The trip had been a fruitful one for Goodenough as well. Visiting one of their public houses, or “dead-houses,” he was able to trade a preserved head for a knife, and the indigenous allowed them to take several others. Goodenough did not hesitate and “made a prize of some for Col. Fox, and got him one or two very good stone and shell adzes.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ DF [ZOO/]200/3, 178, f. 3-4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence E-F-G. Letter from James G. Goodenough, Captain of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 17 May 1873.

¹⁰² DF [ZOO/]200/3, 179, f. 1, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence E-F-G. Letter from James G. Goodenough, Captain of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 20 May 1873.

¹⁰³ Flower, *Catalogue*, 214, no. 1159-61; Stewart, *Catalogue*, 358, no. 1159-61.

¹⁰⁴ DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 247, no. 1-4, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

¹⁰⁵ DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 247, no. 4, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register; DF [ZOO/]216/29, 54, NHM, Oct[ober] 1873-Oct[ober] 1882, Zoological Donations.

¹⁰⁶ Goodenough, *Journal*, 326.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

While it is unclear whether the acquisitiveness of Goodenough, Corrie and Perry directly provoked the violence, it is clear that the Mallicollo natives often perceived the presence of Europeans a provocation. Nevertheless, in his journal, Goodenough tries to pre-empt “outrageously foolish stories” and imagined the motives of the attack to have been “plunder, or a sort of running-a-muck.”¹⁰⁸ With his dying words, Goodenough tried to disassociate his death from their own actions, placing the onus squarely on savagery of the indigenous, their greed, and their propensity for violence. Reports of the Commodore’s death soon reached England, they turned public opinion against the natives. The treacherousness of the Solomon Islanders was to become a trope in the descriptions of British collectors. In 1887, C. W. Woodford indicated to Günther his plans for collecting on one of the islands, but he did “not care to do so except accompanied with a very strong party as the natives of that part ... are about the most treacherous in the whole group.”¹⁰⁹

In any case, the death of Commodore Goodenough put a stop to the collecting forays of Corrie and Perry as well. In a letter dated 30 June 1875 Corrie informs Günther that “I shall not be able to furnish you with many more as we leave this station in a few months for England, and I imagine our visits to the Islands are at an end.” He was rather disappointed in the collections he had made, though he did have “a few specimens that I think may prove of interest.”¹¹⁰ Perry felt a similar sense of disappointment, having “to say that I shall be prevented from again visiting

¹⁰⁸ The commodore’s journal ends with the words “I don’t feel...”. *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁰⁹ DF [ZOO/]200/31, 445, f. 2-3, NHM, Jan.-June 1887, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from C. W. Woodford to Dr. A. Günther, Natural History Museum, S. Kensington, 19 January 1887.

¹¹⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/9, 85, f. 1-2, NHM, 1876, Zoology Correspondence A-J. Letter from Alfred Corrie, Surgeon on H. M. S. Pearl, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 30 June 1876.

those interesting islands of the South Seas where I have spent many an agreeable hour in collecting the few specimens of nat[ural] history which I have sent from time to time to you.”¹¹¹

However, Perry and Corrie were not easily deterred from collecting human remains. Perry resumed collecting in 1877, when he received a new commission as Secretary to the Commander in Chief of the East Indian Naval Station. Once there, he promised, “wherever I may go and may have the opportunity of collecting, I shall be very glad to do so.”¹¹² Three years later he again offered his services, this time in China, though he feared that “I may be able to do but little, as my offi[cial] work will be heavy, but if I can have any leisure, I shall be glad to devote it to anything which will further the knowledge of zoology.”¹¹³ Six years after the death of Commodore Goodenough, Corrie contacted Günther. This time he informed the Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum that he had been assigned to the hospital in Ascuncion, Paraguay, which he mistakenly identified as “the Island of As[c]junction.” He was “anxious to know if I can collect while I am on the Island, anything of interest for you or the B. Museum.”¹¹⁴ Despite the fatal encounter with the natives in New Guinea, Corrie remained committed to collecting human specimens. In 1877 he presented a Fijian cranium to the Hunterian Museum, and in 1885 and 1888, he presented ten ancient (Inca) and modern skulls of Peruvian natives to the Natural

¹¹¹ DF [ZOO/]200/6, 124, f. 1-2, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the H. M. S. “Pearl”, to the British Museum, of 23 December 1875.

¹¹² DF [ZOO/]200/12, 53, f. 2, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence N-Z. Letter from Wykeham Perry, of P & O Steamship “Cattray”, to Albert Günther at the British Museum, 29 April 1877.

¹¹³ DF [ZOO/]200/19, 226, NHM, Jan.-June 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from Wykeham Perry to Albert Günther at the British Museum, 26 December 1880; DF [ZOO/]200/19, 230, NHM, Jan.-June 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from Wykeham Perry to Albert Günther at the British Museum, 17 January 1881.

¹¹⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/20, 103, NHM, Jul.-Dec. 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from Alfred Corrie to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 23 October 1881.

History Museum, collected from burying grounds during his time surveying south American waters on board the *HMS Pelican*.¹¹⁵

Indigenous resistance to British collecting did not always spill over into the kind of open conflict that claimed Commodore Goodenough's life. Concealment and comedy offered a safer and more sustainable way of safeguarding the bodies of the weak or undermining collectors' efforts. The secrecy and duplicity with which collectors sought to acquire indigenous remains offers an ironic counterfoil to their indignation when they discovered the deception and treachery of their indigenous informants. The latter often thwarted the efforts of British ethnoprospectors by keeping secrets or providing false information. Even when they did share their knowledge, they often did so on their own terms. In June 1881, Richard Burton wrote a note to William Flower at the Hunterian Museum informing him of the history of a collection of Egyptian skulls. The "Arabs" disposed of the skulls and bones of mummies they found in pits in the desert. This seriously jeopardized the authenticity of the skulls, Burton realized, for the collection might thus contain several "modern" skulls, from individuals who had died from a cholera epidemic during "the Levant Attack." But this was not the most serious difficulty he had contend with. Intending to ransack these "pits," Burton was interested in discovering where the locals disposed of the mummies' remains, but he was frustrated the indigenous, who "they keep them secret and so I cannot point out the exact place."¹¹⁶

If we can believe British accounts, and there is no reason to question them on this point, indigenous attempts to keep the whereabouts of the remains of their family, friends and fellow

¹¹⁵ For the remains donated to the Hunterian Museum in 1875 and 1877, see Flower, *Catalogue*, 214, no. 1159-1161; 15, no. 129; and Stewart, *Catalogue*, 358, no. 1159-1161. For the human specimens donated to the Natural History Museum in 1885 and 1888, see DF[ZOO] 218/2/5, 370, no. 1-4; and 404, no. 1-6, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

¹¹⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 103, f.1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Richard Francis Burton [to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum], 30 June [1881].

tribesmen secret were rooted in indigenous burial customs and beliefs about the dead body. Even if in the eyes of collectors, indigenous attitudes towards human remains had produced human wastelands, indigenous burial customs and beliefs about the afterlife made scientific collecting a difficult and dangerous task. Like in Europe, indigenous traditions often sought to safeguard the inviolability of the dead as well as secure the health and safety of the living. In 1869, C. F. Robinson, Governor of the Falkland Islands, was glad to be able to send the skulls of a Fuegian and a Patagonian. He was particularly confident that the Fuegian skull would be “the object of no little interest,” since “I am told, it has never yet been possible to procure, in consequence of the superstitions with which the Fuegian tribes surround their dead and the umbrage which they take at any intrusion on their burying places.”¹¹⁷ Patagonians and Fuegians were notorious for protecting the remains of their dead. When Ernest A. Holmsted presented the skull of a fifteen-year old Fuegian girl to the Hunterian Museum in 1879, he informed Flower that she had been “murdered and buried under a pile of stones on a small island near ... the South American missionary settlement in Tierra del Fuego.” He had had great difficulty in obtaining the specimen, since the indigenous often burned their dead or buried them in remote parts of the forest. Indigenous prohibitions regarding contact with the bodies of the dead further encumbered his efforts to procure more, though he hoped that a friend at Ushuaia would soon be able to procure a complete skeleton.¹¹⁸

Indigenous burial customs could be a cause for both caution and optimism. When R. W. Coppinger sent word to Albert Günther at the British Museum of a collection of human remains found in caves along the Patagonian coast, he informed Günther that “judging from the numbers

¹¹⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 23, f. 1-2, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from C. F. Robinson, Governor of the Falkland Islands, to the Secretary of the Hunterian Museum, 25 April 1869.

¹¹⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 72, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Ernest A. Holmsted to William H. Flower, 19 November 1879.

of scattered huts, and the extensive middenheaps which we find, it would seem that their numbers were within recent years far more numerous than they are now.” This was good news for British collectors. More dead meant more potential specimens. However, despite his confidence that the decline of the Patagonian population had likely provided a wealth of raw materials for collections in Britain, Coppinger warned Günther that “it is very difficult to obtain authentic specimens of the skeletons of the Fuegians inhabiting these Western channels, for they seem to take great care about securing the remains of the deceased.”¹¹⁹ Similar attitudes in South Africa and Australia hindered the efforts of ethnoprospectors.¹²⁰ In 1876, Charles Taylor presented Flower with the skull and some bones taken from a grave in Australia. But, Taylor warned Flower, obtaining these remains was a dangerous enterprise, and “any white man known to disturb such places would undoubtedly receive a subtle touch of the malicious tomahawk.”¹²¹

In some parts, British collectors were convinced that indigenous taboos surrounding the dead bodies of their tribesmen could work in their favor. When in 1880, Hugh Brook Low of the Arawak Civil Service sent Flower the skull of a native of the interior of Borneo, he briefly commented on indigenous burial customs. One of his men had found a dead body “at the foot of a sago palm in the centre of the island.” Custom demanded that the body be left in the trunk of a tree and taboo compelled the natives to leave the place, enabling prospectors to obtain it without fear of getting caught. “They often bury their dead in the trunks of trees,” he informed Flower,

¹¹⁹ DF [ZOO/]200/17, 112, f. 1, NHM, 1880, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from R. W. Coppinger to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 24 December 1879.

¹²⁰ See Chapter Five for indigenous attitudes towards the bodies of their dead in the violent context of frontier warfare in South Africa.

¹²¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 38, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Taylor to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, [? March 1876]; RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 38, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Taylor to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 21 April 1876.

“and immediately desert the locality for fear of spirits.”¹²² In Australia, too, indigenous customs facilitated the acquisition of native remains. One correspondent wrote to Flower at the Hunterian to inform him that the custom of suspending the bodies of the dead in trees had enabled him to procure three Australian skulls.¹²³ In a more candid statement of the usefulness of native burial rituals, the Bishop of North Queensland told Flower at the Hunterian Museum that “the blacks do not bury their dead but suspend them among trees, embalmed in something of Egyptian care; so skulls are not hard to find in places frequented by camps of blacks.” He had no doubt that soon he would be able to furnish Flower with some skulls through his network of collectors.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, when the indigenous hid the bodies of their dead and kept the locations secret, they often sought to enforce the inviolability of these bodies and the seclusion of these sacred places. Ignorance of native attitudes towards the remains of their dead made collecting them a dangerous enterprise, especially in those areas where European contact had been endemic and had eroded relationships of trust. In areas where British rule had been established, colonial officials were aware that the acquisition of human remains was likely to excite a hostile indigenous response. Nevertheless, by the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the collection of human remains increasingly received official endorsement. In 1879, Sir Joseph Fayrer, President of the Indian Medical Board, issued a call to medical officers in India to encourage “that every effort should be made to procure authenticated crania of any of the people of India or

¹²² RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 78, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Hugh Brook Low to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, n.d. [? January 1880]; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 87, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Hugh Brook Low to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 14 April 1880.

¹²³ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 127, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Fraser S. Crawford to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 4 May 1882.

¹²⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 96, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from George H. Stanton, Bishop of N. Queensland, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 February 1880.

the neighbouring territories.”¹²⁵ Fayer had been an industrious collector of human specimens himself. In 1877-8, he collected twelve human skulls from the Andaman Islands for William Flower at the Hunterian museum, and in 1880, he presented the skull of a “Mahomedan” from the Maldives.¹²⁶ Fayer also briefly mentions collecting human remains for Flower in his autobiography.¹²⁷

As head of the medical services in India, Fayer was willing to marshal the resources of the British empire to assist the cause of science. His circular received a wide circulation in India, passing through the hands of Sir Richard Temple, the lieutenant-governor of Bengal Presidency, and W. G. Hunter, Surgeon General at Bombay.¹²⁸ His request proved an immediate spur to collectors in India. In October 1877, Alfred J. Wall at the Presidency Hospital in Calcutta vowed to do his utmost to comply with Fayer’s earlier wishes regarding Indian skulls.¹²⁹ When Fayer’s request reached S. H. Cook at the Grant Medical College in Bombay, he replied in

¹²⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 82, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from J. N. Cody, secretary to the surgeon general, Indian Medical Department, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 27 February 1880. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to discover a copy of Fayer’s circular, but I have pieced together its contents from accounts by those to whom he addressed it in India.

¹²⁶ Flower, *Catalogue*, 225, no. 1205, no. 1206-1210, no. 1211, no. 1212-1216; Stewart, *Catalogue*, 207, no. 674/1.

¹²⁷ Joseph Fayer, *Recollections of My Life* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900), 427.

¹²⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 66[a], f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from G. H. R. Hart to Sir Joseph Fayer, India Office, 18 August 1879; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 66[b], f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from G. H. R. Hart to Sir Joseph Fayer, India Office, 21 August 1879; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 66[c], f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from W. G. Hunter, Surgeon General, India, to G. H. R. Hart, 18 August 1879.

¹²⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 51, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from Sir Joseph Fayer to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 24 November 1877. Fayer’s request was widely circulated among Indian medical officers, and Fayer kept William Flower informed of potential contributors throughout 1879-80. See also RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 66, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Note from Sir Joseph Fayer to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 10 September 1879; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 81, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Note from Sir Joseph Fayer, India Office, to Sir James Paget (1814-1899), surgeon, 3 February 1880.

August of 1879 “I will do what may be possible to carry out his wishes.”¹³⁰ In 1888, the circular was still on his mind and he sent an Italian skull he had acquired while on vacation to the Hunterian.¹³¹ Fayrer’s circular did not fail to appeal to the sense of patriotic duty among collectors. In July 1879, William Raymond Kynsey, Civil Medical Officer and Inspector General of Hospitals in Ceylon, acknowledged receipt of Fayrer’s circular, and informed him that “I am making a collection of crania of the different races in the island.” Although he had “also promised some to Prof. Broca of Paris,” he vowed that “the Hunterian Museum will come first.”¹³²

In India, in the meantime, J. N. Cody, Secretary to the Surgeon General, Indian Medical Department, received word of Fayrer’s circular in February 1880. He was relieved to be able to comply with Fayrer’s request, sending a case containing three Indian skulls from his station in Bombay. He had apparently also met Fayrer’s standards of authenticity, supplying information on age, sex, caste, place of birth and death.¹³³ In 1881, collectors in India were still responding to Fayrer’s call. In April of that year, Stephen Coull Mackenzie at the Campbell Hospital in

¹³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 62, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Copy of letter from S. H. Cook to G. H. R. Hart, 14 August 1879.

¹³¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 34, f. 1-2, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from Alfred J. Wall to Charles Stewart, 7 June 1888.

¹³² RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 62, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from William Raymond Kynsey to Sir Joseph Fayrer, India Office, 2 July 1879; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 66, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from William Raymond Kynsey, Ceylon, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 16 September 1879.

¹³³ I have not been able to retrieve the communication dated “London, April 1879.” My account of it is based on several letters from medical officers in India responding to Fayrer’s call. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 82, f. 1-3, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from J. N. Cody, secretary to the surgeon general, Indian Medical Department, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 27 February 1880.

Calcutta dispatched a collection of four skulls procured from deceased individuals at the hospital.¹³⁴

Despite so many favorable responses to Fayrer's request, not everyone was convinced that it contained sound policy. In October 1877, Alfred J. Wall, from the Presidency Hospital at Calcutta, informed Joseph Fayrer that he had not been "unmindful of the interests of the Hunterian when I was down at the Andamans," and that he had procured the promise of a Andamanese skeleton. He expected some delay, though. He had learned that "the commissioner and the officer in charge of the aborigines have the greatest possible objection to the natives being interfered with in any way - and especially with any meddling with their remains." But Wall was confident that he would soon be able to procure it, since both officials were soon to leave for a tour of the interior, allowing a friend to secure the specimen.¹³⁵ In some cases, it seems, British collectors were willing to deceive their own to acquire their desired objects.

When the news of the concerns of British officials on the Andaman Islands reached Fayrer, he sought to circumvent the concerns of the local officials. He contacted Joseph Dougall, the medical officer on the islands. Dougall "at once applied to the chief Commissioner and also to the Officer in charge of the Andamanese Houses (Mr. E. H. May)," and assured Fayrer that "the crania for the Hunterian Museum will be forth-coming in a little time." He also provided an explanation for the delay. Andamanese burial customs involved hanging the body of the deceased from trees "until they drop from decomposition." Afterwards, the nearest relative of the deceased would wear the lower jaw around the neck, and "the other remains are then buried in

¹³⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 99, f. 1-5, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Stephen Coull Mackenzie to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 10 April 1881. Interestingly, Mackenzie sent the boxes through the hands of Joseph Fayrer's son, William, who was a merchant at Calcutta.

¹³⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 50, f. 1-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Alfred J. Wall, Presidency Hospital, Calcutta, to Sir Joseph Fayrer, 31 October 1877.

some obscure plot, so that there is some difficulty in obtaining their skulls.” Fortunately, one of Dougall’s contacts knew of a body hanging from a tree, and he would attempt to procure its skull “if he can get the tribe to remove to a distance.”¹³⁶

In the meantime, Dougall also knew of some specimens to temporarily still Flower’s appetite until more could be procured. Two months after the first letter assuring Flower of his assistance, Dougall managed to secure for the Hunterian one of three Andamanese skeletons he had sent home to his brother William in Edinburgh three years earlier. While William had disposed of two of the skeletons to Dr. Turner in Edinburgh, Dougall and Fayrer convinced him to save the third for the Hunterian Museum. William Dougall had given the third skeleton to his nephew, who was studying for the Indian Medical Service.¹³⁷ He assured Flower that “I shall do my best to procure as many more for you as I possibly can” and that “this matter will not be lost sight of while I am in this place.”¹³⁸ William was eager to comply with Fayrer’s request, and he had “No doubt Sir Joseph Fayrer will be pleased that his wish has been attained.”¹³⁹ Flower wanted as many Andamanese skeletons as possible, and he offered several European ones in exchange for those Dougall’s nephew was using for his medical studies, along with any bones he might have. The bones, too, Dougall had promised to Professor Turner, but “I prefer sending them to you.”¹⁴⁰ Along with the skeletons and bones, William included several photos and

¹³⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 52, f. 2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from Joseph Dougall, medical officer on the Andaman Islands, to Sir Joseph Fayrer, India Office, 8 February 1878.

¹³⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 53, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from William Dougall, brother of Joseph Dougall, to Sir Joseph Fayrer, India Office, 11 March 1878.

¹³⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from Joseph Dougall, medical officer on the Andaman Islands, to William Henry Flower, Conservator at the Hunterian Museum, 2 May 1878.

¹³⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from William Dougall, brother of Joseph Dougall, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 14 March 1878.

¹⁴⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from William Dougall, brother of Joseph Dougall, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 21 March 1878.

ethnological materials, such as pieces of cloth from Andamanese dresses, and a bow and arrows.¹⁴¹ He also had in his possession a lock of hair, but was unable to find it.¹⁴² However, by May 1878, Joseph Dougall was able to deliver on his promise. He had secured the assistance of a General Barwell and had also received “bundles said to contain as many skeletons of Andamanese.”¹⁴³

Indigenous customs underwrote an important form of indigenous resistance to the appropriation of the indigenous dead. Precepts against touching the dead and strong beliefs in the inviolability of the body after death induced indigenous men and women to conceal the remains of their tribesmen. The threat of violence often forced British collectors to be cautious, if not abandon any hopes of acquire indigenous specimens altogether. Moreover, the acquisition of native remains did not only pit ravenous British collectors against indigenous guardians of the dead; it also caused tensions among British officials and those seeking to comply with requests from London. Indigenous resistance to these efforts, some believed, threatened to undermine already fragile balances of power on the margins of empire. Yet, despite the resistance of some officials sensitive to native concerns, medical officers used their influence and the resources of empire to secure their prized objects.

Some collectors sought to exploit the questionable fame British travelers and explorers had built up. Throughout the nineteenth century, British explorers had acquired a reputation for colonization and missionizing that jeopardized their ability to venture into the interiors and collect specimens of natural history. Some foreign collectors even sought to capitalize on native

¹⁴¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from William Dougall, brother of Joseph Dougall, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 16 March 1878.

¹⁴² RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from William Dougall, brother of Joseph Dougall, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 13 April 1878.

¹⁴³ CS-MUS/5/2/3, 54, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Note from Joseph Dougall, medical officer on the Andaman Islands, to Joseph Fayrer, India Office, 2 May 1878.

suspicion towards British collectors. When in November 1842 a German collector by the name of E. Duffenbach applied to John E. Gray at British Museum to assist him in securing the financial backing of the Earl of Derby, he suggested that “being a German, I could push my way perhaps better than an Englishman into Central Southern America, as I would excite no suspicion regarding any political or religious motives.”¹⁴⁴

His plea, it seems, was one of desperation, though. He had recently moved from London to a small university at Giessen, some 30 miles from Frankfurt, “although I hope, it is only for a short time.” Duffenbach thanked Gray for “your goodness for me,” and pleaded with him to “get me but to Paraguay, to China, to New Guinea, to Borneo or anywhere else.”¹⁴⁵ It is unclear whether Duffenbach succeeded in securing the backing of the Earl of Derby, or whether Gray assisted him in doing so. What is clear is that he sought to leverage indigenous suspicion towards the British to escape from the parochialism of a small university town in Germany. In any case, the German explorer’s assessment of the obstacles facing British collectors in the field certainly appears to have been accurate. When the Reverend Samuel Macfarlane at Cape York, Australia, informed Albert Günther of another shipment of natural history specimens, he hoped to be able to send more once he had settled in. But he warned, “we are engaged in a very difficult, dangerous work, and until we get our mission thoroughly established in tolerably healthy localities, I cannot pay much attention to collecting.”¹⁴⁶

Another form of everyday resistance involved indigenous indifference towards the indigenous remains British collectors valued so much. In the eyes of collectors, the indigenous

¹⁴⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/144, 165, f.2-3, NHM, 1819-1845, Foreign Letters volume 1, part 1. Letter from E. Duffenbach to John Edward Gray, at the British Museum, 17 November 1842.

¹⁴⁵ DF [ZOO/]200/144, 166, f.1-2, NHM, 1819-1845, Foreign Letters volume 1, part 1. Letter from E. Duffenbach to John Edward Gray, at the British Museum, 8 February 1843.

¹⁴⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/14, 350, f. 2-3, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, 24 August 1877.

often did not share the same appreciation of the value British collectors placed on human remains. When Charles Thomas informed Flower that a British resident in Lima might be willing to dispose of a rare Titicaca skull, he alluded to such a failure to grasp the value of human remains on the part of the indigenous laborers who had found similar remains when working on the railroad. Initially, work on the railroad from Lima to the Andes had turned up many similar skulls, he wrote to Flower, but most of them had been lost because “the laborers amused themselves on Sundays firing pistol shots at them.” Now only two remained, Thomas believed. One was in the hands of Charles Bryant and the other resided in an American collection.¹⁴⁷

Thomas was not alone in his assessment of the callous treatment of indigenous remains. Destruction of this kind reappears as something of a trope in the accounts of British travelers. In May 1876 John Hamilton deplored that the Guancho mummy his brother Charles had sent to the Hunterian was “not a very good one,” but he assured Flower that it was “as good as can be procured, as the goatherds who generally find these mummies almost invariably knock them about with their sticks.”¹⁴⁸ Unable to turn down a rare specimen from a now extinct race, Flower added the mummy to the collection.¹⁴⁹ In Syria, too, indigenous children were jeopardizing Richard Burton’s chances of finding the remains of ancient Egyptians he so coveted. The damage they were doing, was considerable. On 28 September 1870, Burton found five skulls, likely of priests, but he “might easily have collected fifty,” if children from neighboring villages

¹⁴⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 51, f. 1-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Charles Thomas to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 1 December 1877.

¹⁴⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 39, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from John Hamilton to John J. Hamilton to Secretary of the Hunterian Museum, 2 May 1876.

¹⁴⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 39, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from John J. Hamilton to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 4 May 1876.

did not spend their free time “skylarking amongst the graves.”¹⁵⁰ Again, accounts of native indifference sustained European assessments of indigenous savagery. Nevertheless, evident in the indifferent destruction of indigenous remains by the hands of the indigenous themselves constituted, if not an outright act of defiance, at least an implicit resistance to British efforts to order the human terrain.

British collectors often misread indigenous indifference. At times, they saw this apathy towards the remains of their ancestors as tacit compliance with their actions. One example of this occurs in Grey’s journal of his exploration of Australia. Grey and his men had been exploring the interior of Western Australia, while his ship, the *Beagle*, was surveying the adjacent coastline. Soon, one of the officers on board spotted a skeleton “enveloped in three pieces of papyrus bark, on a small sandy point in Cygnet Bay.” The bones had been carefully packed together, with the head on top. The officer removed the bones from their resting place and took them on board. Three natives, who had been with the watering party for some days, had been watching. Shortly after the officer had removed the bones, the eldest of the natives walked up to the parcel. He “turned up the bark with his foot, and did not appear to shew the slightest symptom of uneasiness.”¹⁵¹ Grey later forwarded the skeleton along with other specimens of natural history to the Royal College of Surgeons in August 1838, while recovering on Mauritius from injuries sustained during a native attack.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Charles Carter Blake, “Description of Skulls and other Remains from Ma'alulah, Syria, discovered by Captain Burton, By C. Carter Blake, Doct. Sci., F.G.S., Hon. Mem. A. I., Lecturer on Comparative Anatomy, Westminster Hospital.” Reprinted in Richard F. Burton, *Unexplored Syria* (London: Tinsley Borthers, 1872), vol. 2, 271.

¹⁵¹ Extract from a letter from an officer of the H.M.S. *Beagle* to George Grey, s.d. Quoted in Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, vol. 1, 257.

¹⁵² NZ MSS 574, ff. 1-4, APL, Auckland, New Zealand. Letter from Sir George Grey to Richard Owen, 19 August 1838,

There is something curious going on here. Even if we take grey's observations of indigenous indifference at face value, we still cannot be sure about what exactly the indigenous Australian was indifferent. Was it about the disappearance of the remains? Or, was about the fact that the officer had taken them? The accounts do not provide any immediate answers to these questions. The historical record appears silent in this case. However, when confronted with Grey's own descriptions of indigenous burial customs and beliefs, this account of indigenous indifference loses much of its coherence. Instead of lacking any "symptom of uneasiness," the funerary and mourning scenes Grey had observed, often involved relatives watching over the graves of the deceased in order to prevent evil spirits from feasting on the remains or to ascertain the cause of death.

For example, when on the 16 June 1839 he visited the grave of Mulligo, a young indigenous Australian who had died from the injuries sustained when falling from a tree, Grey found his mother wailing by his grave. Apparently, Grey learned, she had detected the presence of evil *boyl-yas* "sitting round his grave for the purpose of preying on his miserable remains." She was certain that evil *boyl-las*, or sorcerers, were present for she had seen their tracks in the sand, pointing in the direction of the district suspected to harbor the individual responsible for Mulligo's death. (Could these have been tracks of Grey's party?) Grey, however, was unable to verify this, since his "eyes were not good enough to detect the slightest vestige of any traces."¹⁵³ Grey concluded that the natives frequently remain amongst the graves in order to obtain the identity of the individual who caused the death of the loved one "either by means of actual visions, or by dreams."¹⁵⁴ Sorcerers, too, Grey claims, often performed this task. Drawing on an

¹⁵³ Grey, *Journals*, vol. 2, 328.

¹⁵⁴ The practice was apparently also common among the Jews of Judea, who "provoke me to anger continually to my face, that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick, which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments." (*Isaiah*. XLV. 4-5.) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 335.

account in Mr. Threlkeld's *Vocabulary*, Grey described how the deceased individual rises from its grave to insert three bone fragments into the bodies of three doctors keeping watch over his body, where they remain, without causing harm, until the doctors kill the person held responsible for the death.¹⁵⁵ Despite his sympathy for these indigenous mourning scenes, Grey was unaware that collectors like himself might be turning into evil *boyl-yas*.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to probe the motives of the indigenous Australian who approached what was left of the remains of another indigenous Australian after a British collector had taken from it what he wanted. However, confronting Grey's observations about the episode with other descriptions of the care with which indigenous Australians watched over the remains of their loved ones, we can certainly lean one way or the other. Grey's own accounts of indigenous burial practices, which he believes are "found among the natives of nearly all known portions of Australia," may provide some insight into the apathy of the three men. The indifference these men displayed, I suggest, was not aimed at the disappearance of the remains, but rather at their plunder by one of Grey's men. Did this indigenous Australian feel any sadness or anger? It is impossible to know for sure, but Grey's own accounts would surely support the conclusion that he might have taken umbrage at the appropriation if they had known the deceased individual. Instead, he simply walked away – an act of quiet resistance if ever there was one.

Finally, the indigenous also employed what I call the comic mode of resistance. As the opening vignette to this chapter illustrates, indigenous men, women and even children often tried to dupe British collectors into trading for worthless objects. Their efforts to deceive, I argue, do not (as Forbes, for example, would have us believe) point to their ignorance. To the contrary,

¹⁵⁵ Grey, *Journals.*, vol. 2, 336-337.

their comic mimicry suggests that they fully understood what these visitors were doing. They simply did not care about the everyday objects the British seemed to venerate with such passion. We encounter another illustration of this in Forbes' travels in Timor-Laut. There, Henry Ogg Forbes had taken to employing natives in looking for animal and human remains as he had done on numerous occasions. However, he soon became annoyed with the diligence of his assistants. When he informed the natives that he was looking for skulls and bones, their appetite for trade with Europeans set them in motion and they brought Henry "skulls and bones of any kind, ... gathered from the refuse-heaps near the village."¹⁵⁶

Forbes' comment here reveals two significant points about his understanding of native attitudes towards human remains. First, he believed that the indigenous tribesmen of Timor-Laut did not care for the remains of their ancestors, an assessment shared by his wife Anna. She claimed to have observed a similar indifference. In her account of the indigenous of Tenimber, Timor-Laut, she recalled stumbling over human skulls, seeing in it proof that the natives did not always observe their own burial rites.¹⁵⁷ Second, and more importantly, it also shows that once the indigenous learned that Europeans had an appetite for such specimens, they exploited, and perhaps even ridiculed, European curiosity by offering them scraps of "any kind."

Yet another instance of this comic mode occurred when the hapless Commodore Goodenough, and his fellow collectors Perry and Corrie visited an indigenous village on Mallicollo Island. Goodenough soon observed that the natives appeared to be engaged in a form of ethnopropecting themselves. While the ship's illustrator, Mr. Messer, was drawing the face of a native, a young boy approached him to measure his nose with a straw. The incident convinced Goodenough that "they are speaking of us as we of them." While, "we are measuring

¹⁵⁶ Forbes, *Insulinde*, 164.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

their facial angles, writing down their language, pacing their houses; they measure our noses.” Despite Goodenough’s conviction that the boy was actually engaged in an act of collecting of his own, I wish to offer another reading of the event. It is likely that the boy’s ostentatious measuring of the illustrator’s nose constituted an act of mimicry and ridicule, much like the offering of worthless objects to Cook’s men. It seems presumptuous to assume, like Goodenough did, that the islanders would measure human difference in the same way. Instead, I suggest that the young individual had engaged in an act of mockery. To make fun of those pursuits for which British collectors risked their lives constituted a powerful and meaningful act of resistance. It amounted to the nullification of the classificatory regime imperialists like Forbes and Goodenough were trying to recreate in the colonies. The indigenous simply laughed British collectors away – at least for a while.

Conclusion

Cooperation and resistance characterized the search for the bodies of weak on the margins of empire. New and unstable relationships formed over these “contact bodies.” The forest pathways and indigenous burial grounds British collectors sought to ransack in the colonies constituted messy social spaces, where colonizer and colonized negotiated new relationships, developed tensions, and ultimately confronted each other’s misunderstandings. An indigenous informant could also be lying. An indigenous trader might be selling a specimen of questionable origin. Relations could easily and quickly deteriorate, and when they did, British collectors often failed to see any cause other than indigenous savagery.

However, British efforts to acquire the remains of the indigenous dead did upset indigenous sensibilities. When British officials became aware of this, some tried to preserve the already precarious peace with the natives, while others sought to find new ways of furthering the

cause of science. Indigenous assistants were critical to the ability of British collectors to satisfy their acquisitive obsession. When a personal relationship could be established, success seemed guaranteed. But the indigenous also developed forms of resistance, both violent and everyday. They chased British collectors back to their ships. They withheld information, displayed indifference, or simply deceived their British interlocutors. At times, they also ridiculed the British. In all these ways, the indigenous resisted, or even rejected, even for a moment, the regimes of classification to which colonialism sought to condemn them.

CHAPTER FOUR

“The Zeal of Travellers”

Introduction

Who were these collectors of men on the edge of empire? In March 1833, a man named John Marshall addressed a letter to the Board of Curators of the Royal College of Surgeons.¹ He was about to sail for the Pacific Ocean, where he believed a “still unexplored field ... lies open to the Profession in the South Seas.” He presented himself as a “traveler ... for the purpose of collecting specimens of Comparative Anatomy in that quarter of the Globe.” The region was virgin territory, as far as Marshall was concerned, and he was confident that “I should be able to collect many valuable preparations for your museum.” His offer, he proclaimed, was “chiefly actuated by scientific objects.” He left it to the Board “to determine the amount and period of remuneration for my services and to regulate my expenditure by their instructions in furtherance of the objects alluded to.”² A few days later, Edmund Belfour, the Secretary of the Royal College of Surgeons replied that the Board “have no Intention of making such appointment.”³ But John Marshall was not the only traveler to offer his services to the curators of museums in London. Over the course of the nineteenth century, medical officers, colonial officials, explorers, and many others would help stock the storerooms in Britain’s centers of knowledge with the remains of the indigenous dead. This chapter tells the story of their motives and aspirations.

¹ Not to be mistaken with John Marshall (1818–1891), surgeon and teacher of anatomy

² RCS-MUS/5/6/21, n. n., RCS, 1810-1844, Bundle of letters relating to the affairs of the Museum and College, especially donations. Letter from John Marshall to [?] at the RCS, 2 March 1833.

³ RCS-MUS/5/1/2, 23, 1831-1850, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2.

As we have seen in previous chapters, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, specimens, human and animal, were arriving on the doorsteps of museums in Britain at a pace curators could barely keep up with. The influx of natural history specimens strained the resources of the Hunterian Museum, for example. As early as 1817, its curator William Clift complained that the “Torrents of Specimens of parts removed by operation, good and good for nothing, that continued to be daily sent to the College” were rapidly depleting his reserves of spirit for preservation. When he laid his concerns before the Board of Curators, his colleagues resolved that he was to “use his best discretion; and not waste spirit.” In doing so, he was also to make sure not to give “offence to the zeal of the Donor.”⁴ Half a century later, calls for specimens issued by scientific institutions in London and elsewhere in England had perhaps been too successful in appealing to travelers. In June 1879, Arthur Russell wrote to Alfred Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum, to inform him that his friend, Hugh Hastings Romilly, private secretary to Sir Arthur Gordon, was about to leave for Fiji. Russell asked Günther to meet with Romilly so he could “profit by your advice” and “ask you how he can best serve the interests of the British Museum.” Such a request was necessary, Russell believed, because the “Zeal of Travellers is often turned in the wrong direction.”⁵

⁴ RCS-MUS/3/1/3, opposite 855, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3.

⁵ DF [ZOO/]200/16, 383, f. 1-2, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence L-Z, Letter from Arthur Russel to Albert Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM/NHM, 30 June 1879.

This is a story about the “zeal” of the men who collected the remains of the indigenous dead on the edge of empire. In it, I hope to convey a sense of who they were, their social, educational and professional backgrounds. More importantly, however, I seek to probe their motivations and aspirations. As the example of John Marshall in the intro to this chapter shows, the prospect of remuneration often underwrote a self-proclaimed interest in scientific progress. Collectors in the field sought to profit from the growing trade in natural history specimens.⁶ However, for many of these collecting men on the margins of empire, collecting was not only a means to accumulate knowledge and wealth, it was also about creating one’s own identity. Despite the diversity of their educational and professional backgrounds, I suggest that these collecting men saw the acquisition of the indigenous dead as “a means of self-fashioning.”⁷ They all sought to advance the cause of science, but in the process, they hoped to secure their own financial futures, launch their professional careers, and hone their social personas. Collecting the remains of the indigenous dead, along with their ornaments, utensils and even language, represented a means to assert their gentility in the circulatory networks that developed around these objects.⁸

⁶ See for example Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

⁷ Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 7.

⁸ For the links between gentility and collecting, see Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996); and Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

Despite their differences, a few common attributes stand out among these collectors of the indigenous dead. They were, first and foremost, cosmopolitans, drawn to faraway places by the prospect of opportunity and adventure. These were restless men, attracted to the novelty and strangeness of their destinations. John Davy, a medical officer stationed in British Ceylon from 1816 to 1820 described the interior of the island as a “*terra incognita*.”⁹ Six decades later, landing at Batavia on 17 November 1878, the naturalist and explorer Henry Ogg Forbes “said good-bye to western life and ways, and entered on others new and strange to me.”¹⁰ His wife, Anna, echoed this sentiment as they were about to embark on a journey “different from Western life and ways.”¹¹ When travelers arrived at their destinations, the experience of newness was visceral and disorienting.¹² Having just arrived in Australia, George Grey observed that the foliage and stars, and even the smells on the wind and the humming of the insects swirling around him “at first, oppress the senses with a feeling of novelty and strangeness, till the mind appears to hover between the realms of truth and falsehood.”¹³ The exoticism and alienation

⁹ Davy, *Ceylon*, 6-7, 341. Despite centuries of European contact, initially with the Portuguese and later the Dutch, Davy notes, little was known of the interior of the island. Part Two of his book on Ceylon offers narratives of several of the journeys Davy made into the interior.

¹⁰ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 3-4

¹¹ Forbes, *Insulinde*, 4.

¹² In her study of the early settlement of Virginia and Barbados, Kathleen Donegan has argued that catastrophe rather than triumph awaited settlers. The experiences of starvation, disease, violence and a lack of knowledge forged a colonial identity that embraced a sense of disorientation and alienation from Europe. See Kathleen Donegan, *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

¹³ Grey, *Journals*, vol. 1, 25.

travelers described only enhanced the desirability of the information and objects they brought back.

These collectors were men consumed by the Victorian fascination with human difference. They were tuned into not only scientific novelties at home but also popular fads in the Victorian imagination. The comparative anatomy of William Lawrence and Robert Knox, the phrenology of Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, Franz Joseph Gall and George Combe, and “anthropology” of James Cowles Prichard and Robert Knox offered new ways of looking at human difference and new avenues for participating in the accumulation of data and raw materials for its systematic classification.¹⁴ Networks of correspondents, contributors and collectors coalesced around the idea of participation in the advancement of scientific knowledge. As the collectors of plants had done in the eighteenth century, collectors of indigenous body parts not only profited from the resources of empire to acquire their prized objects, they also provided the raw materials for imperial logics of conquest and domination.¹⁵ Its association with medical science, medical men and medical institutions made the appropriation of indigenous remains a powerful tool in the suppression of indigenous customs and beliefs, such as witchcraft, for example. Many of these

¹⁴ By naming these individuals in the same breath, I do not intend to gloss over their profound theoretical and ideological differences. Adrian Desmond has written the most in-depth analysis of the controversies and politics that animated British comparative anatomy in the 1830s.

¹⁵ For the relationship between science, and botany in particular, and empire, see Drayton, *Nature's Government*.

collecting men saw science, and the accumulation of indigenous remains as part of Britain's civilizing mission.

However, the rationale of scientific progress, even if understood to be underpinned by commercial and imperialist concerns, fails to fully account for the growing interest of an eclectic group of individuals in indigenous remains. Many of them had come of age in a Victorian society obsessed with human difference. Around mid-century, for example, a deep fascination with Arabs, and especially nomad culture, took hold of the Victorian imagination, as evidenced in the works of Richard Francis Burton, William Gifford Palgrave, Wilfrid S. Blunt and Charles M. Doughty. A curious blend of dissimilitude and affinity excited the popular imagination as well as scientific interest.¹⁶ It is no wonder, then, that so many of the indigenous remains arriving on the doorsteps of scientific collections in Britain came from North Africa and the Middle East. This fascination with human difference resulted in the popularity of exhibitions of the living as well as the dead. Sadiya Qureshi, for example has argued that human exhibitions in nineteenth-century Britain, such as the ones organized by Robert Knox in the 1840s, brought together painting, theatre, print, and photography in a visual culture that took its cues from public as well as scientific attitudes towards human difference.

¹⁶ Kathryn Tidrick has provided a mold-breaking analysis of this kind of cross-cultural imagining. Excavating clues about Victorian mentalities from literary works of these four observers of Arab peoples and cultures, she unearths the close links between a Victorian appreciation for the purity of nomad populations in Arabia and the intimate bonds ideas about affinity created between these two very different races. See Kathryn Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby: The English Romance with Arabia* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010); and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

By looking at the “zeal” of these collecting men and women, this chapter exposes the logic of disinterested scientific exploration to a critical light. Examining letters, accession records, travel narratives, and manuscript diaries, I look into the motives behind their actions. The lives and actions of these collecting men offer a window into the practice of science in the nineteenth century. As they collected, packaged and shipped the remains of the indigenous dead, they not only stocked the storerooms of museums at home; at the same time, Britain’s medical officers, colonial officials, explorers, missionaries, long-term residents and even her cosmopolitan women were negotiating what science looked like, who could participate in it, and where it took place.

Some Numbers About Collecting Men

Over the course of the period under study here, more than three hundred individuals contributed indigenous remains from outside Europe to the four collections I have procured data for. From this group I have drawn a sample of fifty-eight individuals, who collected five or more indigenous specimens between 1790 and 1890. For the individuals in this group, I gathered information relating to their place of birth, the occupation of their parents, their education and their professional career. Unfortunately, the unsettled lives of many of these collectors have resulted in a scattered historical record and further research may well bring to light new information. Nevertheless, some trends are clear and unlikely to change significantly after additional research.

The individuals who collected indigenous remains on the margins of empire were almost exclusively men. The few women who do appear in the accession records were donors of their husbands' collections. Contemporary observers considered women, and their bodies, incapable of bearing the burdens and dangers associated with travel and scientific exploration. Because of these prejudices, the history of scientific exploration and collecting has been told as the history of heroic men.¹⁷ This chapter ends with a brief discussion of Lady Jane Franklin and her donation of eight indigenous skulls to the Hunterian Museum between 1854 and 1856. In that section, I explore how her participation in the global circulation of indigenous remains ignored widely shared assumptions who could do scientific work in the field. Her work, I argue, illustrates an important democratic aspect of scientific collecting at this time.

Despite Lady Franklin's example, scientific exploration and collecting were still male pursuits, and most of the collecting men from my sample came from rural and provincial areas within the British Isles (see Table 4.1). Six individuals were born in Ireland, another six in Scotland, but the largest segment grew up in the West Country. As did the "Lunar men" of the eighteenth century, this provincialism ensured that Davy developed his interests beyond the confines of the aristocratic establishment, free from the institutional politics, prestige and deference to old stalwarts.¹⁸ Moreover, their rural and provincial origins appear to have played a crucial role in kindling an interest in the natural world. John Davy, for example, and his famous brother, the chemist Humphry Davy, found that the area surrounding Penzance, Cornwall, afforded "an exquisite specimen of Cornish scenery," with "the expanse of the ever-varying blue

¹⁷ Mary Terrall, "Heroic Narratives of Quest and Discovery," *Configurations*, vol. 6 (1998), 223-42.

¹⁸ For the influence of this vibrant provincialism in the scientific culture of the eighteenth century, see Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002). See also, Roy Porter, "Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England," *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1980), 20-46; and Joel Mokyr, *The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 239-72 (especially 242).

sea on one side, bounded only by the horizon, and the distant headlands; on the other side, the furze-clad hills, and rocky little glens, each pouring down its small clear stream, diversified with green fields, farm-houses, orchards, and other accompaniments of cultivation.” The whole region, Davy believed, was “admirably adapted to invite curiosity and affect the imagination.”¹⁹

Cornwall seemed to invite a closer scrutiny of the natural world:

There did I first rejoice that I was born
Amidst the majesty of azure seas,
Surrounded by the everlasting forms
Of mighty rocks, on which alike the waves
And the harsh fury of the storms of heaven
Beat innocent. Eternally allied
Pleasure and hope connected with the scene,
Infix'd its features deeply; and my mind
Growing in strength with livelier zeal
Still looked on nature.²⁰

¹⁹ Davy, *Memoirs*, 8-10. John mentions Humphrey having made a drawing of St. Michael's Mount, but I have not been able to track this down (if it still exists). Davy, *Memoirs*, 445.

²⁰ Davy, *Fragmentary Remains, Literary and Scientific, of Sir Humphrey Davy, Bart., Late President of the Royal Society, etc., with Sketches of his Life and Selections from his Correspondence. Edited by his brother, John Davy, M.D., F.R.S.* (London: John Churchill, New Burlington Street, 1858), 7.

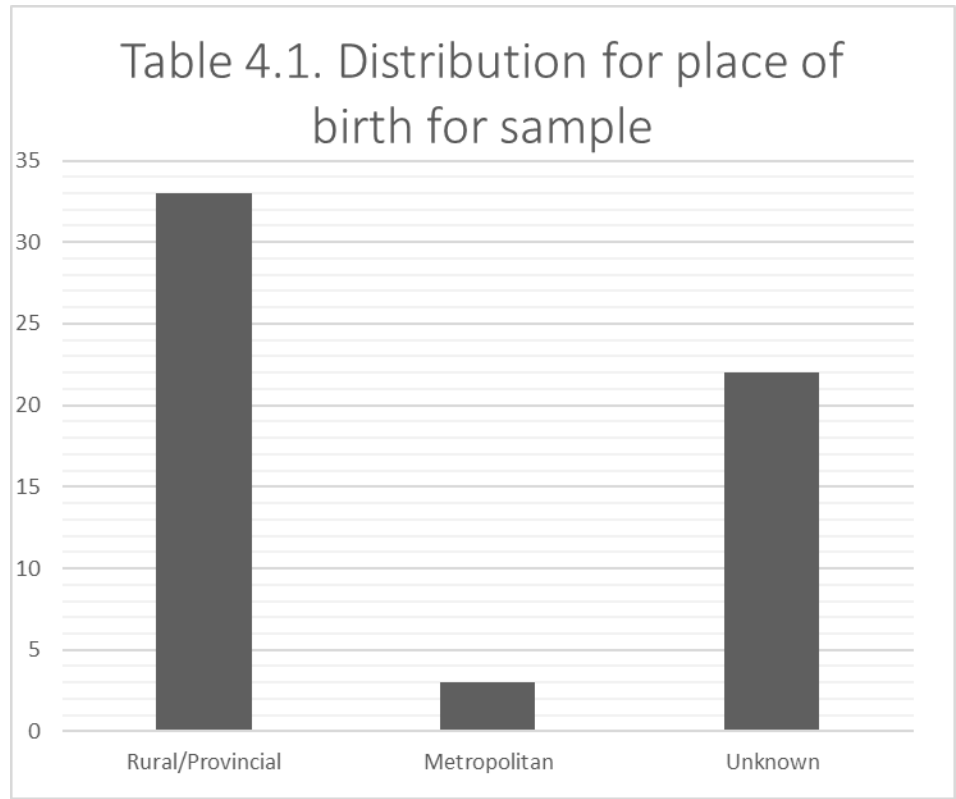


Table 4.1. Distribution for place of birth for sample.

Such memories of their homes stayed with collecting men like Davy as they traveled through the jungles, deserts and marshes of Britain’s colonies. At the top of Adam’s Peak, in the Kandyan interior in 1817, Davy was struck by the wide views of mountains, valleys and wilderness, which “I doubt if any pencil, could do justice.” Here, thousands of miles removed from Cornwall, the “dense strata of white mist, ... the appearance of ... frozen rivers and lakes ... vividly brought to my recollection the winter-scenes of my native country.”²¹ For the naturalist Henry Ogg Forbes, too, the environment of his rural Scottish home shaped how he saw the new world he was about to enter. As he rounded the Cape of Gibraltar on his way to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies late in 1878, he realized that “leaving to the north of me purple hills of heather scarlet fields of poppies, and rich parterres starred with cistus and orchids, with anemones and geraniums, and

²¹ Davy, *Ceylon*, 342.

sweet with aromatic shrubs and herbs,” he “would encounter nothing half so rich or bright amid all the profusion of the ‘summer of the world’.”²² Like strangeness and novelty, the ideas of natural plentitude and beauty were relational concepts. They contained within them rich sets of associations and assumptions that had taken shape in Britain. And these prejudices and presumptions infused their observations with a nostalgic longing to see in the alien environment something of the world they had left behind.

Many of these collecting men also shared a middle-class upbringing (see Table 4.2). Among their fathers I found officers, physicians, missionaries, small landowners, merchants and artisans. If middle-class men were encouraged to question traditional forms of authority, to aspire to unchecked reason, and embrace self-improvement, they also recognized the need for restraint, responsibility and respectability.²³ They strived for social mobility through training and education, consumption and material culture, and professional opportunities and aspirations.²⁴ John Davy, the son of a woodcarver from Penzance, Cornwall, described his family as “middle class” and a “family both on the father’s and mother’s side that for many generations - so far back, indeed, as it could be traced - had received a lettered education, and was above the wants which the peasant labourer has to struggle with.”²⁵ Self-reliance, humility and moral fortitude

²² Forbes, *Wanderings*, 3-4

²³ For the development of the “middle sort of people,” see Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), especially 296-300. See also, P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), especially chapter six on “Doctors”; and for an earlier period, see Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (New York: Methuen Publishing, 1989).

²⁴ Christopher Brooks, “Apprenticeship, Social Mobility, and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800,” in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, ed., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England 1550-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 52-83; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1996), especially 166-190; and Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite?: England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²⁵ John Davy, ed., *Fragmentary Remains, Literary and Scientific, of Sir Humphrey Davy, Bart., Late President of the Royal Society, etc.* (London: John Churchill, New Burlington Street, 1858), 2.

were the hallmarks of Davy's middle-class preoccupation with self-fashioning.²⁶ "What I am I have made myself; I say this without vanity, and in pure simplicity of heart," Humphry scribbled in the margins of a letter to John and their mother.²⁷ Independence, moral fortitude and humility bred in Humphry and John a lasting sympathy with their fellow man. John proudly quoted from Humphry's notebooks: "I have neither riches, nor power, nor birth to recommend me; yet, if I live, I trust I shall not be of less service to mankind and to my friends than if I had been born with these advantages."²⁸ These words John and his brother Humphry lived by. Science was to benefit the subaltern, whether he be a coal miner in England, a Singalese native in Ceylon, a Maltese farmer or an emancipated slave in the West Indies.

²⁶ For a study of the interest of the middle class in self-identity, see Michael Mascuch, "Continuity and Change in a Patronage Society: The Social Mobility of British Autobiographers, 1600-1750," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 1994), 177-97.

²⁷ John Davy, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphrey Davy, bart., L.L.D., F.R.S., foreign associate of the Institute of France, etc.* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1839), 11-14.

²⁸ John, for example, shared Humphrey's concern for the fate of miners in England. He describes Humphrey's research into fire-damp and his discovery of the safety lamp in 1815 as "objects of the first importance in relation to the interests of humanity, and hardly less so as regards national wealth." John would come to share Humphrey's belief John expresses admiration for his brother's sympathy for the working class throughout the *Memoirs*. In 1795, after finishing Grammar School, Humphrey became apprentice to a local surgeon and apothecary in Penzance, a Mr. Bingham Borlase. Soon, John writes, Humphrey "applied himself with earnest zeal to his professional studies and duties, and ... gained equally the good opinion of Mr. Borlase and of his patients, especially the poorer class, to whom he showed particular kindness," and he became known for "the humane way he behaved towards those in humbler life." Davy, *Memoirs*, 40, 43, 199.

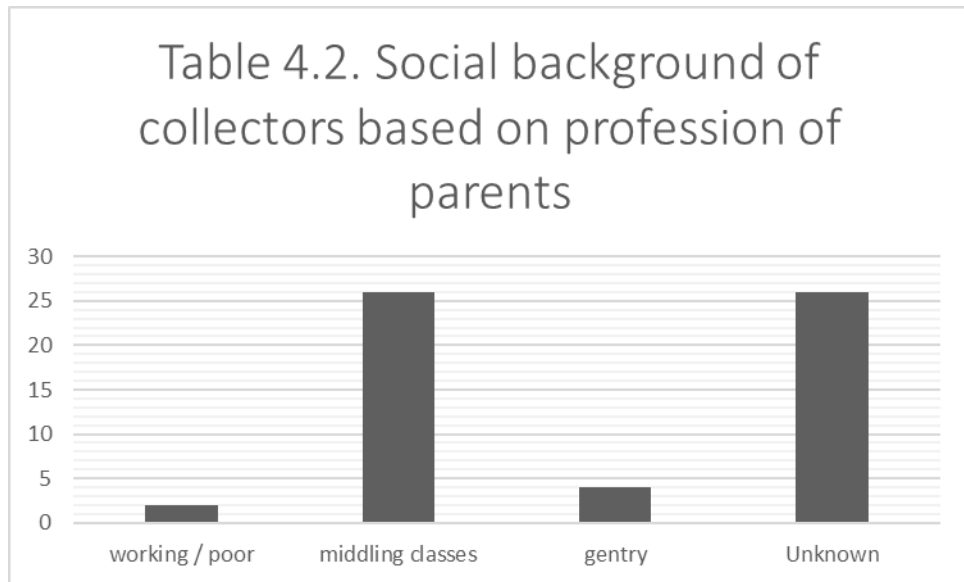


Table 4.2. Social background of collecting men in sample, based on profession of father.

If place of birth and their upbringing provide a clear picture of the social background of these collecting men, the picture for the educational and professional backgrounds of the men in my sample is far less straightforward (see Table 4.3). The largest group in my sample (21) did not receive a university-level education, attending only grammar school, moving on to military colleges, or enlisting in the Army or Navy around the age of twelve or thirteen. The second largest group consists of men who obtained a medical degree (15). Of this group, eight obtained their degree from the University of Edinburgh. These numbers indicate that collecting human specimens was not necessarily restricted to individuals with medical training.

The interest of medical men in collecting the remains of the indigenous dead is not surprising. As Harold J. Cook has suggested for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, physicians were at the forefront of the transition from hypotheses to observation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a result, knowledge of the natural world became the prerogative of medical men, especially physicians, who used plants, minerals and animals to create new

remedies. The physician was almost always a “physician-naturalist.”²⁹ During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, surgeon-naturalists serving in Her Majesty’s armed forces sustained this empirical reorientation, collecting facts and objects from around the world. Their medical training ensured that medical men were familiar with the methods in natural history, botany, and comparative anatomy. As the study of human difference entered the natural realm in the eighteenth century, surgeons and physicians on the edge of empire began accumulating collections of indigenous remains.

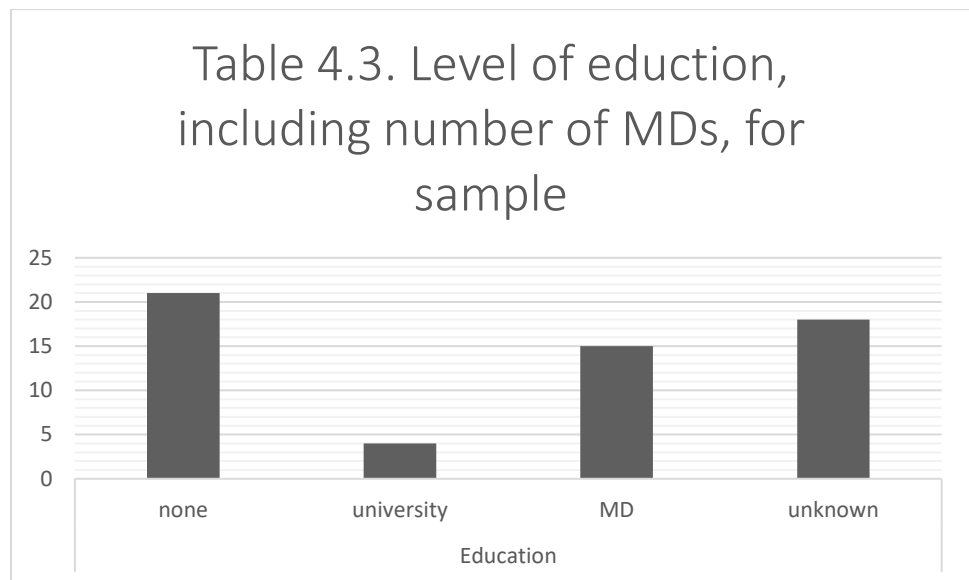


Table 4.3. Level of education, including number of individuals with a medical degree (MD), for sample.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, men with no prior training in medicine or natural history contributed indigenous remains to collections in Britain. Collecting these human specimens required far less training and knowledge than was to be expected from a practicing physician or surgeon. The acquisition of indigenous remains depended on resources and skills that could be developed in the field, such as a deep knowledge of the environment, a vast

²⁹ Harold J. Cook, “Physicians and Natural History,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 91-105 (quote from 92).

network of informants and assistants, and sheer luck. No medical education could prepare its students for the exigencies of collecting in the field. Nor was such training a guarantee for success. As we have seen in the previous chapter, when William Clift found what he believed to be the human specimens Davy had sent from Ceylon in 1821 in a decrepit state, he questioned the medical officer's knowledge of proper preservation techniques and his sanity.

The prospect of monetary gain and the low requirements for participation associated with collecting appealed to the desperate and the destitute at home and in the colonies. Some collectors in the field offered their services to museums and other scientific institutions in the hope of making a living for themselves and their families in places that offered very few prospects otherwise. In 1877, William R. Guilfoyle, Director of the Botanic Gardens at Melbourne, hoped to dispose of "the skeleton of a Papuan" for "a poor young fellow, who gains his bread by collecting plants & seeds, reptiles, insects, birds, and all sorts of things to lay at my feet."³⁰

In Britain, too, collecting specimens held forth the promise of financial relief. In March 1862 George Russell addressed a letter to the Conservator at the Hunterian Museum offering to collect indigenous remains for the Museum in Canada. If he encountered any burial grounds of indigenous tribes, Russell confided to Flower "I shall be strongly tempted to expose the graves and examine the crania." His motives appear to have been purely financial: "I can do better for my family by emigrating to Canada than to continue longer in England." Russell had been a restless individual, having resided in Birmingham and now being employed as a builder in Manchester. In 1860 he had already sold a collection of twelve American skulls to the Hunterian Museum for £40, including a detailed description of where he had found them. He had saved £30

³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 46, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from William R. Guilfoyle, Melbourne Botanic Gardens, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Museum, 22 February 1877.

of this money to pay for the transportation of his family to Canada. This prior windfall had given Russell a glimpse of the money to be made from collecting and he now hoped it would pay for a new life in North America.³¹

But Russel was not only desperate for money; he was also eager to reclaim a measure of respectability often associated with scientific pursuits. He wished to know if someone at the Museum had published any papers on the collection of skulls he had sold in 1860. Russel even entertained hopes of becoming a scientist himself. He desperately wanted “a galvanic or magnetic battery, also a miniscope” and was willing to trade the “bowl of an Indian pipe made of red keaddle” or any future shipments he might send for these items.³² But the fate of an opportunistic collector like George Russel was uncertain. Two weeks after Russell had offered his services, William Henry Flower wrote back, assuring the desperate traveler that the College would reward any collector of “well-authenticated skulls of the inhabitants of Canada.”³³ The following week, however, Flower again wrote to Russell informing him that he had presented his offer to the Museum Committee, but that “they cannot undertake to make any promises with reference to the skulls you may collect in Canada.” He reassured Russel that the College would be interested in purchasing “well-authenticated specimens,” but Flower had very little confidence that Russell’s efforts would pay off.³⁴

³¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, 4, f. 2-3, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1, Letter from George Russell to the Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 March 1862. See also Flower, *Catalogue*, 149-51, no. 853-874.

³² RCS-MUS/5/2/1, 4, f. 4, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1, Letter from George Russell to the Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 30 March 1862.

³³ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, 2, f. 1-2, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1, Letter from William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, to George Russell, 15 April 1862, in response to his offer to collect Indian skulls.

³⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, 2, f. 1-3, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1, Letter from William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, to George Russell, 22 April 1862, with the response of the Museum Committee to his offer to collect Indian skulls.

Collecting the remains of the indigenous dead appears to have been a more democratic pursuit than many other scientific activities. It thrived in that environment and among those individuals amenable to curiosity and ambition, appealing to men employed in a wide variety of occupations. A final statistic shows the distribution of occupation at the time of collecting for the individuals in my sample (see Table 4.4). Most collectors of indigenous remains (25), served in Britain’s military. At least fifteen of these military men were surgeons or physicians. Many of the others served as officers in Her Majesty’s Navy or Army. Colonial officials, such as governors and consuls, and travelers constitute the two second largest groups (both 8), followed by missionaries (3) and long-term residents (3). In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly explore how and why these groups contributed to the circulation of indigenous remains in the nineteenth century. For each category, I focus on a single or a few individuals as typical examples of the whole group.

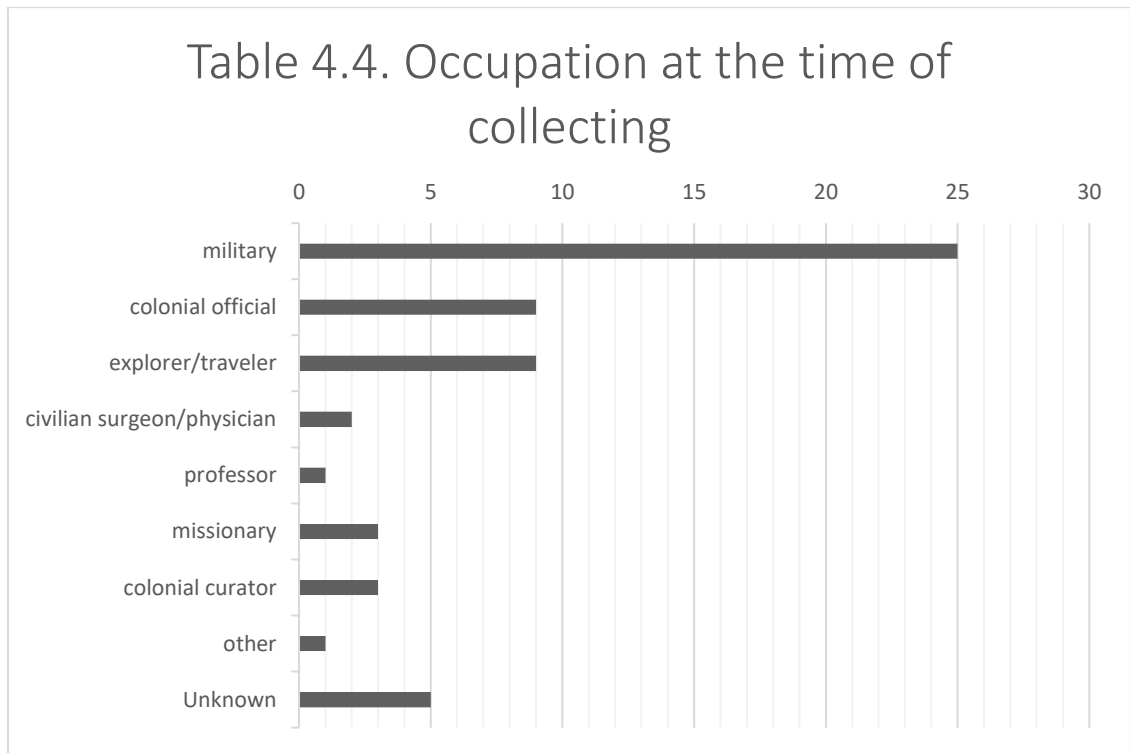


Table 4.4. Occupation of collectors at the time of collecting for sample.

Medical Men in the Service of Empire: John Davy (1790–1868), in Ceylon, the Mediterranean and the West Indies

As the British empire expanded into the East, the Pacific, Africa and South America in the nineteenth century, its medical officers became part of a network of scientific contributors, correspondents and collectors that linked scientific institutions in Britain and Europe to the natural riches of its overseas possessions. If scientists in Britain were to take advantage of its global dominance, some believed, they would need to draw on the resources of empire to gain access to this natural wealth. The Dutch, Britain's foremost physical anthropologist Joseph Barnard Davis mourned, had been far more industrious than their English rivals in taking advantage of their imperial resources. Dutch medical officers, Davis wrote to George Grey, the governor of South Africa in 1858, take great care "never to let a skull escape their hands." He hoped Grey would be able to enlist the service of British medical officers in South Africa, South America and the South Pacific to enrich his collection at home.³⁵ When Grey returned to New Zealand in 1861, Davis was sure that he would be able encourage medical officers there to procure the skeleton of a Maori.³⁶ Despite lagging behind their Dutch contemporaries, the mobility, expertise and professional ambition of British medical officers in the field endeared them to scientists and collectors in Britain. Serving in colonial hospitals, operating local dispensaries or sailing on Her Majesty's men o' war, medical officers were in a privileged position to collect ethnographic data, anatomical measurements and scientific objects.

Indigenous bodies were hard to come by and the mobility of medical officers presented unprecedented opportunities for collectors at home. In June 1880, J. Thompson Hague, medical

³⁵ GL D11.9, f. 1-4, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 6 June 1858. See also GL D11.6, f. 2-3, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 12 November 1856,

³⁶ GL D11.13, f. 2, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 12 December 1867.

officer to H. H. the Sultan of Zanzibar, offered to take the measurements of the toes of indigenous subjects. His presence on the margins of empire alone justified his offer. “The fact of my being in so good a place as Zanzibar for observation,” he informed Flower, “must be my excuse for offering services otherwise valueless.”³⁷ Around the same time, T. L. Craister similarly offered his services to Flower. He ran “a small charitable dispensary” in Umtata, Thembuland, on the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, and his position on the “on the edge of civilization” allowed him unprecedented access to indigenous bodies.³⁸ But skulls remained the most coveted objects for Victorian scientists of man. When the Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum forwarded a list of desiderata to the surgeon-naturalist of *HMS Alert*, the latter promised him to pay attention “also to the interest attaching to the skulls of the different tribes of man.”³⁹

British medical officers were industrious collectors. In 1833, the editor of the catalogue of the Museum of the Army Medical Department, Fort Pitt, Chatham, applauded the “zeal” of the medical officers in contributing to collections of indigenous remains in Britain.⁴⁰ Among the first to add to the collection of indigenous crania at the Army Medical Museum was a young chemist and medical officer named John Davy.⁴¹ By the time the catalogue of the Army Medical

³⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 103, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from J. Thompson Hague, Medical Officer to H. H. the Sultan of Zanzibar, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 29 June 1880

³⁸ Like Thompson, Craister offered to “be of use to you in obtaining for you some information about the tribes hereabout, and perhaps some data in the anatomy of the people of Kaffraria, such as measurements of the various parts of the frame, height of men & women &c &c., measurements of their limbs, feet, hands, &c. - height.” RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 101, f. 2-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from T. L. Craister to William Henry Flower, 16 June 1880.

³⁹ DF [ZOO/200/17, 112, f. 1, NHM, 1880, Zoology Correspondence A-M. Letter from R. W. Coppinger to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 24 December 1879.

⁴⁰ N.a., *Catalogue*, iv.

⁴¹ The 1833 *Catalogue* listed “Crania of the various Races of mankind” as the first item on their list of “Preparations most wanted in the Collection of the Medical Officers of the Army.” See N. a., *Catalogue*, xi-xii.

Museum appeared, Davy had contributed two skulls from Ceylon, five ancient Greek skulls from his time in the Mediterranean, two German skulls, and two Xhosa skulls from South Africa to the Museum of the Army Medical Department.⁴² He also promised to send a dozen indigenous skulls from Ceylon to the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons in April 1821.⁴³

Like many of his fellow medical officers, John Davy was an astute bioprospector, collecting data on the geography, mineralogy, botany, and people of the places he traveled to. As so many before him, Davy had benefited from the patronage of Britain's most powerful promotor of science and empire, Joseph Banks, who assisted him in securing a commission in the Army Medical Service in 1815.⁴⁴ Davy's interest in geography, mineralogy and botany dovetailed with his concern for Britain's commercial and strategic dominance in the region. In Ceylon in 1817, he discovered saltpeter caves and brackish lakes, which, under the proper scientific management, might yield "profit to government" and supply all of India with salt.⁴⁵ In Malta and the Ionian Islands, Davy suggested that the government build a deep water harbor near Cerigo, in the bay of Capsasli, in 1827, to supply ships in the Mediterranean with fresh water.⁴⁶ In the West Indies, Davy recommended mining the almost limitless supplies of sulphur on St. Lucia, whose export had been checked by export duties but could be revived if Britain's regular

⁴² N. a., *Catalogue*, 227-8, 230.

⁴³ RCS-MUS/5/6/11, 264, f. 1-4, RCS, 1819, Museum Letters. Letter from John Davy to William Clift, 30 April 1821. There is some uncertainty surrounding Davy's letter of 30 April 1821. William Clift, the curator at the Hunterian Museum at the time, was still unsure of their provenance in 1827. Clift did record the donation of several specimens of natural history from Davy on 30 April 1821. RCS-MUS/3/1/3, no. 1030, RCS, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3.

⁴⁴ Letter from Humphrey Davy to John Davy, Plymouth, 15 October 1813. Quoted in Davy, *Fragmentary Remains*, 184-185.

⁴⁵ Davy, *Ceylon*, 430, 37.

⁴⁶ John Davy, *Notes and observations on the Ionian Islands and Malta: with some remarks on Constantinople and Turkey, and on the system of quarantine as at present conducted*, vols. 2 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1842), 163.

supply from Sicily stalled.⁴⁷ British Guiana's forest was an "inexhaustible" source of "timber trees of excellent quality," yielding resources "for the cabinet maker, as well as the ship builder."⁴⁸ In the West Indies, Davy's belief in the usefulness of science had a distinct humanitarian, even utopian, character. "May it be for you worthily to follow up that great act," he writes, "and whilst taking the lead in improving your agriculture, forget not the improvement of the people."⁴⁹

The collections of medical officers like John Davy often reflected the fragmentary and eclectic natures of their bioprospective gaze. Besides more than a dozen indigenous crania, Davy also sent William Clift at the Hunterian Museum a specimen of the "Ceylon Leach, which is so troublesome in that island," and the hooded snake.⁵⁰ His colleague, John MacGillivray (1821-1867), naturalist on board *HMS Rattlesnake* (1846-1850) and *HMS Herald* (1852-1855) gathered snakes, lizards, seals, kangaroos, bats, lots of birds as well as sundry dried plants and "spiritual things" from Fiji and the Solomon Islands.⁵¹ The abundance of natural treasures in these newly

⁴⁷ Davy, *West Indies*, 270.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁴⁹ Here Davy echoed words he had once aimed at medical officers across the British world. "Let us imagine Barbados an example in point and the improvements commenced carried further; science and skill brought to the aid of industry as much as possible; an educated peasantry, an enlightened proprietary, no means wasted, no resources neglected! then, we apprehend, more than existing difficulties would be got over; her condition would be more secure and prosperous than at any former period; and what is more, she would be able to compete with, and prove the superiority of free over slave labour, and thereby afford a demonstration of a great truth, viz., that what is right in principle is right in practice." *Ibid.*, vi, 147.

⁵⁰ RCS-MUS/5/6/11, 264, f. 1, RCS, 1819, Museum Letters, Letter from John Davy to William Clift, 30 April 1821.

⁵¹ DF [ZOO/200/146, 126, f. 1-4, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2, Letter from John MacGillivray to John E. Gray, at the British Museum, 5 March 1855; DF [ZOO/200/19, 113-114, Jan-Jun 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, List of NH specimens from heirs of J. Gould to A. Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM, [?] 1881; DF [ZOO/200/19, 115, Jan-Jun 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Copy of list of NH specimens from heirs of J. Gould to A. Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM, [?] 1881; DF [ZOO/200/19, 116-116a, Jan-Jun 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, lists of NH specimens from heirs of J. Gould to A. Günther, Keeper of Zoology at the BM, [?] 1881. MacGillivray also served on the *HMS Fly* during its surveying voyage in the southwestern Pacific (1842-1846).

discovered regions of the world made the task facing medical officers especially daunting. The surgeon-naturalist of *HMS Alert* surveying the waters of the Australia station, Richard Copping, expressed as much when he informed Alfred Günther at the British Museum that “the amount of life in this region is so great and varied that a single individual trying to collect in every branch of zoology ... can only thus succeed in acquiring a medley of specimens which would be insufficient to fairly represent any one group of animals.” Nevertheless, he realized that such “opportunities of collecting ... do not fall to the lot of a private zoologist.”⁵² Despite the diversity of such collections, curators at museums in Britain eagerly awaited shipments from their adventuring colleagues and continuously sent medical officers lists of desiderata.

Davy considered collecting to be part of the medical officer’s duties. It was impossible to overstate the benefits of the accumulation of empirical data and raw materials: “If medical officers considered it a duty which they owe to the public to communicate such information, as they may [have] it in their power to collect, ..., how many doubtful points would have been cleared up, how many errors corrected, how much more perfect would the histories of those countries have been rendered.”⁵³ Almost half a century later, the surgeon and natural historian Francis Trevelyan Buckland echoed a similar sentiment when he considered it “the bounden duty of everyone who can assist him to render all possible aid to the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons and their able Curator, Mr. Flower” in making the collection of human crania more complete.⁵⁴

⁵² His collections included above all marine specimens such as dugong skulls, corals, sponges, and many other marine specimens obtained during one of the many dredgings he undertook in Australian waters in 1881. DF [ZOO/]200/23, 101-102, f. 7, NHM, Jan.-June 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from R. W. Copping to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 4 December 1881.

⁵³ Davy, *Ionian Islands and Malta*, vol. 1, 6-7.

⁵⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 81, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Copy of a printed article in *Land & Water* (February 21, 1880) from Frank Buckland to [William H. Flower at] the Hunterian Museum, [21 February 1880].

The medical officer, Davy believed, enjoyed a “double benefit” from his service “in our extensive colonies.” It allowed these adventurous and ambitious men of science to combine “the pleasure and profit of travel with professional duties and culture.”⁵⁵ The ship surgeon Alfred Corrie agreed. Commissioned as the surgeon-naturalist of *HMS Pearl* surveying the waters of the Australia Station in 1875, Corrie wrote to Günther expressing his delight that soon he would be able to enrich the stores of the British Museum with zoological specimens and eventually also human remains.⁵⁶ “What golden opportunities naval men have,” he boasted to Flower almost a year later, though he feared that “frequently they thoroughly disregard them.” The exigencies of life on board a man of war and his duties as a surgeon in the Navy often multiplied “difficulties attending an effort to collect anything on board a ship.” But Corrie considered these merely a test of “a man [who] has a real liking for science and a desire to further it.”⁵⁷ Collecting specimens of natural history raised naval surgeons above the status of a menial laborer of medicine. Ever short on storage space, supplies and time, the ship surgeon could showcase his commitment to science as well as his knowledge of the natural world through collecting. With each specimen dredged from the bottom of the ocean, each plant dried and each ethnological object traded or plundered, medical officers seized a “golden opportunity” to become gentlemen of science.

Despite such aspirations, images of naval and army surgeons as the incompetent and unschooled proletarians of medicine persisted into the nineteenth century. Yet, as historian Iris Bruijn has shown for those employed by the Dutch East India Company, these prejudices were

⁵⁵ John Davy, *Notes and observations on the Ionian Islands and Malta: with some remarks on Constantinople and Turkey, and on the system of quarantine as at present conducted* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1842), vol. 1, 5-6.

⁵⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/2, 61b, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence C-D, Letter from Alfred Corrie, Surgeon on H. M. S. Pearl, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 4 June 1875.

⁵⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.37, f. 3-4, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Alfred Corrie, surgeon on H. M. S. "Pearl," to Edward J. A. Trimmer, Secretary of the College, 26 February 1876.

unfounded.⁵⁸ In Britain, too, naval surgeons had had medical training. Richard W. Coppinger, for example, had obtained an MD from Queen’s University, Dublin, in 1870 before joining *HMS Discovery* as a surgeon and later *HMS Alert* as a naturalist. His medical training certainly benefited collectors back home. When he dispatched nine cases of specimens of natural history to the British Museum in June 1879, he carefully labeled each case and recorded “a few particulars as to the manner in which the specimens belonging to the different groups will be found . . . , and the circumstances under which some of them were obtained.” For example, he “duly labelled” the marine animals he had caught off the Patagonian coast, preserving the fish “in a sheet-iron vessel,” attaching “to each specimen or bundle of specimens from the same locality a copper label . . . , bearing a number which has reference to a table given below.”⁵⁹ By 1880, Coppinger had developed a system of cross-referencing specific specimens, including various ethnological objects, with numbered lists and notes.⁶⁰ In doing so, Coppinger began in the field the process of “inscription” that transformed random scraps into objects of science, whose meaning could be read on labels and whose relations to one another could be clarified in catalogues.⁶¹

Medical officers stationed at port towns, forts and settlements in the colonies, too, contributed to collections in Britain. Treating indigenous patients as well as British soldiers and

⁵⁸ Iris Bruijn, *Ship’s Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company: Commerce and the Progress of Medicine in the Eighteenth Century* (Leyden: Leiden University Press, 2009).

⁵⁹ DF [ZOO/200/17, 111-111b, f. 1, NHM, 1880, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from R. W. Coppinger to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, June 1879. For a list of the contents of each case, see DF [ZOO/200/17, 111a, NHM, 1880, Zoology Correspondence A-M, List of references from R. W. Coppinger to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, n.d.

⁶⁰ DF [ZOO/200/23, 97-98, f. 2, NHM, Jan.-June 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from R. W. Coppinger to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 15 May 1880.

⁶¹ For the significance of this process of “inscription” for collections of natural history, see James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Cambridge, MA; The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 259-60.

seaman, they were a reliable source of indigenous bodies. Moreover, their medical training and the nature of the treatment often enabled them to provide detailed histories for the patients from whom they acquire their specimens. In 1899, John H. Spitzly, a surgeon at a hospital in Surinam, British Guinea, donated a collection of 145 skulls he had obtained from patients at the hospital between 1885-9. His “patients” included individuals he described as “negro,” “Indian,” and “Coolie,” and he carefully recorded all the pathological and ethnographic information he could get his hands on.⁶² Spitzly’s collection illustrates how the acquisition of indigenous remains dovetailed with the medical exigencies of service on the margins of empire. He saw his patients as useful sources of medical knowledge about the environment and disease, commenting on their susceptibility to disease, symptoms and treatments. Moreover, he also saw his patients as valuable resources for Europe’s racial classifications, taking careful measurements, describing skin color and recording their histories. The skull collections obtained by medical officers often blurred the lines between the anatomy of disease and the anatomy of difference.

The responsibilities of a medical officer on the margins of empire could also stand in the way of his wide-ranging interests. Serving on board the *HMS Pearl* in 1873, the surgeon-naturalist Wykeham C. Perry regretted to inform the Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum that “as yet my opportunities [for collecting] have been few and ... I have been generally so occupied with Off[icial] work that I have been able to devote but a very small portion of time to other matters.”⁶³ Opportunities for Perry’s land-based colleagues were scarcely better.

Responding to Joseph Fayrer’s circular in 1879, William Raymond Kynsey, Civil Medical Officer in Ceylon and former Assistant-Surgeon of the Indian Medical Service, found conditions

⁶² RCS-MUS/7/8/16, 1899, Manuscript Catalogue of Collection of Skulls made by John H. Spitzly.

⁶³ DF [ZOO]/200/6, 119, f. 1, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P. Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the H. M. S. "Pearl", to the British Museum, of 10 December 1873.

in Ceylon anathema to scientific work. “Zeal is entirely absent,” he complained.⁶⁴ Three years later, however, Kynsey had apparently overcome some of the obstacles and he promised to send Flower a collection of “Sinhalese skulls, 19 in number.”⁶⁵

Despite these difficulties, collecting specimens on the edge of empire at least held out the possibility of contributing to cutting-edge sciences in Britain’s and Europe’s centers of knowledge. Davy’s manuscript diary of his voyage to Ceylon in 1816 reveals a wide-ranging inquiring mind in tune with developments in comparative anatomy back home. Having just left Gravesend on board the *Prince of Orange* in February 1816 heading for Ceylon, Davy paced its deck, observing the behavior and anatomy of mollusks, flying fish, and porpoises. When the crew hauled onboard a shark, Davy immediately dissected it, carefully taking notes on its morphology and including three sketches of the animal’s internal structure.⁶⁶ But he also carefully recorded the water temperature, the passage of a meteorite, and the appearance of “a small water spout” in the Indian Ocean.⁶⁷ His interest in comparative anatomy also extended to the diversity of human races. During the outbound journey from England to Ceylon, for example, Davy seized the opportunity of “trying the temperatures of several different races of men.”⁶⁸

But Davy’s interest in indigenous skulls also reflected the growing popularity of a less rigorous but more popular branch of science: phrenology. When he presented to his audience the

⁶⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 62, f. 4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from William Raymond Kynsey to Sir Joseph Fayrer, India Office, 2 July 1879.

⁶⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 133, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from William Raymond Kynsey, Ceylon, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 3 September 1882.

⁶⁶ MS.7696, f. 22-26b, WL, John Davy, *Journal of a voyage from Britain to Ceylon via the Cape of Good Hope*, 1816.

⁶⁷ MS.7696, f. 11-2, 14, 5, 13, 27-27b, WL, John Davy, *Journal of a voyage from Britain to Ceylon via the Cape of Good Hope*, 1816.

⁶⁸ MS.7696, f. 14b, WL, John Davy, *Journal of a voyage from Britain to Ceylon via the Cape of Good Hope*. 1816. For his findings, see John Davy, “Observations on the Temperature of Man and other Animals,” *Researches, Physiological and Anatomical* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1839), 169-172.

drawing of the skull of a Sinhalese chief, he noted that “the form of their head is ... perhaps longer than the European, a peculiarity, according to Dr. Spurzheim, of the Asiatic” (see Fig. 4.1).⁶⁹ In London, Davy deposited his collection of Sinhalese skulls with a well-known phrenologist Dr. Leach, who “phrenologically mapped” one of them before sending them on to William Clift at the Hunterian Museum.⁷⁰ Davy’s sympathy for the theories of Spurzheim and Gall was not unique among military men. When a young soldier campaigning against the Xhosa in 1852 saw severed heads rolling past him on the battlefield, he could not resist putting one in his saddlebag. He took it home with him to Scotland, where “it has been much admired by phrenologists for its fine development.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Davy, *Ceylon*, 110.

⁷⁰ RCS-MUS/3/1/3, 1037, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3.

⁷¹ J. P. Fisher-Mother, Greenjackets regimental Museum, Winchester. Quoted in J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 26.

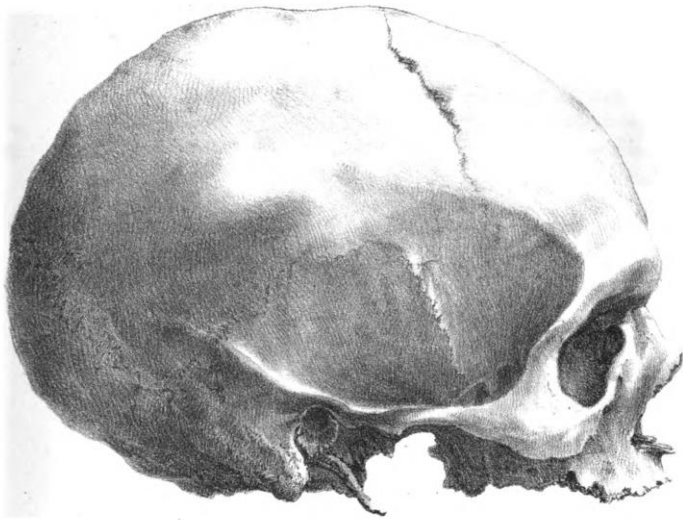


Fig. 4.1. "Plate III."
Davy added: "The cranium represented in Plate III. belonged to a Singalese Chief of a secluded part of the Interior, and is a faithful figure." From: John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants, with Travels in that Island* (London: Longhorn, Hurst, Rees and Brown, 1821), plate III, between 110-1 (quote from fn. p. 110).

More than anything, medical officers like Davy understood that advancing scientific knowledge of human difference required access to indigenous bodies. Hospitals, medical schools and asylums, Davy suggested in his work on the Ionian Islands, were not only to provide medical care or diffuse knowledge to indigenous populations; they were also to become sites for the acquisition of indigenous knowledge and bodies. As in England, medical schools in the colonies would be able to procure corpses from the poor. "A poor-house, or *ospizio*, as an asylum for the aged poor, the lame, and the blind, and those labouring under chronic incurable diseases," Davy

suggested, could supply the anatomical theatre with “subjects.” Aware of the abuses inherent in the traffic of corpses in England, Davy proposed the creation of legal guarantees to “prevent abuses, and insure respectful Christian burial.”⁷² But the benefits for British power overseas far outweighed any potential abuses. Access to human cadavers was essential to the acquisition of practical knowledge about the links between climate and disease, for example. Having noticed a greater incidence of consumption among the descendants of Portuguese and Dutch creoles in Ceylon, Davy was disappointed that he had been unable to verify the nature of the disease or identify its origins since their bodies “are generally attended by their own medical men, and [they] never permit a body to be examined.”⁷³

Across Britain’s vast empire, medical schools, hospitals and poor-houses provided access to indigenous bodies, living and dead. Medical officers stationed abroad transformed Britain’s colonial hospitals, medical colleges and sick wards from institutions of diffusion and care into centers of appropriation and accumulation. When the renowned surgeon James Paget wrote a letter to Sir Joseph Fayrer in February 1880, requesting several “specimens,” Fayrer informed him that surgeons at the Medical College Hospital in Calcutta would “do their best to supply specimens.”⁷⁴ The former professor of surgery at the Medical College of Calcutta had earlier been successful in using his influence to encourage medical officers in India and elsewhere to gather indigenous remains for the Hunterian Museum. Hospitals taught the virtues of science and with them, the proper uses of indigenous bodies.

In India during the second half of the nineteenth century, surgeons and physicians transformed military hospitals into entrepôts in the global trade in indigenous bodies. If they did

⁷² Davy, *Ionian Islands and Malta*, vol. 2, 109.

⁷³ Davy, *Ceylon*, 491.

⁷⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 81, f. 3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Note from Sir Joseph Fayrer, India Office, to Sir James Paget (1814-1899), surgeon, 3 February 1880.

not collect the specimens themselves, medical officers could serve as go-betweens, facilitating the circulation of human materials in networks that linked men in the field to metropolitan collectors. In doing so, they offered themselves as gentlemen and promoters of science on the edge of empire. In 1882, the civil surgeon William C. Ondaatje procured for Flower at the Hunterian Museum the remains of a Singhalese man who had died at the Galle Hospital in Ceylon.⁷⁵ The previous year, William Coull Mackenzie, surgeon-major with the Bengal Army, sent Flower four skeletons of a Bhutan woman, an Abyssinian, a Sikh, and an Afghan, all of them patients who had died under his care at the Campbell Hospital in Calcutta.⁷⁶ Staff in the sick wards of jails, too, answered the requests for indigenous remains from London. In January 1880, G. Richard Pollock informed Flower at the Hunterian that he would soon receive the skeletons of a “Sikh and a Punjabi Musalman” who had died at a jail in Lahore. The local physician had paid two keepers of the jail twenty rupees “to flesh the bodies” and pack them.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 132, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from William C. Ondaatje, Galle Hospital, Ceylon, to William Henry Flower, 7 August 1882.

⁷⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 99, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from Stephen Coull Mackenzie to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 10 April 1881.

⁷⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 79, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Copy of a letter from G. Richard Pollock to William H. Flower, 15 January 1880; RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 87, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Copy of a letter from G. Richard Pollock to William H. Flower, 6 April 1880.

Patrons of Science: Sir George Grey (1812-1898) in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

Governors, consuls and other colonial officials also contributed to the global circulation of indigenous remains in the nineteenth century. As representatives of Britain's military power and dominance, they proved particularly adept in marshalling the resources of empire to supply the wants of collectors at home. But they often also shared with collectors at home an interest in the natural world. They, too, sought to participate in the culture of gentility associated with the study and accumulation of the natural world. In December 1821, Sir Robert Townsend Farquhar, the governor of Mauritius, sent the skull of a New Zealander to Everard Home at the Hunterian Museum along with an apology for not having sent the other specimens of natural history he had promised.⁷⁸ To ensure a richer harvest, he informed Home that he had hired two naturalists "to search and collect and preserve for the purpose of being transmitted to you everything here that may come within the scope of your researches."⁷⁹ Colonial officials continued to contribute specimens of natural history and indigenous remains throughout the nineteenth century, sometimes in large quantities. In 1879, for example, the Hunterian Museum acquired the collection of human crania from the anthropological Institute, including one hundred crania and one hundred and fifty lower jaws from the former surgeon and now Consul at Callao, Peru, Thomas Joseph Hutchinson.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ RCS-MUS/3/1/3, no. 1121, 1818-1822, Donation Book, vol. 3. Home entered the specimen in the accession records on 21 June 1822.

⁷⁹ RCS-MUS/5/6/19, n.n, f. 1, RCS, c. 1803-1828, File of letters and papers relating to museum business. Letter from R. T. Farquhar, Mauritius, to Everard Home, 24 December 1821.

⁸⁰ RCS-MUS/7/8/10, f. 50-2, n.d., Catalogue of Skulls of the Various Races of Man in the Collection of the Anthropological Institute. Charles Thomas references this donation in a letter from September 1878. RCS-MUS/5/2/3, f.50, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Charles Thomas to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 5 September 1877.

Compared to Hutchinson's massive collection of indigenous remains, the collections George Grey donated to the Hunterian Museum were rather limited.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Grey's example illustrates how colonial officials took advantage of their influence on the periphery of empire to advance the cause of science. To many of his biographers, Sir George Grey was a figure somewhat out of touch with the times he was living in. He was a proponent of imperial expansion at a time when the British government pursued a more cautious course of military-fiscal retrenchment. His attitude towards natives and his ideas about race, too, displayed a similar tension. His concern for the welfare of the natives was critical to his decisions, but he assisted in the confiscation of native lands and the destruction of native customs.⁸² Although he considered the Anglo-Saxon race the most civilized in history and destined to lead the world into the next century, he believed in the amalgamation of native peoples and European settlers at a time when racial categories were hardening. These idiosyncrasies were the result of a personality shaped by the fortunes (and misfortunes) of colonialism, a steadfast belief in imperial expansion, and faith in the usefulness of science to the civilizing mission.⁸³ Like John Davy, Grey was a bioprospector for empire, accumulating and distributing natural resources to strengthen her power overseas. In the process, he presented science as a crucial part of Britain's civilizing mission in the world. And as a collector of indigenous remains, he presented himself as a patron and promotor of science.

⁸¹ These included one skeleton from Cygnet Bay, Australia; six crania and two skeletons from natives of Adelaide Australia in 1844-5; and one skull from the Canary Islands in 1846. See RCS-MUS/3/1/5, f. 8, 24, 26, 1834-1858, Donation Book, vol. 5; RCS-MUS/3/3/15, f. 5, 6, 1858, Letters and papers re human crania.; RCS-MUS/5/1/2, f. 87, 1831-1850, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. See also Owen, *Catalogue*, 829, no. 5344; Flower, *Catalogue*, 190, no. 1066.

⁸² James Collier, *Sir George Grey, Governor, High Commissioner, and Premier: An Historical Biography* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1909); James Rutherford, *Sir George Grey, K. C. B., 1812-1898: A Study in Colonial Government* (London: Cassell, 1961).

⁸³ Alan Lester, "Settler colonialism, George Grey and the Politics of Ethnography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 34, no. 3 (June 2016), 492-507.

First as explorer and later as governor, Grey was part of a network of natural history exchange that stretched from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa to Europe. During his eight years in Australia, including both his exploration of northwestern Australia and his Governorship in Southern Australia, Grey sent several collections of natural history to institutions in Britain and Europe. Richard Owen at the Royal College of Surgeons was particularly fond of a collection of bird specimens Grey had sent over in 1845, which “great as the value of the specimens is from their novelty and scientific relations, it is much enhanced by its coming as so friendly a remembrance from you.”⁸⁴ Yet, the responsibilities of colonial officials often interfered with their efforts to assist in the accumulation of specimens. Nevertheless, collectors at home insisted that such assistance was crucial for the development of accurate knowledge. In 1848, Owen wrote to Grey, now governor of South Australia, expressing his hope that “the more immediate and arduous cares of Government will not divert you from the due encouragement of the collection of the materials for the Natural History of your Colony.”⁸⁵

As an explorer Grey often indulged his wide-ranging scientific interest into questions in comparative anatomy and biogeography.⁸⁶ Landing at Santa Cruz, Tenerife, on 19 July 1837, Grey immediately set out with his friend Lieutenant Lushington, two native guides and a set of ponies to learn more about the island’s now extinct natives: the Guanches. Such rare specimens

⁸⁴ GL O10.6, f. 1, APL, Letter from Richard Owen to Sir George Grey, 8 June 1850.

⁸⁵ GL O10.5, ff. 2, APL, Letter from Richard Owen to Sir George Grey, 26 January 1848.

⁸⁶ When on the voyage home from Australia in 1840 he caught a small marine animal he had seen before, Grey proclaimed: “Are not the ways of nature very wonderful?” Its distribution in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans coupled with its inability to tolerate water temperatures below the Cape of Good Hope, encouraged Grey to wonder whether “there was a time when the continent of Africa did not exist?” Biogeography was the branch of natural history that investigated the distribution of plant and animal species across the globe. Grey records having found two similar specimens, one on 15 July 1840, just a few days before catching this one, and another on 21 November 1837, during the voyage outward. Grey, *Journals*, vol. 2, 161-163. For an important study of its history, see Janet Browne, *The Secular Ark*.

of an extinct race, Grey knew, would interest collectors in Europe, who possessed only “scanty vocabularies and some mummies from Teneriffe.” When “an old inhabitant” told Grey of a cave of Guanche bones called “La Cuerva de los Guanches,” located some three miles northeast of Santa Cruz, he organized a party to retrieve some of them. Grey and the ship’s surgeon Mr. Walker approached the caves by sea, but were unable to scale the cliffs. In the end he managed to procure only a few human bones that “had been blown out of the apertures.”⁸⁷

Despite these early attempts to contribute to collections of indigenous remains in Europe, Grey was most prolific as the governor of New Zealand and South Africa. In New Zealand, Grey’s access to Maori skulls made him a dear friend to collectors back home. In August 1852, the British craniologist Joseph Barnard Davis wrote to Grey requesting “the favour of your assistance” in procuring “any specimens of the different tribes of New Zealanders, or of any of the other races inhabiting the Islands of the Pacific.” Davis had been impressed with the ethnographic data in Grey’s *Journals*, and felt that with Grey’s assistance “my wishes are pretty sure to be gratified.”⁸⁸ On 2 May 1853, Grey sent Davis the skull of a New Zealander.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Grey, *Journals*, vol. 1, 18-22.

⁸⁸ GL D11.1, f. 1-9, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 24 August 1852. Davis’ network of field collectors included colonial officials and medical personnel all over the globe. In the same letter to Grey, he mentions that Dr. Bowring of Hong Kong had been working with surgeons of the different consulates in China to procure Chinese specimens.

⁸⁹ GL D11.2, f. 1-2, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 27 August 1853. Davis was not the only beneficiary of Grey’s access to indigenous remains. In August 1865, Julius L. Brenchley, a traveler with wide-ranging scientific interest including botany, zoology and meteorology, informed Grey that he was “very anxious to get a male & female Maori skull.” A missionary at Rewa in Fiji had procured one for him a while ago, and Brenchley assured Grey that his request “is quite a correct proceeding.” GL B60, f. 4, APL, Letter from Julius L. Brenchley to Sir George Grey, 9 August 1865. Brenchley (1816-1873) was originally ordained as an Anglican priest but devoted his life to science and exploration. At the time, Brenchley was sailing between the islands of the Pacific on the steam frigate HMS Curacoa. He published an account of his experiences in 1865 as *Jottings during the cruise of H.M.S. Curaçoa among the South Sea Islands* (London: Longmans, Green, 1873).

British institutions and collectors were not the only beneficiaries of Grey's patronage. Like Joseph Banks, Grey found the promotion of science too important to be hemmed in by national boundaries and he frequently responded to requests from other European collectors with the same zeal. In 1858, the Austrian anthropologist Karl Ritter von Scherzer (1821-1903) at Vienna forwarded Grey at the Cape Colony a manual detailing how to take anatomical measurements and requesting the governor to "procure for us [...] some skulls or whole skeletons of the aborigines of the country in which reside." He assured Grey that the Austrian Consul at the Cape or the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna would reimburse any expenses incurred.⁹⁰ Grey and Scherzer had established a personal rapport when Scherzer visited the governor in South Africa, and the Austrian collector did not eschew flattery to ensure Grey's continued assistance. Upon hearing that Grey had again been sent to New Zealand to subdue Maori unrest in 1861, he was certain that the country would soon see its "second redemption" by the hands of "her political Messiah."⁹¹ During the following years, Scherzer applied for native skulls from New Zealand, Australia and Van Diemen's Land for the "anthropological part" of his *Narrative*, along with some statistical data on New Zealand and several works on philology.⁹² In 1863, one of Scherzer's letters found Grey embroiled in yet another war with the Maoris. Having benefited

⁹⁰ GL S7.2, f. 1, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, [?] December 1858.

⁹¹ GL S7.4, f. 1, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 26 August 1861.

⁹² GL S7.5, f. f. 2-3, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 9 December 1862. See also GL S7.6, f. ff.4, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 6 March 1863. GL S7.7, f. f. 1-4, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 9 May 1863. GL S7.9, f. f. 1-4, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 25 March 1864. In addition to indigenous skulls, Scherzer also asked for fresh specimens of the *Phormium tenax Herakeke*, or New Zealand Flax in his letter of 6 March 1863. A German farmer had discovered a particularly efficient way of separating the fibres from their husks, and the Austrian government sought to cultivate the flax in Dalmatia, Istria and the southern parts of Hungary. Scherzer's *Narrative* was an immediate success and he published an account of his travels in German, English and Italian. See his *Narrative of the circumnavigation of the globe by the Austrian frigate Novara, (Commodore B. von Willerstorff-Urbair): undertaken by order of the imperial government, in the years 1857, 1858, & 1859*, 3 vols. (London: Saunders, Otley and Co., 1861).

from Grey's assistance in securing several "Bushman" skulls in 1858, the Austrian anthropologist was now keen on receiving some from the South Seas, pledging his government's recognition "for promoting my scientific researches."⁹³

His ability to supply the wishes of collectors in Europe and his access to a network of collectors in the field made Grey a patron of science on the edge of empire. Once whetted, it was impossible to satisfy Davis' appetite. In May 1854, the anthropologist asked for more skulls from New Zealand and the Pacific. But he also asked for Grey's assistance in expanding his network of collectors in the field. He wanted to know the name of the commander of a British man o' war currently stationed in New Zealand, whom Davis believed was "likely to have it in his power to aid me."⁹⁴

Grey's patronage of the science of man did not go unnoticed in Britain. In June 1857, the ethnologist John Crawfurd wrote to Grey in South Africa to convey Joseph Barnard Davis' appreciation to the "Governor that patronizes Craniology." However, Crawfurd did not share the confidence of his colleague in physical anthropology and in February 1857, he encouraged Grey to stick with his "literary labours."⁹⁵ A few months later, Crawfurd dismissed Davis' interest in indigenous crania as a "pet study," though he did not deny "that there are and that there always have been many distinct races of man." Davis's project was doomed to fail since so much "commixture" had taken place that it had become impossible to distinguish between them.⁹⁶ Not everyone was convinced that the anatomical study of human diversity could provide answers to

⁹³ GL S7.8, f.1-4, APL, Letter from Karl Ritter von Scherzer to Sir George Grey, 28 November 1863.

⁹⁴ GL D11.4, f. 1-4, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 17 May 1854, APL, See also Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 13 January 1854, GL D11.3, ff. 1-4, APL,

⁹⁵ GL C59.4, f. 2, APL, Letter from John Crawfurd to Sir George Grey, 3 June 1857.

⁹⁶ GL C59.4, f. 1-4, APL, Letter from John Crawfurd to Sir George Grey, 3 June 1857. As an example of such commixture, Crawfurd cited a well-known incident involving the renowned comparative anatomist Richard Owen. One day, when Owen was arranging a set of African skulls, he placed one of a Scot killed at Waterloo among them, not realizing his mistake until he turned it over and saw the label.

the question whether the human race was one or many. Nevertheless, Joseph Barnard Davis hoped philology would not distract Grey from his efforts to collect human remains. “I trust will not let philology engross you too exclusively,” Davis implored Grey as he was planning to publish an account of his library. “The physical and physiological peculiarities of aboriginal races, so difficult to observe and discriminate, stand first.”⁹⁷ In December 1857, Davis received a box containing six South African skulls, including that of a “Bushman” girl of five years old. The anthropologist appreciated Grey’s continued diligence and offered him a copy of his *Crania Britannica* “in the hope that you may take increased interest in the study of skulls.”⁹⁸

Despite his contributions to the global circulation of indigenous remains, Grey appears to have shied away from the increasingly ideological rift between ethnologicals and anthropologicals in Britain during the 1850s and 1860s, and he continued to collect the indigenous languages as well as their bodies. But personally, Grey undoubtedly favored the study of indigenous languages. By the late 1850s, Grey’s library included more than eight hundred books on African languages and dialects and countless manuscripts documents, such as letters and vocabularies.⁹⁹ It also included more than six hundred works on the languages and dialects of the Pacific, as well as more than five hundred on the Maori language and twenty on Australian dialects.¹⁰⁰

Collecting native languages and dialects was not simply of scientific interest for Grey. Language, he believed, was a profoundly practical and political tool. Not only did word lists

⁹⁷ GL D11.7, f 2-3, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 27 June 1857.

⁹⁸ GL D11.8, f. 1-4, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 5 March 1858. See also GL D11.11, f. 1-4, APL, Letter from Joseph Barnard Davis to Sir George Grey, 12 February 1860.

⁹⁹ William H. I. Bleek, ed., *The Library of His Excellency Sir George Grey, K. C. B.: Philology*, vol. 1 (London: Trübner and Co., 1858).

¹⁰⁰ William H. I. Bleek, ed., *The Library of His Excellency Sir George Grey, K. C. B.: Philology*, vol. 2 (London: Trübner and Co., 1858).

contain useful information about plants and animals as well as indigenous customs and beliefs, knowledge of their myths also facilitated interaction with indigenous populations. He was convinced that such knowledge “may assist the settler in his arrival there, and to sacrifice something of literary accuracy in favour of present usefulness.” But his vocabularies contained much more than word correspondences. He provided information on indigenous uses of plants, on exploration and conquest, and on food ways and customs.¹⁰¹ But Grey’s philological inquiries also served his diplomacy. Dissatisfied with the reliability of interpreters in New Zealand, Grey set out to compile a translation of New Zealand myths. If he was “to win their confidence and regard, it was also requisite that I should be able at all times, and in all places, patiently to listen to the tales of their wrongs and sufferings.” If he could not find a remedy, Grey believed he should at least be able “to give them a kind reply, couched in such terms as should leave no doubt in their minds that I clearly understood and felt for them, and was really well disposed towards them.”¹⁰²

Growing increasingly dissatisfied with the increasing hardening of racial categories in the 1850s and 1860s, Grey believed the “amalgamation” of the races, by which he mostly meant the assimilation of native peoples to the Anglo-Saxon language, legal tradition and culture, was not only possible, but desirable. In Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, anatomical approaches to human difference were being hijacked by racialists like Robert Knox, Luke Burke, and later James Hunt at the Anthropological Society. Grey resisted the vitriolic rhetoric of the physical

¹⁰¹ The word “Kour-rain,” for example, is a “species of Olea” the natives King George’s Sound used to cure headaches. “Mag-go-rung,” which refers a species of seal, Grey explains, had also become the word for “pigs,” which had been introduced by Europeans. Or, the word “Ma-rail-ya,” which indicates a species of freshwater muscle, which the natives of southwestern Australia refused to eat, believing them to be poisoned by others a long time ago. George Grey, *A Vocabulary of the Dialects of Southwestern Australia. By Captain G. Grey, 83rd Regiment*, 2nd. Ed. (London: T. & W. Boone, 1840), xvii, 70, 76, 79-80.

¹⁰² George Grey, *Polynesian mythology and ancient traditional history of the New Zealand race, as furnished by their priests and chiefs* (London: John Murray, 1855), iii-iv.

anthropologists, not only because they had aligned themselves with slave interests during the American Civil War, but because he believed in the improvement of native peoples regardless of their anatomical differences. But he went further than this. When John Lubbock presented his work on the *Primitive Condition of Man* to the British Association in 1869, Grey took the floor. Lubbock, Grey proclaimed, had failed to grasp the difference between civilization and barbarism. In London, he claimed, he had seen savagery “in the heart of the most civilised nation, at the back of the house in which he resided” where “he had witnessed scenes of barbarism and heard language the like of which he had not seen or heard in any savage race upon the earth.” Here, in this center of art, science and progress, British citizens were “outsavaging” the savage.¹⁰³

Like John Davy, Grey saw medical science as an exponent of Britain’s civilization mission. Unlike Davy and his colleagues in the medical service, though, the governor did not necessarily envision colonial hospitals as centers of accumulation, but rather as instruments in the reform of traditional customs. Above all, Grey sought to prove the superiority and efficacy of the scientific method over superstition and witchcraft. Admitting indigenous patients to the hospital in King Williamstown he had founded and that bore his name, near the Buffalo River, Grey hoped, would undermine the influence indigenous witch doctors had on the health and minds of the natives on the eastern Cape (see Fig. 4.2).¹⁰⁴ British officials saw it as a success. The Xhosa “see the reality and honesty and successes of our way of treating diseases, and their faith in witchcraft is terribly shaken,” Mr. Chalmers, the British magistrate in the Transkei, wrote

¹⁰³ George Grey, “Anthropology at the British Association, 1869,” *The Anthropological Review*, vol. 7, no. 27 (1869), 414-32 (especially 418)

¹⁰⁴ Grey appointed Dr. Fitzgerald from New Zealand as the head of the hospital. George C. Henderson, *Sir George Grey: Pioneer of Empire in Southern Lands* (London: J. M. Dent, 1907), 134-5.

to Dr. Fitzgerald at Grey Hospital in 1886.¹⁰⁵ Dr. Fitzgerald himself claimed in 1886 that since its establishment, the hospital had treated more than 100,000 patients, and had restored eye sight to some 200 of them.¹⁰⁶ Hospitals were to be the vanguard of lifting the indigenous out of ignorance. But in the process, they also instituted a new politics of the body that was inimical to the spiritual economy in which indigenous bodies, living or dead, moved and made sense.

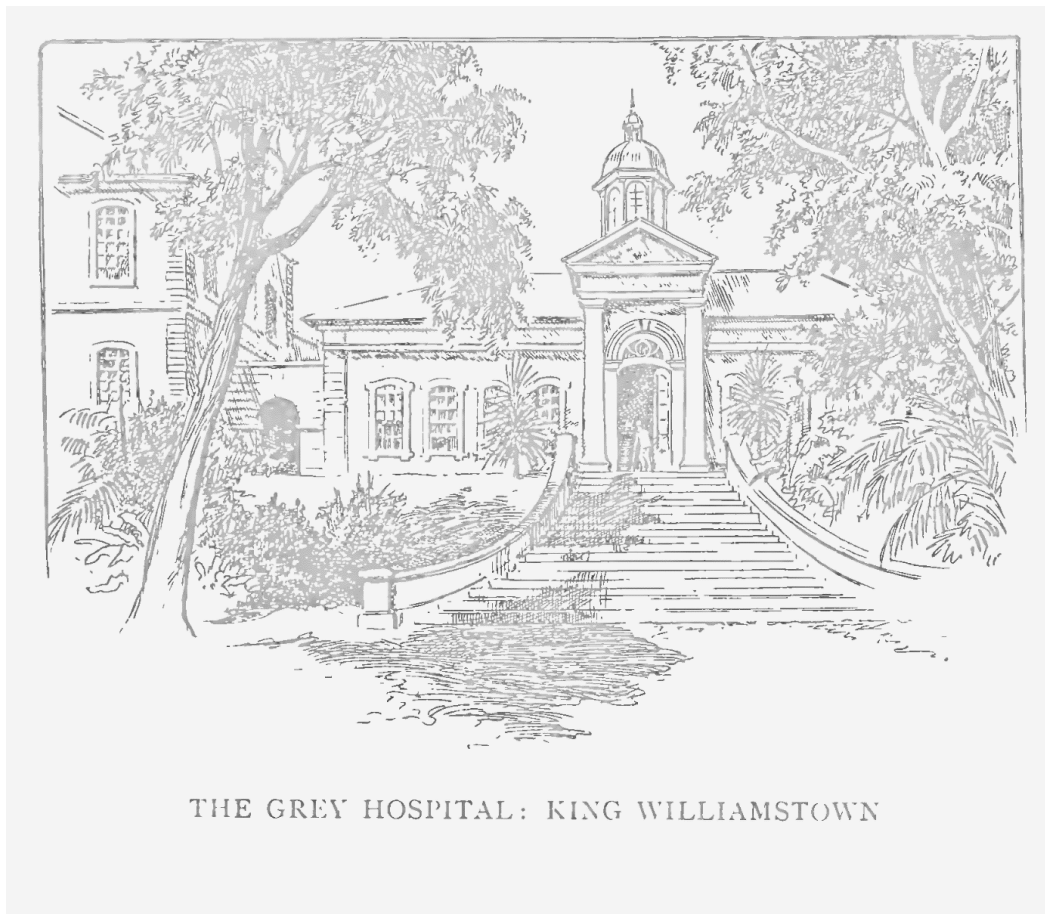


Fig. 4.2. “The Grey Hospital; King Williamstown.” From: George C. Henderson, *Sir George Grey: Pioneer of Empire in Southern Lands* (London: J. M. Dent, 1907), between 134-5.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from W. B. Chalmers to Dr. Fitzgerald, 3 November 1886. Quoted in Rees, *Life*, vol. 1, 230-2.

¹⁰⁶ Rees, *Life*, vol. 1, 237.

Travelers and Explorers: Henry Ogg Forbes (1851-1932) in the Malay Archipelago

For many collecting men, the acquisition of natural history specimens represented a corollary to their duties as explorers, surveyors and prospectors. On the eve of the departure of his expedition to survey the boundaries of British Guiana, Robert Herman Schomburgk wrote to John Edward Gray at the British Museum to remind him “to note ‘*en passant*’ whatever you wish me to pay attention to at my arrival in Guiana.”¹⁰⁷ For those explorers and travelers who lacked the financial security offered by a commission in Her Majesty’s armed forces or the assistance of learned societies, collecting represented a means to defray the costs associated with long-distance expeditions. In 1882, the Scandinavian explorer and naturalist A. G. Nordvi informed Flower of his plans to visit northern Finland in search of the heathen tombs of ancient Lapps. He hoped that the value of the indigenous human specimens would cover the “expenses and wants connected with the excavations” in such a remote region of “Finmark.”¹⁰⁸

When learned societies such as the Royal Geographical Society or the British Association for the Advancement of Science did provide monetary support, they often laid claim to the collections made by the explorers in their service. The Scottish naturalist Henry Ogg Forbes, for example, was an explorer who relied for funds on scientific institutions in London and elsewhere. In return, he handed his collections of natural history specimens over to them. Those he could dispose of himself, he sold to fund his next expedition. Forbes’ experiences provide an insight into the motives of bone collectors in the field who lacked the certainty of a commission

¹⁰⁷ DF [ZOO/]200/145, 195, f. 1, NHM, 1819-1845, Foreign Letters volume 1, part 2. Letter from Robert H. Schomburgk to John Edward Gray, at the British Museum, 24 August 1840. For Schomburgk’s activities as a surveyor in British Guiana, see D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of all They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 123, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from A. G. Nordvi to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1882. Nordvi asked for 4-6 pounds sterling per skull and offered to send any skeleton he could find “gratis” along with the skull belonging to it.

in the Navy or Army, and who relied on support from scientific institutions as well as the proceeds of their collections for any future endeavors.

Henry Ogg Forbes was a quiet and reserved man, burdened by a desire to make a name for himself in the scientific community. Born in Dunblade, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on 30 February 1851, he was the son of the Reverend Alexander Forbes. He attended Aberdeen Grammar school and later matriculated in the universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh, where he studied medicine. Shortly before he was to take the qualifying exams, however, Henry lost an eye, shattering his hopes for a career in medicine. He then turned his attention to the study of nature, visiting Portugal in 1875-7, Timor-Laut in 1878-83, and New Guinea in 1885-6 as a naturalist. Afterwards, Forbes became the Government representative in the China Straits until 1887. He also visited the island of Socotra (1898-9).¹⁰⁹ He later became the Director of Haast's Canterbury Museum in 1890, holding that position for three years, before returning to England to become the Director of the Liverpool Museums (1894-1911) and consulting director (1911-1932).¹¹⁰ At Liverpool, Forbes was responsible for developing the growing stores of ethnological materials in the museum into permanent ethnographic exhibitions.¹¹¹ Eager to make his mark in natural history, Forbes' most famous expedition to New Guinea was plagued by an unusual degree of misfortune. He lost most of his £800 worth of equipment early on in 1885 and he

¹⁰⁹ Forbes published a short account of his botanizing in Portugal in *Nature* in 1877. See Henry Ogg Forbes, "The Fertilisation of Orchids," *Nature*, vol. 16, no. 397 (7 June 1877), 102.

¹¹⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/34, 87, NHM, July-Dec. 1888, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from Henry Ogden Forbes to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 10 August 1888; W. L. S., "Henry Ogg Forbes" [obituary], *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 81, no. 1 (January 1933), 93-4; and [anonymous], "Henry Ogg Forbes" [obituary], *Nature*, vol. 131, no. 3309 (1 April 1933), 460-1.

¹¹¹ Louise Tythacott, "Race on Display: The 'Melanian', 'Mongolian' and 'Caucasian' Galleries at Liverpool Museum (1896-1929)," *Early Popular Visual Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2011), 131-46.

suffered frequently from deserting indigenous carriers.¹¹² He wrote down his experiences in the region in a work that sought to complement Alfred Russel Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), but did not achieve the latter's success.

In August of 1878, Forbes, acting on the advice of his friend Alfred Russel Wallace, wrote to William H. Flower at the RCS to inform him that he was “meditating a visit to the Island of Celebes for the collection of natural history specimens, both botanical and zoological.” Unlike many other explorers, Forbes lacked “a private fortune.” Instead, Forbes was forced to finance his journey by offering to collect specimens, hoping that doing so would “prove somewhat remunerative as well.”¹¹³ Despite the uncertainties Forbes was forced to confront, his tastes in collecting appear to have been as broad as those of his military colleagues. He gathered bird skins and skeletons on Sumatra and New Guinea, corals from the Keeling Islands as well as some “botanical” and “ethnological” things from New Guinea.¹¹⁴ He also donated fourteen Sumatran skulls in 1881 and 1882, and twenty-three Papuan skulls to the Natural History Museum in 1888.¹¹⁵

¹¹² J. M. Hennessy, “A Few Months’ Experience in New Guinea,” *Proceedings of the Queensland Branch of the Geographical Society of Australasia*, vol. 1, (1885-86), 106-16; W. Macgregor, “Journey to the Summit of the Owen Stanley Range, New Guinea,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 12 (1890).

¹¹³ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 55, f. 2-3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Note from Henry O. Forbes to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 7 August 1878. Initially, Forbes appears to have been thinking only of animal remains, requesting “a list of the animals whose skeletons are special desiderata in the Museum.” Later offers to the RCS and the BM provide evidence that Forbes’ collection did indeed include human remains as well.

¹¹⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/25, 109, f. 2, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from Henry Ogden Forbes to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 19 February 1884; DF [ZOO/]200/31, 89, f. 5, NHM, Jan.-June 1887, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from Henry Ogden Forbes to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, n.d. [1888]; DF [ZOO/]200/31, 90, f. 2, NHM, Jan.-June 1887, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from Henry Ogden Forbes to Dr. Carruthers, at the British Museum, n.d. [1888].

¹¹⁵ DF[ZOO] 218/2/5, p. 344, 412, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register;

Like those of Davy and Grey, Forbes' observations reveal a gaze tuned into the usefulness of natural resources in the interest of imperial power and commercial profit. Observing the behavior of the great cocoa-nut crab, or *Birgus latro*, in the coral reefs surrounding the Cocos-Keeling Islands, he noticed that the fat it accumulates beneath its tail could, by the application of heat, be turned into a "valuable preserving lubricant for guns and steel instruments," or a "precious anti-corrosive." It could also serve as a substitute for butter.¹¹⁶ Palm trees and rice plantations, too, provided a valuable resource for the region, especially for the burgeoning coconut trade with Mauritius, Madras and Bencoolen and for markets on Java.

At the same time, however, Forbes was also critical of the changes the British empire introduced into these islands, and he justified collecting as a means of protecting these natural riches from destruction. Forests were making way for palm tree and rice plantations at an alarming rate. Though deplorable, such changes seemed inevitable. Soon, the Indian Ocean would echo with "the new sounds of the puffing of steam mills, the whirring of lathes and saws, and the clang of the anvil."¹¹⁷ He saw his work as a collector in part as an effort to salvage fragments of nature for posterity. "Our children's children will search in vain in their travels for the old forest trees of which they have read in the books of their grandfathers," he writes, "and to make their acquaintance, they will have to content themselves with what they can glean from the treasured specimens in various herbaria, which will then be the only remains of the extinct vegetable races."¹¹⁸ The same would be true for the region's indigenous people.

Supported by learned societies at home, ownership of the collections explorers like Forbes made often belonged, either entirely or partially, to these institutions. Sometimes,

¹¹⁶ Forbes, *Wanderings*, 27-8

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

however, explorers themselves retained a certain measure of discretion, which they sought to exploit to cover future expenses and expeditions. When in 1883, Forbes sent home several of the collections he had made during his trip to “Timor Laut,” ownership claims to the specimens were still uncertain. Forbes was engaged in exploring the region under the auspices of “a committee of the British Association,” whose object was “to promote the exploration of Timorlant.” The Secretary of the committee, William Turner Thiselton Dyer, informed Albert Günther at the Natural History Museum that “The claim of the Brit[ish] Assoc[iation] only extends to one set of typical specimens of animals coming from Timorlant.” And, he added: “Any duplicates or specimens coming from other sources are the property of Mr. Forbes, and sh[ould] be handed over to his representative.”¹¹⁹ Dyer informed Flower at the Hunterian Museum of the same arrangement.¹²⁰

The British Association could thus dispose of Forbes’ Timor Lant collection, but did not have any claim over any duplicates of specimens not covered by the agreement. On 10 March 1883, Dyer pledged Forbes’ collection to Günther, though he admitted that “After eliminating the crania, Ethnography & birds, the residuum is not very extensive, even fitting in just one case.”¹²¹ Forbes’ representative, Alexander Comyns, was anxious to have the rest of the collection, and Dyer reminded Günther just three days later that the British Association had but a

¹¹⁹ DF [ZOO/]200/23, 113, f. 2-3, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from W. I. T. Dyer to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 7 March 1883. Forbes representative at the time was Mr. Alexander Comyns of 47 Chancery Lane, London.

¹²⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 143, f. 2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from W. I. T. Dyer, to William H. Flower, 8 March 1883.

¹²¹ DF [ZOO/]200/23, 114, f. 1, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from W. I. T. Dyer to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 10 March 1883.

limited claim to Forbes' collections.¹²² Günther immediately informed Dyer of his interest in the human crania. But, Dyer had “to confess that I must plead ignorance as to the Museum having a collection of crania.” He had already disposed of twelve skulls to William Henry Flower, “not knowing that there was any other course which we could take with regard to them.”¹²³

Günther must have thought that he had missed out on a valuable collection of human remains. However, the Natural History Museum records show that Forbes donated a collection of 12 Sumatran skulls on 23 April 1884. The arrival of the skulls coincides with Flower's appointment to the Natural History Museum in 1884. It is likely that Flower brought Forbes' collection with him, since the records at the Hunterian Museum do not mention a donation from Forbes.

In any event, despite the obligations that accompanied the patronage of learned societies, collectors like Forbes could preserve some claim over their collections. G. M. Giles, an ethnoprospector sending home several skulls from Chitral, India, in 1886, suggested he had a similar discretionary claim over his ethnological specimens, since his instructions from the Indian government mentioned that only specimens of natural history had to be sent to the Indian Museum in Calcutta, not the bounty of “any ethnological studies.”¹²⁴ Despite being in the service of the Admiralty, naturalist John MacGillivray similarly retained a similar discretionary claim over how to dispose of the collections he made.¹²⁵ Such discretionary claims were crucial to

¹²² DF [ZOO/]200/23, 115, f. 3, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from W. I. T. Dyer to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 13 March 1883. See also DF [ZOO/]200/23, 113, f. 3-4, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from W. I. T. Dyer to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 7 March 1883.

¹²³ DF [ZOO/]200/23, 116, f. 2-3, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, Letter from W. T. T.[?] Dyer to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 14 March 1883.

¹²⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 18, f. 4, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5, Letter from G. M. Giles to [Charles Stewart,] Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1886.

¹²⁵ “I am not tied down to my employers (the Ls Cs of the Admiralty) in any way,” MacGillivray informed John Edward Gray at the British Museum, “and am fully entitled to act according to my own judgement in distributing the

collectors in the field. The sums acquired by selling specimens covered past expense and funded future expeditions, supplies and assistants.

Missionaries of Science: Samuel MacFarlane (1837-1911) in the South Seas

Missionaries often combined the spiritual needs of the indigenous with the material wants of scientists back home. When Günther asked for contacts who could collect on his behalf, William Wyatt Gill suggested that Günther contact Reverend W. G. Lawes and Dr. William Turner in New Guinea, Reverend Brown of the Wesleyan Mission in New Ireland, and Reverend J. P. Sunderland in Sydney.¹²⁶ As French armchair naturalists and collectors in Paris understood, networks of Jesuit priests and missionaries were a useful resource for the circulation of knowledge and specimens in the eighteenth century.¹²⁷ Their perambulations granted them access to remote parts of the world. Moreover, as ethnographers and linguists, they also served as go-betweens, mediating between indigenous peoples, explorers and collectors. Over the course of the nineteenth century, British missionaries began contributing to the accumulation of botanical, zoological and human specimens in Britain.

Though the benefits were clear, some of these missionaries subordinated the virtues of scientific collecting to the tenets of their Christian faith. When Günther asked Wykeham Perry, the surgeon-naturalist on board *HMS Pearl* to relay a request to collect specimens to Dr. Lawes

government collection.” DF [ZOO/]200/146, 126, f. 4, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2, Letter from John MacGillivray to John E. Gray, at the British Museum, 5 March 1855.

¹²⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/9, 230, f. 1, NHM, 1876, Zoology Correspondence A-J, Letter from William Wyatt Gill to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 25 May 1876.

¹²⁷ Networks of missionary naturalists were especially influential in the circulation of *materia medica* in the early modern period. Several historians of science have uncovered how philanthropic, charitable and missionary projects in time developed into organized and integrated commercial enterprises stretching across the globe. In the process, knowledge, often in the form of medical materials, traveled across the globe. See for example, Steven Harris, “Long-Distance Corporations, Big Sciences, and the Geography of Knowledge,” *Configurations*, vol. 6 (1998), 269-304.

on Savage Island, Perry doubted that the missionary would be willing to sacrifice a member of God's creation on the altar of science. "He would, I have no doubt, willingly collect many things," he wrote back, "but I have an idea that he might see some objection to killing birds, reptiles, butterflies, &c." Missionaries on other islands, too, Perry warned Flower, "have quaint fancies about these things." Nevertheless, Perry knew of another missionary, a Dr. Turner, belonging to the Mission at Apia, Samoa, whom he described as "a splendid fellow, and a naturalist to some extent," who had already collected specimens for someone in England and who had "offered to get anything from the Samoan Group that I can tell him."¹²⁸

Despite such moral misgivings in the minds of some, most missionaries eagerly complied with requests from collectors in Europe, including those for human remains. Opening heathen graves did not violate Christian prescriptions. In October 1870, the Reverend F. W. Holland, attached to the Sinai Survey Expedition, sent to Flower two skulls and a jaw bone from Sinai. One of the skulls had belonged to "a monk buried in an ancient Tumulus."¹²⁹ The inviolability of the human body after death, a point of scholastic contention since the Middle Ages, did not extend to non-Christians. Nevertheless, some missionaries made sure that the indigenous remains received a proper Christian burial after they had been stripped of their useful parts. When a Fuegian brought the Reverend Thomas Bridges a bag of "Indian" bones, Bishop Stirling of Ushuaia advised him to send the skull to Flower at the Hunterian Museum. Bridges obeyed with

¹²⁸ DF [ZOO/]200/6, 120, f. 4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence N-P, Letter from Wykeham Perry, member of the H. M. S. "Pearl", to the British Museum, of 9 August 1874.

¹²⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 76, f. 1-2, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2, Letter from Reverend F. W. Holland to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 12 October 1870; RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 76, f. 1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2, Letter from Reverend F. W. Holland to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 17 October 1870.

the Bishop's wishes, and "left orders for [the rest of the bones] to be buried" according to Christian prescriptions.¹³⁰

For missionaries, too, collecting might serve more mundane purposes. The Reverend Samuel Macfarlane of New Guinea, for example, sought to turn his collections into money and supplies. Having just arrived in Somerset, Cape York, in the North of Queensland, Australia, Macfarlane was intent on collecting specimens. He did not share the concerns of some of his fellow missionaries about killing animals, and hunted for fish using dynamite.¹³¹ Earlier in 1876, he had written to R. B. Sharp at the British Museum to inform of a shipment of natural history specimens, including "a very good specimen" of a Bird of Paradise, and some other birds and butterflies. He had acquired the Bird of Paradise up the Baxter River, and skinned it himself. However, despite the beautiful bird specimen, he was altogether disappointed with his collections. He had managed to find several other specimens, but "nothing yet worth sending." Missionaries, too, suffered from the responsibilities of their work. I have "really had very little time as yet to attend to collecting," Macfarlane complained, because "when we are on shore, my business is with the natives." Nevertheless, he hoped his meager collection would fetch a good price and asked Günther to send an order of money to Sydney for "spirit of wine, tins, a dredge, &c. for collecting."¹³² The following year, Macfarlane informed Günther that his wife and two

¹³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 88, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from Thomas Bridges to Mr. Coleman, [?], 13 January 1880.

¹³¹ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 266, f. 2, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharpe, at the British Museum, 8 December 1876.

¹³² DF [ZOO/]200/11, 265, f. 1-4, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharp, at the British Museum, 1 January 1876.

sons were due to arrive in England soon, and he hoped Günther would see to it that “that which is due to me be handed over to her.”¹³³

Missionaries like Macfarlane also operated within extensive networks of exchange, linking indigenous informants, explorers and collectors in Britain. When an expedition returned from Port Moresby in New Guinea on the mission’s “little steamer,” Macfarlane ensured the specimens of birds, birds’ nests, and butterflies would reach the Museum in a good state.¹³⁴

Eleven months later, he had succeeded in convincing the explorer Luigi D’Albertis to offer some of his collections from New Guinea to the Museum.¹³⁵ D’Albertis delivered in 1879, offering the Natural History Museum forty-seven indigenous skulls and two skeletons from Hawaii, New Guinea, Australia and other islands in the Pacific for £150.¹³⁶ He had made a similar offer to the Hunterian Museum a few months earlier.¹³⁷

Despite high hopes, Macfarlane was often disappointed in his own contributions. In Britain, Albert Günther was disappointed as well. When in May of 1876, William Wyatt Gill got wind of Günther’s disappointment about the Reverend’s meager collections, he was surprised: “A man must be blind in an absolutely new country if he does not pick up something of interest.”¹³⁸ By May 1876, Macfarlane had been more successful. He sent a female specimen of

¹³³ DF [ZOO/]200/14, 351, f. 3, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, 20 May 1878.

¹³⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 265, f. 1-4, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharp, at the British Museum, 1 January 1876.

¹³⁵ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 266, f. 2, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharpe, at the British Museum, 8 December 1876.

¹³⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/15, 6, NHM, 1879, Zoology Correspondence A-K, Manuscript catalogue of skulls, ethnological materials and natural history specimens for sale, from L. M. D. D’Albertis to the British Museum, [1879].

¹³⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.56, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Luigi Maria D’Albertis, Botanist, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, [December 1878].

¹³⁸ DF [ZOO/]200/9, 230, f. 1, NHM, 1876, Zoology Correspondence A-J, Letter from William Wyatt Gill to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 25 May 1876.

the Bird of Paradise “to match the male one I sent you,” and promised to send a collection of snakes, beetles, and lizards. As usual, however, Macfarlane was running low on supplies, for which he hoped to receive some assistance from Sharp and Günther. He also hoped to enlist several indigenous assistants to collect on his behalf.¹³⁹ By the end of 1876, word reached Macfarlane that his Bird of Paradise had arrived in England in a bad state. He apologized for his mistake and admitted that he “must learn by experience.” His collecting now finally picked up pace. He informed Sharp of another shipment, which included “a valuable collection of ethnological specimens.”¹⁴⁰ By June of 1878, he was about to leave for eastern New Guinea for six months, and planned to take “£5 worth of spirits of wine with me.”¹⁴¹ Five years later, the Natural History Museum acquired a collection of indigenous remains by Macfarlane via auction, including 48 crania and 82 lower jaws from the Torres Straits.¹⁴²

Spiritual men were often plagued by worldly problems, and some leveraged their services to acquire support and supplies for their missions. In July 1879, having resided in Queensland, Australia, for several months, George H. Stanton, Bishop of North Queensland, recalled William H. Flower’s interest in the comparative study of the human races, and informed him that he had been able to develop a network of “captains of vessels, the inspectors of native police, the squatter settlers and theirs” who would be willing to contribute to the needs of the museum. But Stanton had a more pressing reason for writing to Flower. Abounding in the “veriest quacks” and

¹³⁹ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 264, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharpe, at the British Museum, 25 May 1876.

¹⁴⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/11, 266, NHM, 1877, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to Mr. R. B. Sharpe, at the British Museum, 8 December 1876.

¹⁴¹ DF [ZOO/]200/14, 352, f. 4, NHM, 1878, Zoology Correspondence A-M, Letter from Reverend S. MacFarlane, Somerset, Australia, to A. Günther, at the British Museum, [?] June 1878.

¹⁴² There was a forty-ninth cranium, “but being ornamented with an artificial nose, was considered to be of unusually high value, and was not therefore purchased.” DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 344, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

“the very sweepings of the medical profession,” he complained, “this northern part of Queensland is lamentably deficient in a supply of qualified, respectable medical men.” With their regular surgeon indisposed, the colony had to resort to freeing another from prison, though the Bishop feared that “his insobriety will soon throw him into his usual home again.” He asked Flower for help in providing a qualified medical man, vowing that his medical education would make him a good deal of money in Australia. There was much to recommend such “a splendid colony and full of unbroached wealth” with “room for millions of our surplus population,” Stanton reminded Flower, provided those seeking their fortune came from “the industrious and sober class.”¹⁴³

Six months later, Stanton’s plea had proved successful. He thanked Flower for his help in finding Dr. Pattison, but repeated his plea for qualified medical men for the colony. Meanwhile, Stanton had become “exceedingly interested in collecting and sending some aboriginal skulls,” and he had already made arrangement with “some Western squatters on whose ‘runs’ there are sure to be skulls.” He also vowed to enquire what was to happen to the skulls from Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea currently on display in an exhibition in Sydney “as it would form a most complete set for your museum.”¹⁴⁴

The coincidence of Stanton’s increased interest in indigenous remains and Flower’s assistance in the search for qualified medical men to tend to the health of settlers in Queensland suggests that the desire of collectors at home could alleviate the needs of men and women in the colonies. Missionaries tried to balance serving the spiritual needs of their flock and the scientific wants of collectors in Europe. In charge of missions in the remotest areas of the British empire

¹⁴³ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 88, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from George H. Stanton, Bishop of N. Queensland, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 12 July 1879.

¹⁴⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 96, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from George H. Stanton, Bishop of N. Queensland, to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 9 February 1880.

and beyond, they became important nodes in the global exchange networks along which natural history specimens traveled. They often employed indigenous field collectors and exploited their growing knowledge of the environment and language to secure prized specimens. In return, they hoped for the assistance of collectors in Britain in serving the needs of their far-flung missions.

Long-Term Residents and the Beginnings of Creole Science: John Shortt (1822-1889) and Thomas Frederic Cheeseman (1846-1923)

Spanish exploration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave rise to what Antonio Lafuente has called “creole science.” Spanish colonial policy, which considered overseas possessions as an integral part of its empire, encouraged not only mixed populations but also mixed knowledge, investing in the creation of universities, botanical gardens, and hospitals to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, people and specimens throughout its territories. Individuals born and educated in Spanish overseas dominions blended American and European knowledge traditions. Nothing like it existed in the Dutch, English and French empires before the final decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁵ Most scientists in Britain’s colonies continued to be educated in Britain or Europe. However, some collectors of the indigenous dead were men whose long-term residency, and even education, in the colonies provided them with a deep understanding of their environment and a commitment to the development of colonial scientific institutions. Though they did not constitute a class of “creole” collectors as such, like their Spanish colleagues, they tapped into rich veins of local knowledge, monopolized access to indigenous resources, and laid the groundwork for the emergence of colonial science. One such long-term resident and collector was John Shortt. Not much is known about Shortt’s early life,

¹⁴⁵ Antonio Lafuente, “Enlightenment in Imperial Context: Local Science in the Late Eighteenth-Century Hispanic World,” Special Issue: Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise, *Osiris*, vol. 15, (2000), 155-173 (especially 161).

though it is possible that he was one of the first students to attend the Madras Medical School in the 1830s to train as an apothecary. He joined the East India Company shortly after.

The company soon recognized Shortt's potential and sent him to Edinburgh to obtain an MD. He returned in 1854, joining the Madras Medical Services and rising to the position of Deputy Surgeon-General of the Madras Presidency.¹⁴⁶ Upon his return, he immediately took an interest in botany, zoology and anthropology.¹⁴⁷ Like most of his fellow collectors, Shortt was a keen bioprospector, using science as a means to improve the production of commercially and strategically important resources. In describing the indigenous production of indigo in India, for example, he also added a list "improvements ... to remunerate both cultivator and manufacturer." Once adopted, he was certain that the production of Indigo, "instead of being the precarious enterprise it is at present considered, will prove a very remunerative investment of labor and capital." The government of Madras awarded him 800 rupees for his work.¹⁴⁸

Shortt's collecting of indigenous remains dovetailed with his wide-ranging interests in natural history. As a medical officer, he was drawn to questions of human anatomy and he considered collections of indigenous remains in national museums important enough to pay his expenses out of pocket. In April 1876, he sent Flower the skeleton of "a female Hindu," asking William H. Flower for help in arranging transportation and informing the curator that he would

¹⁴⁶ S. Muthiah, "The long and the Shortt of it," *The Hindu* (13 May 2016). [Accessed 21 June 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/the-long-and-the-shortt-of-it/article5566545.ece>.]

¹⁴⁷ In zoology, Shortt published a book on the management and diseases of cattle in India. See his *A Manual Indian Cattle and Sheep* (Madras: Higginbottom and Co., 1889). He also frequently contributed articles on the ethnology of Indian tribes. See among others his "An Account of a wild tribe inhabiting some parts of Orissa, and known as 'Juags' and 'Bathuas', or 'leaf wearers'," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 3 (1865), cxxxiv-clxi; "An Account of Some Rude Tribes, the Supposed Aborigines of Southern India," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 3 (1865), 373-94; "The Fishermen of Southern India," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 5 (1867), 193-201; and "A Contribution to the Ethnology of Jeypore," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 6 (1868), 264-81, 364.

¹⁴⁸ John Shortt, *An essay on the culture and manufacture of indigo* (Madras: H. Smith, 1860), 9.

bear the costs involved in packing the specimens himself.¹⁴⁹ Two years later, Shortt's interest in indigenous remains took precedence over his duties as a medical officer. In a letter announcing the shipment of twenty Indian skulls, Shortt informed Flower at the Hunterian Museum that he had retired from the Madras Medical Service to free up time to gather more indigenous skulls.¹⁵⁰ The change proved as success. Between 1878 and 1882, Shortt contributed 99 skulls from India, the majority from the Madras Presidency, and three Dutch skulls collected in Southern India to the collections at the Hunterian Museum.¹⁵¹

Like colonial officials and missionaries, long-term residents such as Shortt could rely on extensive networks of collectors that made them into gentlemen of science. During his time in Madras, Shortt had been able to interest "other friends in the different districts of this Presidency," mostly from the Indian Medical Service, to assist him in collecting indigenous remains, and he hoped "ere long to be in a position to send you a further supply."¹⁵² Among his collaborators were Lieutenant-Colonel Macaulay and an Mr. Falloon, Assistant Apothecary of the Madras Medical Service.¹⁵³ By August 1880, his contributions to the circulation of indigenous remains had not gone unnoticed, and Flower addressed Shortt to inform him that he would assist him in his election to the Royal College of Surgeons. By then, Shortt's contributions

¹⁴⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.38, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from John Shortt (1822-1889) to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 21 April 1876.

¹⁵⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.54, f. 2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from John Shortt (1822-1889) to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 22 March 1878.

¹⁵¹ Flower, *Catalogue*, 108-11 no. 654-673; Stewart, *Catalogue*, 194-197, no. 653/1-34; 197, no. 653/35-6; 201-202, no. 673/1-7; 202-204, no. 673/8-31; 204-205, no. 673/32-43; 117-118, no. 544/1-3.

¹⁵² RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 80, f. 2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from John Shortt (1822-1889) to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 21 January 1880.

¹⁵³ John Shortt, "Description of Crania from India," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 8 (1870 - 1871), xvii-xx.

had already earned him fellowships in several learned societies in Britain, the continent and India.¹⁵⁴

Despite the Spanish head start, long-term residents dispersed across Dutch, French, Portuguese and English began to contribute to a distinctly colonial scientific culture during the second half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. Hospitals, botanical gardens and learned societies started accumulating local knowledge, fusing it with knowledge from European centers such as Leyden, Paris and London.¹⁵⁵ Colonial museums, too, began accumulating and exchanging objects in increasingly global networks of exchange. As long-term residents engaged in scientific pursuits and collecting, colonial curators not only developed a deep knowledge of the area and its peoples, but they also built extensive networks of contributors and developed allegiances that did not always prioritize metropolitan wishes and demands. As the remains of the indigenous dead from New Zealand became more coveted in Europe, Julius von Haast, Thomas Frederic Cheeseman and their colleagues in colonial museums in New Zealand sought to leverage their access to these rare specimens to add to the storerooms of their own museums.

It was becoming increasingly clear that colonial curators no longer quietly subordinated their own interests to those of collectors in the centers of knowledge in Europe and America. Cheeseman at the Auckland Museum, for example, sought to capitalize on the desires of his European colleagues. In March 1878 William Flower dispatched a letter to the curator of the Auckland Museum, New Zealand, requesting his help in procuring a collection of Maori crania.

¹⁵⁴ He proclaims to be a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in Edinburgh, and a Fellow of the Linnean, Zoological and Anthropological societies of London. He also mentions being an honorary fellow of the Anthropological Society of Paris and Berlin, and corresponding member of the Congres International d'Anthropologie, d'Archeologie; and honorary Fellow of the Madras University, and the Agricultural & Horticultural Society of Madras. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 92, f. 2-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from John Shortt (1822-1889) to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 25 August 1880.

¹⁵⁵ See for example, James MacClellan III, *Colonialism ad Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); and Drayton, *Nature's Government*.

Cheeseman informed Flower that he had just received “a number from some limestone caves between the Bay of Islands and Whangarei Harbour,” and he would be able to send “by next vessel direct to London about 20 or 25 crania, together with a few pelves of both sexes.” In return, Cheeseman hoped Flower would be able to “pick us a very acceptable return from your rich collections.”¹⁵⁶

Aware that a humble colonial museum such as his could not possibly rival the rich stores of a metropolitan museum like that of the Royal College of Surgeons, Cheeseman nevertheless sought to transform the Auckland Museum into a center of knowledge on the edge of empire. To do so, Cheeseman traded specimens with whomever offered him the best returns. He had sent several human specimens to Museums in Europe before, including “one of the best” complete skeletons he had been able to acquire to Professor de Quatrefages at Paris.¹⁵⁷ As we have seen earlier, Cheeseman’s colleague at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, Julius von Haast, traded with museums in America, France, Austria and Italy as well as with those in Britain.¹⁵⁸ During the next few years, curators across Europe continued to ask for Cheeseman’s assistance in procuring Maori remains, but the colonial curator was forced to turn them down. By 1880, European demand had grown so much that Cheeseman decided to organize “a special journey”

¹⁵⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 59, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from Thomas Frederic Cheeseman to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 28 May 1878.

¹⁵⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 59, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from Thomas Frederic Cheeseman to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 28 May 1878.

¹⁵⁸ For exchanges with museums in America, see RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 3, f. 1-2, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 7 January 1874. For France, see RCS-MUS/5/2/3, p.33, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 10 January 1875. For Austria, see RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 41, f. 6, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 23 July 1876. For Italy, see DF [ZOO]/200/4, 2, f. 4, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence H-K, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 28 July 1874.

into the New Zealand interior “in a month or two, with the hope of getting a good stock - and, if possible, a few skeletons.”¹⁵⁹ Demand created supply.

But the generosity of colonial curators had its limits. Colonial museums like those of Haast and Cheeseman jealously guarded their most prized possessions. If they lacked the means to expand their collections with foreign specimens, they would specialize in their own fauna and flora. In 1869, the curator at the Colonial Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, apologized to John Gray for the paucity of specimens coming from his colony. “I can quite understand how you and others may expect more from us in the way of collections than I am able to send,” he explained. Although private and government collectors “find it to be their intent to send home large collections,” the curator apologized, “we poor beggars in the pay of the colonial gov[ernment]t have to [be] the jealous museum.” These “beggars,” as he called himself and his fellow curators, sorted through the collections first, keeping what was most valuable, before dispatching collections abroad. In the end though, the curator believed, it was in the interest of science, for “although it may create a dearth of contributions to the Home Museums for a time, it will end in the organization of systematic collections.”¹⁶⁰ Although an enterprising trader of natural history specimens himself, Julius von Haast, too, believed that “unique specimens ought not to leave New Zealand.”¹⁶¹ Colonial museums were becoming centers of knowledge in their own right.

The ‘jealousy’ of colonial curators illustrates that they sought to strike a balance between the needs of and their allegiance to metropolitan science, and their dedication to the development

¹⁵⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 83, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4, Letter from Thomas Frederic Cheeseman to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 1 March 1880.

¹⁶⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/146, 88, NHM, 1829-1869, Foreign Letters volume 2, Letter from James Hector, Director of the Colonial Museum of New Zealand, to John E. Gray, at the British Museum, 8 April 1869.

¹⁶¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 41, f. 1, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 23 July 1876.

of colonial bodies of knowledge. They displayed both a desire to add to their own collection by offering indigenous specimens in exchange for foreign ones, but they also sought to establish their own museums as centers of science and civilization on the margins of empire. This tension between the cause of science represented by the desiderata of the metropolitan museums and the hopes of a colonial curator to transform “an infant museum” into a center of knowledge was acutely felt on the edge of civilization, but little understood in Britain.¹⁶² Seeking to monopolize natural knowledge, Haast accused the curators at the British Museum of hoarding their most prized specimens.¹⁶³ Even between scientific institutions within the British empire, the circulation of human and animal specimens was subjected to petty interests and envy. Allegiances were fickle and the flow in indigenous remains followed the laws of maximized returns.

Women Collectors: Lady Franklin (1792–1875)

Women only rarely contributed to collections of human remains in Britain. When they did, they often simply wanted to dispose of the collections their husbands had made. In November 1868, for example, Mrs. Baxter, the widow of the late Alexander Henry Baxter, surgeon on board the *HMS Beaver* serving in the Mediterranean, wanted to dispose of four skulls from ancient Carthage to the Hunterian Museum and the British Museum.¹⁶⁴ When her husband died after a violent encounter with natives on Santa Cruz, an island in the New Hebrides Group, Mrs.

¹⁶² RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 42, f. 1, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator, to William Henry Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 4 August 1869.

¹⁶³ DF [ZOO/]200/4, 2, f. 1, NHM, 1858-1875, Zoology Correspondence H-K, Letter from Julius von Haast, Curator to the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, of 28 July 1874.

¹⁶⁴ RCS-MUS/5/2/2, 37, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2, Letter on behalf of Mrs. Baxter, widow of Alexander Henry Baxter, Surgeon to the Royal Navy, to Royal College of Surgeons of England, of 25 November 1869.

Goodenough disposed of a collection of seven indigenous skulls through the archaeologist and anthropologist Lane Fox.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the historical record does contain some examples of collections of indigenous remains to which collecting women may have contributed. In March of 1824, the Secretary of the Hunterian Museum thanked Maria Graham for her donation of two New Zealand heads and the skin of a flying fish.¹⁶⁶ But the largest collection of indigenous remains came from the hands of Lady Franklin (1792-1875), the wife of the former Governor of Tasmania and Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin.

Between 1844 and 1856, Lady Franklin donated eight indigenous skulls from Australia, Tasmania and China to the Hunterian Museum in London. While it is unclear whether she herself collected these specimens in the field, accession records list only Lady Franklin, not her husband.¹⁶⁷ Sir John Franklin himself was also an arduous collector of natural history specimens. A 1845 guide to the osteological collection at the Hunterian Museum expresses the College's gratitude to Sir Franklin for having contributed so "many rare and instructive specimens of the skeletons and skulls of Arctic Mammals."¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, after her husband disappeared early in 1845, having just embarked on an Arctic expedition, Lady Franklin continued to send indigenous

¹⁶⁵ Flower, *Catalogue*, 213-214, no. 1154-1158; 215, no. 1165-1166.

¹⁶⁶ RCS-MUS/5/1/1, 115, f. 1, 1800-1830, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1, Letter from Edmund Belfour, Secretary to the RCS, to Mrs. Maria Graham, 6 March 1824, re contribution of two heads from New Zealand.

¹⁶⁷ Only the 1844 skull from Australia appears in the Hunterian Museum's accession records, though the printed catalogues mention seven others donated by Lady Franklin after 1844. RCS-MUS/5/1/2, 87, 1831-1850, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2, A copy of a letter from Edmund Belfour, Secretary of the Hunterian Museum, to Lady Franklin, thanking her for her contribution of an indigenous skull from Australia, dated 18 November 1844. See also, RCS-MUS/3/3/16, 14, c. 1806-1844, Memoranda of Donations to the Museum with reference to the minutes of the Museum Committee where they were reported; and RCS-MUS/3/1/5, f. 8, 1834-1858, Donation Book, vol. 5.

¹⁶⁸ RCS-MUS/8/1/3, 35, 1845, Synopsis of the Arrangement of the Preparations in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, For the Use of Visitors.

skulls to the Hunterian Museum, including two Egyptian, five Malay, two Australian, and two Tasmanian between 1854 and 1856.¹⁶⁹

Well into the nineteenth century, women rarely participated in scientific collecting. Only a handful of women appear to have engaged in the systematic acquisition of specimens from the early modern period onwards.¹⁷⁰ Most of them did so in the wake of the peregrinations of men, not as independent travelers. In the 1770s, Lady Anne Monson followed her husband, a colonel in the English army, to the East Indies. Twenty years later, Maria Riddell accompanied her father, the governor of Saint Kitts and the Leeward Islands, to the West Indies. Once there, both women could indulge their interest in natural history.¹⁷¹ Anna Forbes, wife to the explorer Henry Ogg Forbes, shared her husband's curiosity for the natural world. Having just arrived in Java, Anna recalls walking into a "Chinaman's shop," where she saw "a wonderful collection of curiosities." Among these curiosities were several carved statues of "great value and interest," but the objects that caught her eye were the mummified remains of a merman and mermaid, creatures with the lower body of a fish, and the upper body of a human, with limbs and five fingers.¹⁷² Throughout her husband's travels, she assisted him in collecting data and watching over the safety of his specimens. While she shared her husband's interest in natural history, she also condemned the voracity of European collectors. Seeing a cargo of 2,000 skins of the orange-

¹⁶⁹ The catalogue mentions two other indigenous skulls as part of Lady Franklin's collection, one Chinese and one Australian one, but does not provide any date or additional information. Flower, *Catalogue*, 96, no. 597-8; 117, no. 705; 122-23, no. 727-731; 192, no. 1074-5; 194, no. 1083; 200, no. 1103.

¹⁷⁰ For the contributions of women collectors in the early modern and modern periods, see Ann Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Culture: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

¹⁷¹ Maria Riddell, *Voyages to the Madeira, and Leeward Caribbean Isles with Sketches of the Natural history of these Islands* (Edinburgh: P. Hill, 1792). See also Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 30-1.

¹⁷² Forbes, *Insulinde*, 36.

feathered bird of paradise, 800 skins of the King-bird, and several others destined for Europe, she found “such a fearful slaughter of these lovely birds . . . really distressing.” She anticipated that if unchecked, “we will have lost off the face of the globe these unique and most gorgeous of feathered tribes.”¹⁷³

Independent women collectors remained a rare sight. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Maria Sibylla Merian was the only woman (we know of) who explored the natural world on her own.¹⁷⁴ It was widely believed that the demands and dangers associated with travel affected women differently than men. Traveling in the East Indies, Carl Thunberg believed to have found evidence that women were better able to withstand the bouts of dysentery and fever associated with the torrid climate, but he was also convinced that “those who come from Europe with rosy cheeks lose this species of beauty in a short time, and are afterwards as pale as corpses.”¹⁷⁵ Female physiology represented a special vulnerability. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach supposed that passage into warm climates caused “copious menstruation” in women, which would soon prove fatal.¹⁷⁶ In addition to these perceived frailties, women simply lacked the institutional and financial support that many of their male counterparts had access to.

Nevertheless, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the lack of a neatly circumscribed institutional framework for the comparative anatomy of human difference made collecting indigenous remains a scientific pursuit open to individuals otherwise excluded from scientific inquiry. In writing to request support for the library of the newly founded Tasmanian Society, its secretary, John Philip Gell, lauded Lady Franklin’s involvement in creating the

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷⁴ Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 30-5. I am indebted to Londa Schiebinger for the references in this paragraph.

¹⁷⁵ Carl Thunberg, *Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia, performed between the years 1770 and 1779*, 4 vols. (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1795), vol. 2, 281.

¹⁷⁶ Blumenbach, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, 212, fn. 2.

Tasmanian Museum. This fledgling colonial museum, Gell reminded his interlocutor in Britain, was intended “for the reception of specimens of the natural history of Tasmania, as well as with a view to transmission to England as for the promotion of science in Tasmania.”¹⁷⁷ While it is unclear whether Lady Franklin was involved in the acquisition of these remains, or whether they were procured by her husband while he was governor of Van Diemen’s Land, her interest in indigenous remains appears to have been more than an extension of, or corollary to, her husband’s peregrinations and scientific interests. Commenting on the characters of her Tasmanian skull in 1879, William H. Flower considered that “it is quite probable that she may have had Tasmanian as well as Australian skulls in *her* collection.”¹⁷⁸

As the wife of a colonial governor, Lady Franklin managed to translate her mobility into a powerful asset. Lady Franklin’s position at the periphery of empire provided her with an opportunity to travel, collect and participate in the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge.¹⁷⁹ Her contributions to collections of indigenous remains in Britain stand out even more, since many Victorian scientists interested in the anatomy of human difference considered the presence of women in debates about human anatomy an obstacle to open discussion.¹⁸⁰ As historians of women and science have shown, the unsettled disciplinary landscape of the first

¹⁷⁷ MS.7830/13, f. 1, WL, autograph letter, signed, to James Backhouse in York, concerning the Tasmanian Museum built at the expense of Jane, Lady Franklin (1792-1875), the Governor’s wife. 28 October 1845.

¹⁷⁸ Flower, *Catalogue*, 200, no. 1103 [emphasis added].

¹⁷⁹ For the opportunities afforded to women on the periphery, see Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26-30.

¹⁸⁰ The anthropological Society of James Hunt and Richard Francis Burton found the admission of women into the Ethnological Society particularly disturbing, claiming that their presence impeded discussion of sensitive topics such as phallic worship and genital circumcision. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 252-3.

half of the nineteenth century allowed women like Lady Franklin to find ways of participating in scientific pursuits otherwise considered the domain of men.¹⁸¹

Conclusion

This chapter began with a straightforward question: Who were these men collecting the remains of the indigenous dead? Many of them would have us believe that they had no personal or professional stake. This disinterestedness and detachment are today still the hallmarks of modern science. Financial concerns enter into the frame only as an obstacle to scientific practice, not as a stimulant of it. Ambition, both personal and professional, rarely emerges as a valid motivation for scientific activity. And power and inequality appear only as unforeseen consequences of the circulation of scientific knowledge and materials, rather than objectives in their own right.

This study into the motives of collecting men and women suggests that the “zeal of travellers” lacked not only direction in terms of what to collect, but also why. They offered their services as travelers. They sought out commissions and appointments within Britain’s imperial and scientific establishment to convey them across the globe. Many of them were medical men, like John Davy, a surgeon in Britain’s armed forces. But colonial officials, adventurers and naturalists also contributed remains of the indigenous dead to storerooms in London and Edinburgh. They sailed on Britain’s war ships and mail steamers. They moved into interiors untrodden by European boots as vanguards of British imperialism and knowledge. They were far from disinterested recipients of human specimens. As they exported their hard-won human prizes

¹⁸¹ For analyses of women’s contributions to science in early modern and modern history, see Sally Gregory Kohlstedt and Helen Longino, “Women, Gender, and Science: New Directions,” Special Issue, *Osiris*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1997), Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “Women in the History of Science: An Ambiguous Place,” *Osiris*, vol. 10 (1995), 39-58.

to centers of knowledge in Europe and America, they also imported the “concerns and apparatus for interpreting the world” that had taken shape in Europe.¹⁸² Collections of indigenous bodies were not simply the result of colonial appropriation. To be sure, collecting men were building an empire, but they were also fashioning themselves as gentlemen of science in an environment where gentility seemed hard to achieve, let alone maintain. Industrious empiricists, it seems, made great imperialists.

¹⁸² Emma C. Spary, *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87. See also Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 219-32; Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 87.

CHAPTER FIVE

British Head Taking in South Africa, 1781-1879

*He who fights monsters should be careful
lest he thereby becomes a monster himself
And if you gaze long into the abyss, the
abyss will also gaze into you.*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)¹

Introduction

As European travelers began pouring into Cape of Good Hope during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, everything about the place caught their eyes. Its flora, its fauna, its storms and its peoples presented to the visitor a wide range of fascinating phenomena to be recorded and raw materials to be collected. But by the final decades of the eighteenth century, something about their fascination with these marvels changed. The curiosity of these visitors was no longer the eclectic longing to possess the marvelous. Natural history collecting had gained an internal logic that sought to order and classify, rather than to simply record and accumulate. The French naturalist visiting the Cape of Good Hope in 1780 François Le Vaillant looked upon his own collecting in the Cape of Good Hope as a break with the past: “Natural history has a more extensive moral than has been generally supposed, the metaphysic eye looks further; and blind curiosity, which formerly was the principal motive in forming collections, now gives place to

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. Helen Zimmern (New York: The Modern Library Publishers, [1886]), aphorism 146, 87.

more noble and estimable ideas; there is no longer anything trivial.”² Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have argued that by the second half of the eighteenth century, the transition from wonder (Le Valliant’s “blind curiosity”) to curiosity proper was complete. Curiosity became associated with the disinterestedness, greed and respectability of the man of science, while wonder turned out to be allied with the lust, stupor and ignorance of the masses.³ During the first half of the nineteenth century, the remains of the indigenous dead were no longer trivial.

Robert Knox, one of Britain’s most prominent, if maligned, racial theorist of the mid-nineteenth century, certainly believed so.⁴ During his career as an anatomist in Edinburgh and London, he had witnessed how the comparative anatomy of humankind had taken its place alongside geology, zoology, meteorology and map-making as a reputable field of inquiry, occupying men of science across Europe.⁵ Like Vaillant, Knox, serving as Assistant-Surgeon to the 72nd Regiment on the eastern border of the Cape Colony, believed that the remains of the indigenous dead were valuable specimens. When he published *The Races of Men* (1850), Knox boasted to have been the first to acquaint European scientists with the crania of a “fine race” from the Cape Colony: the Xhosa. He hoped that such raw materials would soon encourage “some scientific man” to “favour mankind with a correct history of the race before their final extinction.”⁶ As we have seen, beneath Knox’s racialist synthesis of human difference lay a profound sense of loss. The Khoikhoi, for example, were different from the Xhosa, though their

² François Le Vaillant, quoted in Joël Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa’s Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 181.

³ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 304-5.

⁴ For the influence of Robert Knox on racial thinking in South Africa, see Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27. See also Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), vol. 2, 377-9.

⁵ See chapter Two.

⁶ Knox, *Races*, 181.

end was to be same. They were a degraded race, and, like the Xhosa, Knox predicted that “they will soon form merely natural curiosities.”⁷ Knox was a collector of such “curiosities” himself. When someone asked him how he had acquired his collection of human skulls, he reportedly answered: “Why, sir, there was no difficulty in Caffraria; I had to walk out of my tent and shoot as many [Xhosa] as I wanted for scientific and ethnological purposes.”⁸

This chapter offers an analysis of the ways in which historical actors like Robert Knox understood, justified and narrated head taking during the frontier wars in the Cape Colony between 1781 and 1879.⁹ Head taking in South Africa has invited some historical interest over the past few decades. Some historians have found evidence for Robert Knox’s rationale, seeing European head taking as a form of scientific inquiry and natural history collecting.¹⁰ Simon Harrison, on his part, has placed British head taking in the metaphorical realm of the “hunt,” suggesting that military men often claimed the heads of indigenous enemies as both specimens and trophies.¹¹ Others have raised important ethical concerns about acquiring and displaying

⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸ Robert Knox, quoted in Laura Callanan, *Deciphering Race: White Anxiety, Racial Conflict and the Turn to Fiction in Mid-Victorian English Prose* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 161.

⁹ This period in South African history is also sometimes called the “Hundred Years War.” See C. Saunders, “The Hundred Years War: Some Reflections on African Resistance on the Cape-Xhosa Frontier,” in *Profiles in Self-Determination: African Responses to European Colonialism in Southern Africa*, ed. D. Chanaiwa (Northridge, CA: California State University Foundation, 1976), 55-77. For compelling accounts of this series of nine frontier wars in the Cape Colony, see also Jeffrey Brian Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); Jeffrey Brian Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*, second edition (Johannesburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1990); Joël Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*, second edition (London: Pimlico, 1993). I am indebted to the works of Peires and Mostert for many of the references and accounts in this chapter.

¹⁰ Alan G. Morris, “Trophy Skulls, Museums, and the San,” in Pippa Skotness, ed., *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 67-79; and Andrew Bank, “Of ‘Native Skulls’ and ‘Noble Caucasians’: Phrenology in Colonial South Africa,” *Journal of South African Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1996), 387-403.

¹¹ Simon Harrison, “Skulls and Scientific Collecting in the Victorian Military: Keeping the Enemy Dead in British Frontier Warfare,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2008), 285-303. For a similar

indigenous remains in South African museums.¹² Most recently, David Webb has tried to revise these analyses into a compelling synthesis. He argues that British head taking on the Cape frontier cannot be understood simply in terms of scientific collecting. Instead, he suggests, the practice occurred in widely different contexts and for widely different reasons, incorporating motives such as phrenology, military culture, commodification, hunting and conquest. By the 1870s, he concludes, the logic of scientific collecting had given way to “a cruder form of racism among settlers and soldiers.” In addition, he suggests that the Xhosa acquired the practice from the British.¹³

Here, I rehearse many of these analyses to argue that the British and the indigenous peoples of the Cape adopted head taking both as practice and trope. There is no doubt that some participants on both sides took enemy heads during the frontier wars in the Cape Colony. The evidence certainly supports this conclusion. Who exactly took heads, how often they did so, and why; these remain open questions, which, as we will see, are difficult to answer. But head taking also appeared as a discursive element, or trope. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the trope of the other as the taker of heads became a resilient image in both the British and indigenous imagination on the Cape, capable of crossing the divide between fact and fiction.¹⁴

analysis of more recent head taking by western military forces, see his “Skull Trophies of the Pacific War: Transgressive Objects of Remembrance,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2006), 817-36.

¹² Martin Legassick and Gordon C. Rassool, *Skeletons in the Cupboard: South African Museums and the Trade in Human Remains, 1907-1917* (Cape Town, South Africa: South African Museum Press, 2000); Gordon, C. Rassool and L. Witz, “Fashioning the Bushman in Van Riebeeck’s Cape Town, 1952 and 1993,” in Pippa Skotness, ed., *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 257-69.

¹³ David A. Webb, “War, Racism, and the Taking of Heads: Revisiting Military Conflict in the Cape Colony and Western Xhosaland in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History*, vol. 56, no. 1 (March 2015), 37-55 (especially 39 and 44). I am greatly indebted to Webb’s revisionist account for many of the following references.

¹⁴ Following Hayden White’s usage of the term, I conceive a trope to be that discursive element which is caught between reality and imagination. For example, during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the wild man as

The ability of this image to subvert reality, while at the same time being constitutive of it, made the trope of head taking a powerful tool on in what I call a semiotics of terror. Indigenous acts of terror fed into this trope. Reports and rumors of indigenous torture, mutilation and head taking, true or false, enabled the trope of the indigenous head taker to survive when empirical data threatened to expose that image as a sham.¹⁵

The first part of this chapter argues that British settlers and soldiers as well as indigenous warriors were entangled in a violent process of meaning-making in which the bodies and heads of enemies and compatriots appeared as discursive elements in a language of brutality, retribution and power. In the British and indigenous imagination, human heads featured as unsettled, abject and destabilizing, embodying to varying degrees an object of science or ritual, a narrative of violence, and an icon of power. Head taking in the Cape, I suggest, was not simply a military tactic or scientific activity, it was also as mode of interaction contributed to by the different sides in what came to be experienced as an ecology of terror. David Bunn, for example, has argued that the practice of head taking in the Cape Colony brought together landscape and the human body in an intensely traumatic drama of beauty and terror. Landscapes littered with mutilated bodies, he suggests, “became important as a brutal *means of communication* between

“noble savage” constituted such a tropical element in discourses about human difference. Hayden White writes: “Tropic is the shadow from which all realistic discourse tries to flee. This flight, however, is futile; for tropics is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively.” Hayden White, “Introduction: Topology, Discourse, and the Modes of Human Consciousness,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 2. For the “Wild man” as trope in colonial discourse, see his “The Forms of Wildness: An Archaeology of an Idea,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 150-82. See also Andrew Bank, “The Return of the Noble Savage: The Changing Image of Africans in Cape Colonial Art, 1800-1850,” *South African Historical Journal*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998), 17-43.

¹⁵ I am adapting an insight from Mary Louise Pratt, who has argued that at the level of ideology, natural historical descriptions “created global imaginings above and beyond commerce.” They articulated and reinforced, often pre-existing, ideas about “non-European” and “non-urban” worlds and peoples. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 33-5 (especially 34).

sides.”¹⁶The body and its parts had become signs that spelled out the brutality and inhumanity of the other while asserting, in no uncertain terms, the intent and power of the other. As Laura Franey has suggested, indigenous remains shared with both kinds of objects the ability “to operate as legible signs of the power possessed by the man who displays them.”¹⁷ Simon Harrison, in turn, has argued that the remains of the indigenous dead unsettled the boundaries between trophy and specimen. But what they did share was the ability to embody the power of its possessor.¹⁸ However, the evidence also suggests that indigenous peoples struggled to redefine the meaning of the heads they took and those that were taken in the violent context of frontier warfare. To them, the severed head of a British soldier may have made a ritual vessel for the preparation of war medicines, as many British observers wanted to believe, but it also represented an appropriation of a language of violence that the British sought to monopolize.

This chapter shies away from David Webb’s conclusion about historical responsibility. Exposing contradictions and omissions in British accounts of Xhosa head taking, Webb challenges the idea that the Xhosa frequently took the heads of their enemies prior to the death and mutilation of Hintsá, the paramount chief of the Xhosa, in 1835.¹⁹ I, however, sidestep this question, not because I believe the question itself is not important, but because I believe the evidence, or the absence thereof, can be marshaled in the service of both sides.²⁰ While it may seem to open the door to historical nihilism, this unsettledness of the evidence is at the core of

¹⁶ D. Bunn, “Morbid Curiosities: Mutilation, Exhumation and the Fate of Colonial Painting,” *Transforming Anthropology*, vol. 8, no. 1-2 (1999), 39-53 (especially 40).

¹⁷ Laura Franey, “Ethnographic Collecting and Travel: Blurring Boundaries, Forming a Discipline,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2001), 219-39 (especially 225-6).

¹⁸ Harrison, *Dark Trophies*, 80.

¹⁹ Webb, “War, Racism, and the Taking of Heads,” 50-54.

²⁰ I do, however, incline to agree with Webb in that an examination of the chronology of events suggests that the Xhosa started taking heads with more frequency after Hintsá’s death. *Ibid.*, 55.

the point I am trying to make. These flaws and silences, I suggest, reveal one of the most nefarious, and hardly unintended, consequences of the semiotic process the British and indigenous peoples in the Cape Colony were entangled in: its ability to warp the historical record.²¹ As objects, the heads that made it into collections in Britain have a story to tell. Taken together, their physical marks, their trajectories, their histories and the ethnographic materials that accompanied them constitute a narrative. What that narrative speaks of (or elides), and how it does so, are the subjects of the following chapter.

Exploring published and manuscript accounts, letters, reports and accession records for evidence of head taking during South Africa's Frontier Wars, I am interested in what is forgotten as much as in what is remembered.²² If British accounts of warfare on the Cape frontier emphasized indigenous violence, these accounts downplayed or omitted accounts of their own brutality. British commentators often referred to the atrocities committed by their own forces as "unspeakable" or "unnamable." When British brutality does appear in the historical record, it seems to rear its ugly head only in the face of an even uglier indigenous savagery. This "language of concealment" allowed British officials and observers to portray themselves as the

²¹ For the relationship between power and the ability of those in power to create silences in history, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

²² I am drawing here on the work of Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger. Schiebinger adopts what Proctor has called "agnotology" to examine what we do not know, and why we do not know certain information. This "nontransfer" of knowledge, Schiebinger suggests, is not always an instance of "ignorance;" more often than not, it is "the outcome of cultural and political struggle." See Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 3; and Robert N. Proctor, *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What we Know and Don't Know about Cancer* (New York: basic Books, 1995); and his "Agnotology: A missing Term to Describe the Study of the 'Cultural Production of Ignorance' (and its Study)," in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-36.

passive victims of specific acts of cruelty, while attributing their own involvement to conditions out of their control.²³

British collectors inscribed these telling silences onto the indigenous heads they took. The remains of the indigenous dead thus entered the imperial storeroom and the colonial archive not only as the raw materials of human classification, but also as enduring icons of indigenous violence and incommensurability.²⁴ By silencing their own unspeakable acts, the British complemented the extermination of the Cape natives from the land, with the violation of the indigenous peoples in the historical record. One way of remedying this imbalance is to subject the spoils of head taking in the Cape to what Ricardo Roque calls a “biography of things.” In taking the human heads that became the resources for Europe’s racial hierarchies as the vantage point for this chapter, I hope to restore to these objects of anthropological classification the virtues and vices of historical narration, that which the historical record shines a light on, and that which it hides in its shadows.²⁵ If the historical responsibility for head taking in South Africa remains obscure here, I hope the historical conditions in which the practice appeared and how it survived in the historical record will not.

²³ For the use of this “language of concealment” in the slave trade, see Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2007), 151.

²⁴ Janet Hoskins, building on the work of Nicholas Thomas, has proposed a similar conclusion about the transfer of the spoils of head hunting in Southeast Asia to collections in Europe. “Relocated to museums, catalogues, and archives, these skulls are removed from their historical context in a society where ancestors are important and are turned into evidence of a ‘timeless’ state of primitive savagery. Once entangled in the processes of colonial representation, the heads, exported to Australia, Europe, and the United States, assume new meanings as trophies of the Western appropriation of indigenous history and personhood.” Janet Hoskins, “Introduction: Headhunting as Practice and as Trope,” in Janet Hoskins, ed., *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 16-7.

²⁵ Ricardo Roque, *Headhunting and Colonialism: Anthropology and the Circulation of Human Skulls in the Portuguese Empire, 1870-1930* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 153.

Toward a Semiotics of Terror in South Africa

Before turning to the practice of head taking in South Africa and its silences in the historical record, I wish to explore the process that made it intelligible, yet unspeakable, to participants and observers on all sides: the semiosis of terror. Like public executions in Europe prior to the nineteenth century, the terrible spectacle of torture, mutilation or dismemberment projected to the audience the heinousness of the crime committed by the sufferer. Unlike in Europe, amidst the horrors of nineteenth-century wars in the Cape, the body had not ceased to be the object of punitive politics. While all across Europe, the mutilated, tortured and dismembered body was increasingly shielded from the public's eye, in the colonies, it resurfaced in the most violent way.²⁶ This, I argue, only enhanced the degrees of separation between civilized Europe and the savage colonies. This violent process of meaning-making came to incorporate the enemy body as a means of communicating a politics of terror on the frontier. Mutilation, torture and fragmentation were the technologies of translation that made this politics intelligible to those involved. Moreover, more than mere tactics of war, these technologies became tropic elements in how each side (mis)understood the other. They harnessed and gave expression to a colonial distress that both Englishmen and indigenous people experienced in different ways.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony was a hostile place. Its fauna, its climate, and its inhabitants not only exposed the vulnerabilities of European settlers and soldiers, they also threatened to obliterate that which distinguished

²⁶ Here, my analysis draws on, and adds to, Michel Foucault's analysis of penal aggression in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. Foucault argues that by that time, "the body as the major target of penal repression disappeared." I argue that this shift away from the body in Europe was critical to the meaning of the body in the colonies. It sustained the belief that the colonies were more savage, brutal and less civilized. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995[1977]), 8. For the disappearance of public executions in Europe, see V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 589-612; and Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 239-65.

Europeans most: their civilization. The Dutch Boers were the first to experience this vulnerability in their association with the indigenous tribes. As their movement into Bushmen, Khoikhoi and Xhosa hunting and herding lands accelerated during the 1770s, they were often forced to live in such paltry conditions and close proximity with their indigenous servants that European travelers remarked on the decline of civilization among these colonists. Contact with inferior races, it was believed, would lead to the degeneration of Europeans. As early as the 1730s the Dutch visitor Hendrik Swellengrebel predicted that his compatriots would soon experience a “complete bastardization of morals from so primitive a life-style in the veld” and “a complete degenerate nation, which might become just as dangerous for the colony as the Bushman-Hottentots now are.”²⁷ Henry Lichtenstein believed that the isolation and privations of life on the frontier had made the Dutch Boer “more indifferent to the higher enjoyments of the mind and heart,” and that he would soon “sink gradually into a sort of demi-savages.”²⁸

However, Dutch settlers retained one redeeming virtue: their faith. European observers lauded the religiosity and moral restraint of the trekboers. This sturdy and pious frontiersman, George McCall Theal writes, “understood the imagery of the Hebrew writers more perfectly than anyone in Europe could understand it for it spoke to him in his daily life.”²⁹ Christianity was

²⁷ Quoted from “Petition from some inhabitants to the governor and the Political Council of the Cape, 11 February 1784,” in *Afrikaner Political Thought: 1780-1850*, ed. André Du Toit and Hermann Buhr Giliomee (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 41-44 (especially 43). Many travelers shared a similar sense of the deteriorating effects of the Boers living in such close proximity to their Khoikhoi servants and laborers. See also O. F. Mentzel, *Description of the Cape of Good Hope, 1787* (Cape Town, South Africa: van Riebeeck Society, 1969), vol. 3, 119; and John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, undertaken at the request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry & Co., and T. Hamilton, 1815), 285.

²⁸ Henry Lichtenstein, *Travels in southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*, transl. Anne Plumtre (London: Henry Colburn, 1812), 364.

²⁹ George McCall Theal continues: “He had heard the continuous roll of thunder which was the voice of the Lord upon the waters, and he had seen the affrightened antelopes drop their young as they fled before the storm, when the great trees came down with a crash and the lightening divided like flames of fire. .. When he spoke of these things he could not be eloquent enough, but they were not subjects for conversation with casual visitors.” George McCall

their strongest link to civilization. Nevertheless, the exigencies of frontier life, as well as the proximity of Dutch settlers and Bushmen, soon produced a cycle of violence that would have even upset some of these Hebrew writers. The closing of the gap between Dutch settler and Bushman, between colonizer and colonized, bred in the minds of the settlers a kind of colonial distress about who they were, which, when the time came, they sought to relieve by violently expelling the other from the land, or from this life.

During the middle of the 1770s, this violence surfaced in clashes between Dutch commandos authorized by the Dutch East India Company and the San (known as “Bushmen”), as the former encroached onto their lands along the mountains of the Great Escarpment on the eastern and northern borders of the Cape Colony. The very first of these commandos in 1774 returned from a campaign into the South African interior reporting that they had killed more than five hundred Bushman and taken two hundred prisoners.³⁰ It was the cruel wastefulness of the San that upset the frontier settler most. In retaliation for a commando raid, Bushmen would often turn to “mere wantonness,” slaughtering the animals of Europeans and Xhosa alike, rather than abducting them.³¹ Dutch settlers failed to make sense of such acts of violence, but they responded in kind. As a result of their wasteful slaughtering of herds, one observer writes, the San “render themselves odious to the rest of mankind, and are pursued and exterminated like wild beasts, whose manners they have assumed.”³² But the loss of human life was still limited. As one Englishman observed in 1809, the ire of the Bushmen almost never claimed the lives of

Theal, *History and Ethnography of Africa South of the Zambesi, 1505-1795* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 3, 301-2.

³⁰ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 220.

³¹ Lichtenstein, *Travels*, 362.

³² Anders Sparrman traveled around the Cape region in 1775-6. Quoted in Donald Moodie, ed., *The Record: Or, a Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), vol. 3, 56, footnote.

the settlers themselves, only those of their Khoikhoi herdsmen.³³ European land encroachment and indigenous resistance sporadically submerged the frontier into a cycle of punitive campaigns and retaliation that would endure well into the nineteenth century.

Europeans retaliated with an unforgiving brutality. Commandos and military campaigns sanctioned by the Dutch East India Company and later the British colonial government sought to hunt down indigenous insurgents and cattle thieves. Seizing cattle, killing native warriors and abducting into indenture their women and children, these European campaigns were the instruments of colonial terror. The violence of these raids spared no one. As early as 1774, one Boer commando responded to concerns about women and children killed during one of their raids by claiming it was an act of mercy on those accidentally wounded “in order that their death might not be still crueller.”³⁴ In the space of six years, the author of the one of the previous passages, Colonel R. Collins, an Englishman, had “killed or taken 3,200 of the unfortunate creatures,” and he had heard from another officer who “had caused the destruction of 2,700.”³⁵ When the British permanently acquired the Cape of Good Hope in 1806, the government sent British veterans of the peninsular war to conduct the campaigns against the natives. Officers like Sir Harry Smith brought with them a brutality and ruthlessness forged in the crucible of European war. When in 1813 he was about to rejoin the peninsular war, Smith’s mother asked him two “favours.” First, she made him promise never to enter a billiard-room. Second, she implored with him: “if ever you meet your enemy, remember you are born a true Englishman.” Writing his autobiography, Smith was fairly certain he had fulfilled the first promise, but as for

³³ R. Collins, “Collins’ Report on the Bosjesmen,” in Moodie, *The Record*, vol. 1, 33-8 (especially 34).

³⁴ “Extracts from the Records of the Board of Landdrost and Militia Officers Stellenbosch,” in Moodie, *The Record*, vol. 3, 41-2 (especially 41).

³⁵ R. Collins, “Journal of a Tour to the North-Eastern Border, the Orange River, and the Storm Mountains; by Colonel Collins, in 1809,” in Moodie, *The Record*, vol. 1,

the second promise to his mother, he could only “hope I have.”³⁶ There was a realization among these veterans that British soldiers could match, and even overtake, the savagery of their native enemy. “Civilized man, when let loose and the bonds of morality relaxed,” Smith admitted, “is a far greater beast than the savage, more refined in his cruelty, more fiend-like in every act.”³⁷

Recognizing the technological superiority of the invaders, indigenous warriors soon adopted a new method of engaging their enemy that would only exacerbate European retaliation. This guerilla warfare depended on the swift movement of small bands of warriors, short engagements with a high probability for success, and quick retreats when resistance proved too resilient. As one soldier records, “Day after day officers and men tore their way through the thick jungle without seeing an enemy and yet as we approached or left the [Water]kloof the shots fired at us showed us they were there.” His commander, Colonel Fordyce of the 74th Highlanders, “was positive that the place was deserted,” for he had “come through it with his whole regiment ... without firing a shot.” The next day, however, “he was killed.”³⁸ This kind of warfare left an indelible imprint on the mindset of the European soldier. Joël Mostert has suggested that these early clashes between Europeans and native tribes represented the first instances of guerilla warfare between indigenous peoples and colonists. However, as Peter Silver, among others, has shown, British soldiers and settlers had encountered this kind of violence before, in the fledgling colonies of North America, where settlers honed “an enraptured discourse of fear” into an “anti-Indian sublime” and in the process shaped their colonial identity.³⁹ Nevertheless, in South Africa,

³⁶ Sir Harry George Wakelyn Smith, *The Autobiography of Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Smith*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company; London: J. Murray, 1902), 158-9.

³⁷ Smith, *Autobiography*, 68.

³⁸ Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 18.

³⁹ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), xix-xx, and also 39-72, 227-60. For another analysis of this kind of violence, including its

the skirmishes “demonstrated all that was to become familiar in such campaigns, where the native enemy was never fully grappled with and put down, remained elusive, master of his retreat, thereby inciting the special brand of hatred, harsh and merciless pursuit and no quarter that the frustrations of such fighting invariably induced.”⁴⁰ British troops frequently expressed frustration at not being able to see the enemy, and when he did appear, he struck with a swiftness and ferocity that bred hatred. The result was a colonial martial culture in which posthumous mutilation in general, and the taking of heads in particular, no longer seemed out of place.

The events of the First Zulu War (1824-8) crushed any hopes British soldiers might have of salvaging their “Englishness” in the face of this new kind of fighting. Frontier violence erased the lines between colonizer and colonized, necessitating uncomfortable alliances between European settlers and soldiers, and native tribes. Shaka’s forces had been laying waste to the country and inhabitants of the Transkei region. It was to be the first real taste of frontier warfare for the British military in the Cape Colony. The British commander in the region, Henry Somerset, mustered a force of British regulars, Khoikhoi soldiers, Boers and colonists, along with Tembu and Xhosa warriors. In August of 1828 they attacked the encampment of the Zulu leader Matiwane with indiscriminate brutality. Afterwards, “the field presented a scene indescribably shocking,” Stockenstrom writes, “old, decrepit men, with their bodies pierced, and heads almost cut off; pregnant females ripped open, legs broken, and hands severed from the arms, as if for ... the armllets, or some trifling ornament; little children mutilated and horribly

religious implications during the seventeenth-century wars of extermination in North America, see Susan Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 17-75 and 76-125.

⁴⁰ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 218.

mangled.”⁴¹ The enemy body, mutilated and fragmented, reflected the brutality and disorder of this new kind of warfare.

It is no coincidence that Stockenström ascribes this horrific scene to a mixed force of European regulars and indigenous allies. To the British imagination, the violence natives visited upon members of their own or rival groups represented the most savage scenes in colonial war. Stephen Kay, for example, lists the Xhosa methods of punishment resulting in death, including stabbing, stoning or clubbing, burning and strangling. In all cases, Kay had noticed, the purpose of the method seemed to be to extend the victim’s suffering.⁴² When in 1834-5 the Xhosa realized that the Mfengu might side with the British in their wars, British soldiers were horrified by the animosity and violence Xhosa warriors visited upon a people they considered inferior to themselves. The Xhosa, Bisset reports, killed Mfengu men and women alike, and like the raid on a Zulu encampment in 1828, young women “had their bosoms cut out.”⁴³ Observers found this kind of violence against women, European and indigenous alike, particularly unsettling.⁴⁴

By the mid-nineteenth century, racial prejudice animated the treatment of the enemy body after death on both sides. White and black bodies were subjected to mutually reinforcing racial prejudices. Observing the atrocities of Mlanjeni’s War (1850-3), missionaries James Laing and Richard Birt feared that the present conflict would decide the matter of the superior race for

⁴¹ Stephen Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria, Describing the Character, Customs, and Moral Condition of the Tribes Inhabiting that Portion of Southern Africa* (London: John Mason, 1833), 332.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 180-1.

⁴³ John Bisset, *Sport and War* (London: John Murray, 1875), 21. Cutting off the breasts of females from other tribes was a particularly powerful scene of native savagery in the mind of the English observer. Stephen Kay observes a similar instance, see *Travels*, 332.

⁴⁴ Gender should be a part of my analysis here. It remains a mostly unspoken and underdeveloped element in this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole. Susan Juster pointed this out to me recently and I felt there was simply not enough time to weave it into this discussion in a way that would do justice to the subject.

once and for all. “The war of colour now seems to have commenced,” James Laing believed.⁴⁵ When the Khoikhoi of the Kat River region rebelled against their European allies, James Read Junior remarked that “there seemed to ooze out the premonitions of a war of races, and a threatening of the extermination of whites or blacks.”⁴⁶ As Jochen Arendt has shown, the images of “treacherous savages” and “merciless barbarians” that developed in military discourse between 1834-5 and 1850-3 increasingly loosened any moral restraints British regulars still had in their engagements with the Xhosa.⁴⁷ As a result, British regulars ceased to view the indigenous enemy as human. “I could feel no compunction in shooting a Kaffir,” a nineteen-year-old Lancer wrote to his mother in 1852, “and yet I could not shoot a dog without feeling some pity, and yet I could feel none for this [Xhosa].” Killing Xhosa, he added, “is like killing rats and mice, only not quite so easy.”⁴⁸

Such racial prejudice was not a product of the Cape’s ecology of terror, but it was exacerbated, and ultimately transformed in a deep hatred, by the cruelty and pervasiveness of violence it encountered in South Africa. Although he had never before seen a Xhosa in the flesh, an ensign on his way to the Cape in 1847 composed a doggerel that combined the inhumanity of the indigenous with the belief that cannibalism was nearly universal among them:

⁴⁵ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1077.

⁴⁶ James Read, *Kat River settlement in 1851: described in a series of letters published in “The South African commercial advertiser”* (Cape Town, South Africa: A. S. Robertson, 1852), 48.

⁴⁷ Jochen Arendt, “Treacherous Savages & Merciless Barbarians: Knowledge, Discourse and Violence During the Cape Frontier Wars,” *Journal of Military History*, vol. 74, no. 3 (2010), 710-1.

⁴⁸ Elwes Deposit 2/1, Lincolnshire Archives, V. D. C. Elwes-Mother, 11 February, 13 March 1852. Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 24.

Hunt this 'black game' o'er their hills,
Dose them with your 'leaden pills',
Sing; digest these if you can,
Or keep your distance [Xhosa] man,
Come on ye cannibals, come on,
Roast, and eat us one by one...⁴⁹

The Xhosa, too, began to exhibit the same kind of racial prejudice British troops had been showing towards the indigenous body. On the eve of the War of the Axe (1846-7), Buck Adams, a private in the 7th Dragoon Guards, witnessed Xhosa justice done. A Xhosa woman had been caught having sexual intercourse with one of the British soldiers near Fort Beaufort. While such relations were not uncommon between Xhosa women and European visitors, by the middle of the decade tensions between the two groups had risen to such a point where the act constituted a particularly heinous form of defilement and betrayal. Five Hundred Xhosa surrounded the British soldiers soon afterwards, singling out the Xhosa woman's defiler and threatening to "cut him to pieces joint by joint."⁵⁰ The British refused to hand him over and during the night Xhosa numbers swelled to more than one thousand. The British soldier being unavailable, the Xhosa then turned to the Xhosa woman. They lit a bonfire and dragged her through it until she collapsed in agony and died. As Joël Mostert demonstrates, the brutality of the punishment far outweighed the nature of the woman's trespass. Where death by fire was usually reserved for those accused of witchcraft, the kind of sexual indiscretion the woman had committed was hardly a crime at all, and certainly did not warrant this kind of torture. Crucially, though, the fate

⁴⁹ Letter from ensign Whittle to his parents, September 1847, from G. Everson, ed., "The Whittle Letters, 1847-49" [an unpublished typescript, a copy of which can be found at the National Army Museum, London, NAM 1988-03-04]. Quoted in Webb, "The Taking of Heads," 43-4.

⁵⁰ W. J. Adams, *The Narrative of Private Buck Adams: 7th (Princess royal's) Dragoon Guards, on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape of Good Hope, 1843-1848* (Cape Town, South Africa: The Van Riebeeck Society, 1941), 49-50.

of the Xhosa woman shows how the Xhosa treatment of the body now came to embody the same racial bias Europeans had been showing towards the black body.⁵¹

By the War of the Axe (1846-7) and the Mlanjeni's War (1850-3), the mutilation and fragmentation of the enemy body seemed to have become an endemic part of frontier warfare in South Africa. As we will see, British soldiers feared for the fate of their remains. The Xhosa, too, had reason to fear for their bodies after death; and they, too, sought to protect the bodies of their dead from further suffering. Making his way across contested territory to Fort White in search of his wife in early 1851, the missionary George Brown spotted a group of Xhosa in the bush surrounding the scene of particularly brutal fighting. "My impression was that they were hiding," he recalls, "or burying the bodies of some of their dead, which they are most careful to keep out of sight when killed in an engagement."⁵² These were all things the Xhosa stood to lose in their struggle with the British, and they were learning this lesson the hard way. Colonel Eyre, a particularly skilled commander of the 73rd regiment on the frontier, who had adopted the "waylaying" tactics of the Xhosa, also used the bodies of Xhosa's killed in battle in a grim spectacle. When the 73rd regiment engaged a group of Xhosa in February 1853, they shot two of them and hung their bodies in nearby trees "as a warning to all who might pass that way." At times, the remains were so fresh, that passing soldiers could see the blood "trickling from the forehead."⁵³ The scattered remains of the Xhosa killed in battle gave off such a horrible stench that even the most battle-hardened soldiers recoiled in disgust.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 855-6.

⁵² George Brown, *Personal Adventure* (London, 1855), 126.

⁵³ Diary of Private E. G. Richards, 18 February 1853, Mellish Hodsock Papers, University of Nottingham. Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 26.

⁵⁴ William Ross King, *Campaigning in Kaffirland, Or, Scenes and Adventures in the Kaffir War of 1851-2* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1853), 271.

When Mlanjeni's War ended in March 1853, Colonel Eyre prepared to sail for the Crimea and he vowed "to be more civilised [there] than he was in Africa."⁵⁵ As this comment shows, the British considered their own savagery a choice. In Europe, the nature of war, not the nature of man, conditioned their behavior. By the mid-nineteenth century the violent treatment of the enemy body became an integral part of the bloody drama that was playing out on the South African frontier, as it had done elsewhere in Britain's colonies, enacting in a vicious and visceral manner the "otherness" of the enemy. By the mid-nineteenth century, the brutality they displayed towards the native body expressed the violent denial of the natives' humanity in a language Eyre believed the indigenous understood all too well. As each side dismembered the other through mutilation and torture, they also reconstructed a terrible image of the other, drawing on both reality and imagination. With this trope implanted deep into the minds of both colonizer and colonized, the conditions appeared ready for head taking to enter the fray as both practice and trope.⁵⁶

"I fight for my head": Head Taking as Practice and Trope, 1846-7 and 1850-3

The practice of head taking enacted a violent denial of the other by appropriating and exceeding his brutality. In Europe, dismemberment during and after violent confrontations was not uncommon during the late Middle Ages and later, nor were rumors of European headhunting.⁵⁷ Once exported to the frontiers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, head taking became a

⁵⁵ Acc 6807/231, L. Graham, *Diary of the Crimean war*, National Army Museum.

⁵⁶ Janet Hoskins has coined a similar phrase for headhunting in Southeast Asia. See her "Introduction: Headhunting as Practice and as Trope," in Hoskins, *Headhunting*, 1-49.

⁵⁷ J. Gillingham, "Killing and Mutilating Political Enemies in the British Isles from the Late twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Century: A Comparative Study," in B. Smith, ed., *Britain and Ireland, 900-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 114-34; B. Jezernik, "Head-Hunting in Europe: Montenegrin Heroes, Turkish Barabrians, and Western Observers," *Ethnologia Europaea*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2001), 21-36.

powerful instrument of terror. By the mid-nineteenth century both sides had come to fear the savagery of the other. In the martial ecology of the frontier wars, head taking had become a technology of translation, turning the body of the enemy and its parts into “insignia of power.”⁵⁸ It made intelligible the brutality and inhumanity of the other to both the perpetrator and the descendants of the victims. As I have shown, this semiotics of terror depended on the ability of violence committed against the enemy to showcase not one’s own brutality, but by a process of mirroring, the savagery and inhumanity of the victim, whose nature and actions seemed to require such a violent response. In this context, British and indigenous head taking emerged as an instrument of retribution. Conversely, taking possession of the body of a fallen compatriot became a way of evading the punitive aspect of posthumous mutilation and head taking, thereby reclaiming one’s own humanity and elucidating the other’s inhumanity.

Accounts of British head taking increase in the historical record for the frontier wars of 1846-7 and 1850-3. One member of the Greenjackets regiment, the first British regiment to adapt their uniform to the new style of fighting, paints an unusually candid picture of British troops and their allies severing the heads of their enemies. “As we descended,” he records, “the evidences of the fight became more frequent; rolling skulls, dislodged by those in front, came bounding down between our legs; the bones lay thick among the loose stones in the sluits and gulleys, and the bush on either side showed many a bleaching skeleton.” Stumbling on “a fine specimen of a [Xhosa] head,” he put it into his saddlebags and “brought it home with me to Scotland, where it has been much admired by phrenologists for its fine development.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ I am borrowing this term from Eliane Scarry’s examination of pain and torture. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 56.

⁵⁹ J. Fisher-Mother, Greenjackets Regimental Museum, Winchester. Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 26.

Although remarkable for the candid manner in which it speaks about British head taking, by mid-century this soldier's account was no longer unique.

Battles such as these, and the many others that were fought on the eastern border of the Cape colony, provided an immediate source of human specimens for collections in Europe. In 1866, the Staff-Surgeon of the 11th Foot, Mr. Black, sent to Flower at the Hunterian Museum three skulls from South Africa, including one from a Xhosa and another belonging to a "Hottentot." Black had acquired the Xhosa skull in May 1847, during the War of the Axe (1846-7). It belonged to a Xhosa chief who had been shot by a member of the Rifle Brigade near Mount Coke, British Kaffraria. He had claimed to have obtained the skull from the battle field and "prepared [it] on the spot." Almost four years later, now stationed at Whittlesea, North Victoria, Cape of Good Hope, he acquired and prepared the skull of a rebel Khoikhoi killed in battle in much the same way.⁶⁰ Besides lives, British soldiers were acquiring a reputation for taking heads. It is perhaps for this reason that the Xhosa leader Sandile, when meeting with Khoikhoi rebels in 1851 to form an alliance against the British, told them: "I am glad to see you, my friends. I am an oppressed man. I fight for my head, my country, liberty, my grass and water."⁶¹

The scientific collecting thrived in the brutal environment of frontier warfare. British medical officers like Black often gave soldiers orders to take heads, or ransack battlefields, and prepare their spoils for shipment to Europe. Their hearts hardened by their hatred for the enemy and their moral feelings muted by the atrocities of the battlefield, British regulars eagerly

⁶⁰ Black inquired about these skulls and those from Russian individuals in 1871. He mentions three "African skulls, but the records of the Hunterian Museum show that only two were confirmed as from South Africa. The other one had belonged to a Chinese child. RCS-MUS/5/2/2, p.95, RCS, 1868-1873, Museum Letter Book, vol. 2. Letter from [W. T.] Black, Edinburgh, to William H. Flower, Curator of the Hunterian Museum, 7 November 1871. See also Flower, (1879), 244; and Flower (1907), 409-410; and Flower, (1879), 245; and Flower (1907), 412.

⁶¹ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1088.

complied. An often-quoted description by Stephen Lakeman illustrates how this alliance could enlist British soldiers in the practice of head taking:

Doctor A--- of the 60th had asked my men to procure for him a few native skulls of both sexes. This was a task easily accomplished. One morning they brought back to camp about two dozen heads of various ages. As these were not supposed to be in a presentable state for the doctor's acceptance, the next night they turned my vat into a cauldron for the removal of superfluous flesh. And there these men sat, gravely smoking their pipes during the live-long night, and stirring round and round the heads in that seething boiler, as though they were cooking black-apple dumplings.⁶²

One of the skulls ended up the collection of the British Museum in 1846.⁶³

It was not uncommon for medical men serving in the armed forces in South Africa to engage in this kind of head taking. In his account of the Mlanjeni's War, a militia leader recalls being overwhelmed by "a dreadful stench." He sent out men to find the source of the smell, and soon his men reported that a local apothecary who had joined his forces had taken "one of [Xhosa's] heads we had shot the first day," put them in "another man's pot," and was now "boiling to get the meat off." Taylor reportedly kept the skull "in his shop until he died."⁶⁴

The sight and smell of native remains roused the curious Victorian mix of abhorrence and fascination. Confronted with the countless remains of Xhosa warriors, a soldier in the war of 1850-3 might have believed he was contributing to the science of phrenology when he picked up a skull from the battlefield. Nevertheless, he found himself repulsed by the conditions in which he had found his prize. Hanging in the trees, he saw the corpses of two Xhosa who had just been

⁶² Stephen Lakeman, *What I Saw in Kaffir-Land* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1880), 94-5. David Webb identifies Doctor A--- as Thomas Alexander, the surgeon of the 60th regiment at the time. See Webb, "War, racism, and the Taking of Heads," 47, fn. 62.

⁶³ DF [ZOO/218/2/1, 192, DF [ZOO/218/2/1, Accessions Register (1844-1846). I am reasonably certain that this is the skull: the place of origin, date of its acquisition and the reference to a Mr. Alexander all support this conclusion.

⁶⁴ Thomas Stubbs, *The Reminiscences of Thomas Stubbs, including Men I have known*, ed. W. A. Maxwell and R. T. McGeogh (Cape Town, South Africa: Balkema (A. A.); for Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1978), 176.

shot, and the whole place “stunk horribly from the bodies of the dead [Xhosa] that were lying about.”⁶⁵ But such scenes and smells were not supposed to upset the sensibility of the man of science. As early as 1799, Georges Cuvier had advised travelers to collect human specimens for collections in Europe. He provided them with instructions on how to boil the heads to remove skin and muscle tissue. Moreover, he also recommended submerging the specimen in a corrosive fluid and drying it to preserve the flesh and facial forms. While he acknowledged that sailors – the instructions were aimed at men serving in the Navy – might see such acts as “barbarous,” Cuvier implored their superiors to let scientific work be “governed only by reason.”⁶⁶

To reduce British head taking to acts of scientific collecting overlooks an important ritual aspect of head taking that both the British and the indigenous came to share. In many instances, the British saw it as an extension of their punitive politics. They perceived the mutilation of the indigenous body in general, and the taking of heads in particular, in terms of punishment or retribution. Mlanjeni’s War of 1850-3 was not only South Africa’s largest conflict, it was also its most brutal. Mangled and mutilated bodies littered the battlefields on both sides. The brutality of the fighting soon spiraled into vindictiveness. “Give no quarter to any Kaffir,” Harry Smith proclaimed, since “we receive none at *their* hands.” But Smith wanted more. “Rather put a price upon them, as you would upon so many beasts of prey,” he spoke to the hunting spirit of his men, “and honestly pay the same, for every [Xhosa] head which might be brought in.”⁶⁷ Smith’s

⁶⁵ J. P. Fisher-Mother, Greenjackets regimental Museum, Winchester. Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 26.

⁶⁶ Cuvier, “Note instructive,” 70-1.

⁶⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel E. Napier certainly believed that such a treatment was warranted and advocated that the government issue standing orders that “henceforth any rebel or traitor who might fall into our hands: be he Kaffir, Hottentot, of Fingoe; Colonist, Winkler, or Missionary (Whisper this not at Exeter Hall) should be forthwith handed over to the tender mercies of the Provost Marshall, and hanged or shot, ‘without benefit of the clergy’.” Colonel Eyre and other officers gladly passed on Smith’s order for no quarter to their men and reprimanded anyone who refused or hesitated to follow it. E. Napier, “Suggestive Remarks on the Present Kaffir War,” *The United Service Magazine*, vol. 2 (1851), 327, 330. See also, Thomas Stubbs, *Reminiscences*, 161, 169.

order spelled out in words what their actions were enacting on the battlefield: the dehumanization of the other. And his troops responded in kind (see Figure 5.1).

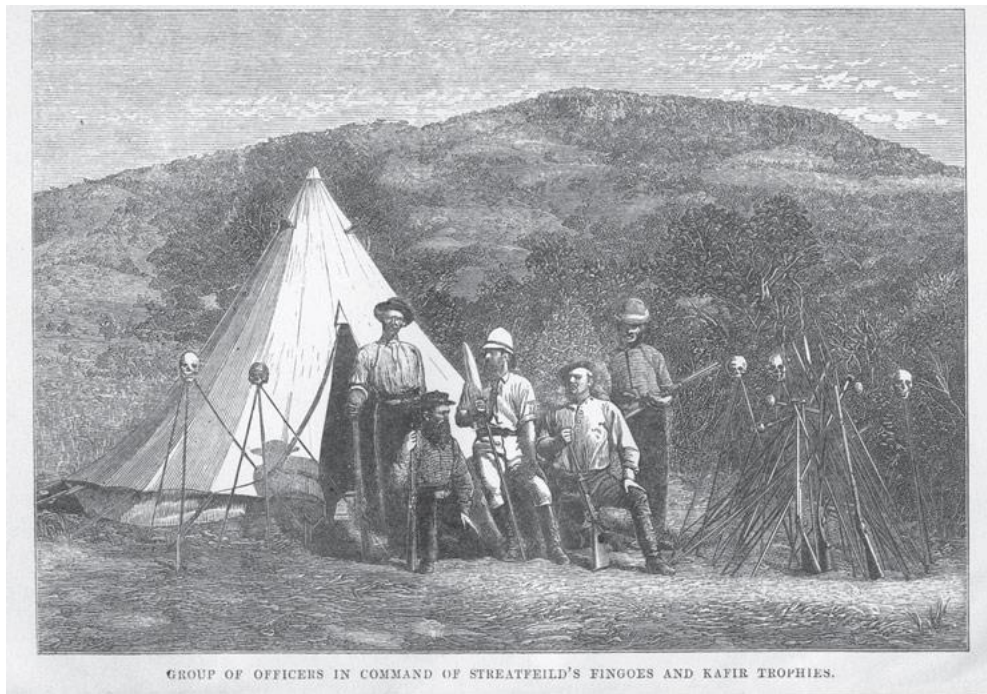


Fig. 5.1. British soldiers posing with indigenous skulls near Gwili-Gwili in the Amathole mountains, 1878. Caption reads: “Group of Officers in command of Streatfield’s Fingoes [indigenous auxiliaries] and Kafir trophies” From: F.N. Streatfeild, *Kafirland: A Ten Months’ Campaign* (London: 1879), frontis piece.

Some Britons recognized in Smith’s policies the very inhumanity they were fighting, exposing to the limelight a truth hidden from view by the accounts of indigenous violence. The candidness of Stephen Lakeman’s account of boiling native heads betrays his moral stance on the matter of head taking. Not only does Lakeman’s description convey his sense of outrage that the small copper vat he carried around for “Matutinal tubbing” had been commandeered by the surgeon of the 60th Royal American regiment for such a nefarious purpose, it also evokes images of the cannibal feast. Such scenes were usually associated with savages. Now, however, such a brutal scene was being applied to British regulars. Another critic was Charles Lennox Stretch, who had previously exposed the posthumous mutilation of Hints’a’s body by British regulars in 1835. He

now attempted to hold the British to their own standards. “The tale of oppression and injustice for the last ten years has not been told,” he remarked. “Native blood is once more running” across “this guilty land,” he continued, “to the disgrace of the Great Britain we belong to.” Harry Smith, he claims, had “invited the colonists to come and shoot the [Xhosa] without Mercy!!!!”⁶⁸ Some soldiers followed Smith’s orders, but could not help but feel some sympathy for these “fine fellows, who are only fighting for their country as we would do in their place.”⁶⁹ Thomas Stubbs distrusted anyone who would “talk very lightly about shooting Kaffirs.” He had always felt “grieved that my duty compelled me to do it.” During a raid he thought very little of it, but “before that, and after the excitement is over is the time any man must feel it.”⁷⁰

Nevertheless, despite such misgivings, frontier warfare in the Cape Colony offered the prospect of an auspicious harvest for collectors of human remains. In January 1877, Henry Wemiss Feilden wrote to Flower to tell him that he was about to leave for the Transvaal in South Africa. Since he had recently contributed an “Eskimo” skull from Greenland and an “Ashantee” one from the West Coast of Africa, he was eager to collect some human specimens from there.⁷¹ Anticipating that the Museum would already have plenty of Zulu specimens, he wondered whether Flower was interested in crania from the Boers. Mounting hostilities between Zulu and Boer forces in 1877 made Feilden hopeful and he fancied that “there will be a glut of them in the market by the time I get out.”⁷² He appears to have also collected several indigenous specimens.

⁶⁸ Charles Lennox Stretch, 20 January 1851, CMW, Box 26, London Missionary Society Archives. Quoted in Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1096.

⁶⁹ Lieutenant Bramston of the Rifle Brigade, quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 22.

⁷⁰ Stubbs, *Reminiscences*, 155.

⁷¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/3, 45, f. 3, RCS, 1874-1878, Museum Letter Book, vol. 3. Letter from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, [?] January 1877.

⁷² RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 94, f. 1-2, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, [?] January 1877.

By 1882 Feilden made good on his promise. The records at the Hunterian indicate that he donated seven South African skulls to the Hunterian Museum, including four from a battlefield in Isandhlwana, two from Ulundi, and one from Natal.⁷³ In a letter dated 15 October 1882, Feilden provided the histories of five of these. The first two belonged to “Zulu Warriors” who had fallen during the battle of Isandhlwanana in January 1879. They were part of a group of skeletons, “(perhaps, ten or twelve) huddled together among the rocks,” some 600 yards from the British encampment. One skull was a “much weathered cranium” belonging to a Xhosa.⁷⁴ The two others belonged to “Zulu warriors, killed at Ulundi” in July 1879. It was impossible for these to have belonged to British soldiers, Feilden reminded Flower, for “the few British that fell on that occasion were carefully buried.” The battlefield at Ulundi contained many more remains of Zulu Warriors, and a British resident of Zululand “was good enough to promise to aid me in getting a sackful of them sent to me from there.”⁷⁵

Feilden had not been the first collector to ransack the battlefield in Isandhlwanana. In January 1880, Henry F. Fynn, the Resident Magistrate of the Umsinga Division, South Africa, donated five skulls to the Hunterian Museum, including four from the “Ngobamosi Regiment,” a regiment composed of Zulu warriors, that had attacked the British encampment in January 1879.⁷⁶ The acquisition of these specimens had not been easy, Robert James Mann confirmed to

⁷³ Stewart, *Catalogue*, 406-407, no. 1285/6-9, 10-11, 12.

⁷⁴ One of these skulls was remarkable because it illustrated the way in which ‘Kaffirs’ treated the wounds received from a blow to the head. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 3-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

⁷⁵ The native practice included opening the skin around the wound and scraping bone off the skull. Uncertain about the origins of the practice, Feilden believed that it was done to relieve the pressure building up behind the skull, causing the wound to burst open. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 3-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

⁷⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 79, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Copy of a letter from James Dalzell, South Africa, to the Resident Magistrate of Umsinga District, South Africa, 6 January 1880. The other skull had belonged to an aged “Kaffir” woman, believed to have perished by exposure to the cold. See also RCS-MUS/5/2/4,

Flower, for they had “been secured after sundry adventures and difficulties.”⁷⁷ One of the skulls was that of a Zulu woman, who “was most probably a refugee from Zululand, who had lost her way in seeking a safe refuge in Natal.”⁷⁸ Battlefields such as these remained sources of human remains long after wars had ended. In 1884, Edward Nundy offered to the Hunterian an “Ashantee” skull from a warrior “killed in the war of 1872.” Nundy had found it in “the Valley of ‘Abrakumpa’ about 16 miles inland from Cape Coast Castle where it had been lying with about 200 others for the last 10 years.”⁷⁹

Just as most of the British in the Cape Colony failed to fully grasp the significance of Zulu, Xhosa and Khoikhoi head taking, indigenous men and women could not understand why British soldiers took the heads of their fallen enemies. During the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the Zulu king had captured a Dutch trader Cornelius Vijn. After having been routed by British forces in the battle of Kambula, Zulu survivors turned to the Dutchman and asked him: “Why did the Whites cut off the heads of those who had fallen, and put them into their wagons? What did they do with these heads? Or was it to let the Queen see how they had fought?” Vijn’s British editor, Bishop Colenso, mentions that these heads were likely Zulu skulls, “which (it is well known) were carried off by some Whites from the battle-field.”⁸⁰

Some accounts openly cast doubt over the claims of collectors that their acquisition of the remains of the native dead furthered the cause of science. Hoping to draw the Zulu king out of

76-77, f. 1-4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Copy of a letter from James Dalzell, South Africa, to the Resident Magistrate of Umsinga District, South Africa, 31 December 1879.

⁷⁷ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 81, f. 3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Robert James Mann to [William H. Flower at] Hunterian Museum, 25 February 1880.

⁷⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 86, f. 3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Robert James Mann to William H. Flower, Conservator of the Hunterian Museum, 15 June 1880.

⁷⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 6, f. 1, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from Edward Nundy to William Henry Flower, Conservator to the Hunterian Museum, [?] April 1884.

⁸⁰ Cornelius Vijn, *Cetshayo’s Dutchman: Being the Private Journal of a White Trader in Zululand during the British Invasion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880), 38.

hiding, British soldiers set out to unearth the remains of his father. A group of four hundred British soldiers and 180 native troops were in pursuit of the king's son but had failed to capture him. The officers then devised a plan to bait him. They asked a local pioneer to point out his father's grave, and the following morning they set out with "four spades and a pick." They soon took his bones, his skull and his teeth, and one of the medical officers placed the native remains into their wagon. When some of the "black people" asked the officers what they were doing, a captain responded: "We are doing it in order to catch the king; for, now that we have dug up his father, we shall soon catch him." The native pioneer who wrote down this account then asked his captain what would become of the king's remains. The captain answered: "They will be carried across the sea to be looked at." Bishop Colenso was appalled by the behavior of his compatriots. He considered the British plundering of the king's grave a "deed of shame," an "infamous act of sacrilege," and a great "insult" to the Zulu nation.⁸¹ He contrasted their behavior with that of the Zulu, who had shown great restraint in plundering the graves of British subjects.

If the desecration of native graves was not lost on some British observers sympathetic to the cause of South Africa's indigenous population, others explained the actions of British head collectors as the corruption of the individual by the nature of South African warfare itself. Having heard accounts of horrible things, including having witnessed the boiling of two dozen Xhosa heads to remove the skin, Stephen Lakeman was convinced that "the most atrocious villains, and the most lovable beings on the face of God's earth, are to be found among the white men." One of his men, he had learned, always carried with him a "broken reaping-hook, to cut the throats of women and children we had prisoners on our night expeditions."⁸² It was instances such as these, Lakeman found, that made Britons in the Cape indistinguishable from the savages

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 86-8.

⁸² Lakeman, *Kaffirland*, 94.

they had been sent to civilize. Sometimes, he considered the British soldier as the “legal hangman in the name of Nature’s undefined laws;” sometimes, he found him “simply a murderer.” At other times, however, he failed to see “which of the two.”⁸³ His assessment of the Xhosa, on the other hand, was much more positive. He praised their knowledge of medicines and surgery.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the ruthlessness and brutality of Cape warfare made it hard, if not impossible, for soldiers and settlers to remember that they were “true” Englishmen. But alongside accounts of British head taking soon appeared rumors and reports of the practice at the hands of the Xhosa and their allies.

British fears about posthumous mutilation in general, and head taking in particular, appear not to have been completely unfounded. As we have seen, violence against the enemy body, both living and dead, became more endemic and extreme on both sides during the War of the Axe (1846-7) and the war of Mlanjeni (1850-3). At this time, the Xhosa were engaged in brutal warfare with the British and their Khoikhoi and Mfengu allies. To English witnesses, the Xhosa appeared to covet the heads of their fallen foes. Robert Godlonton, an inhabitant of Graham’s Town during the war of 1834-5 and harsh critic of the Xhosa, recalls hearing of the deaths of several “defenceless and unresisting inhabitants” of the district. Troops had found the body a Mr. Turner “with his head nearly severed from his body, besides numerous other wounds in different parts of his person.” Shortly after they found the body of another Englishman “mutilated in the same savage manner.”⁸⁵ During a skirmish in Mlanjeni’s War, British soldiers

⁸³ *Ibid*, 96.

⁸⁴ Despite his aversion to the brutal practices of the British in South Africa, Lakeman almost lost his own head when the Queen knighted him. As one bystander, the Duke of Newcastle said: “Allow me to congratulate you as Sir Stephen Lakeman and as to having your head still on. I thought at one time Her Majesty was going to cut it off.” *Ibid.*, 141, 210.

⁸⁵ Robert Godlonton, *A Narrative of the Irruption of the Kafir Hordes Into the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope, 1834-35* (Grahams Town, South Africa: Meurant and Godlonton, 1836), 60.

had to retreat “while passing the dead and dying” who had endured “the merciless tortures and mutilations of the savage enemy.”⁸⁶ There is thus some evidence in the historical record that the Xhosa took heads in battle, although most of it, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is also controversial.

Later ethnographies provide explanations for the practice of posthumous mutilation among the Xhosa, but do not shed any light on endemic head taking among the indigenous tribes of the Cape. For the Xhosa, the bodies of the indigenous and British dead were part of a spiritual economy that elaborated the meaning of acts mutilation and provided a narrow ritual structure that circumscribed what could be done and what could be taken. For example, the Xhosa believed that the swelling of the body after death was caused by the invasion of a spirit (*iqungu*), which would seek to avenge the death of its host. To ward off any posthumous revenge, the Xhosa cut open the abdomens of fallen foes, British and indigenous, thereby releasing this vengeful spirit.⁸⁷ Dismemberment, too, could be part of this narrowly defined spiritual economy of warfare among the Xhosa. More often than not, the indigenous appropriation of body parts was part of an effort to collect the resources for war rituals.⁸⁸ The liver, for example, was the seat of an opponent’s courage and bravery, and consuming it would transfer some of those qualities

⁸⁶ Bisset, *Sport and War*, 87.

⁸⁷ John Henderson Soga concludes: “This superstition is at the bottom of the practice of mutilating the dead – fear of the *qungu*, and not, as some suppose it to be, due simply to wanton savagery.” John Henderson Soga, *The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1932), 76-7. See also James MacKay, *Reminiscences of the last kaffir war, with numerous anecdotes* (Cape Town, South Africa: Struik, 1970[1871]), 41, 151, 221.

⁸⁸ Bomela, for example, wardoctor to the last great Xhosa king Sarhili during the war of 1850-3, possessed the skull of a British soldier killed during the War of the Axe (1846-7). It was part of a series of objects, including a piece of Hintsas’s blanket, hair samples from Sarhili, and excreta from the great leader’s children. These objects were standard equipment for a wardoctor like Bomela, whom Xhosa leaders sought out to consult on military strategy and bless their soldiers. In the end, however, they sealed Bomela’s fate as a witchdoctor who had conspired against Sarhili’s reign, and Sarhili consented with Bomela’s execution. See Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 84.

to the person who had killed the individual to whom it belonged. Skulls, in turn, were used as vessels for war medicines.⁸⁹

British accounts of their own head taking sought to contrast their scientific logic with indigenous motives that linked head taking and witchcraft. Traveling in “Caffraria” in the early 1830s, Stephen Kay stumbled upon the “horrid alarum of war” amidst “lovely and picturesque valleys.” He had found human bones scattered around “heaps upon heaps of ashes” from Xhosa dwellings, and he picked up a skull “that was lying bleaching in the sun.”⁹⁰ Kay decided to carry it along with him. He was keenly aware that if they were caught with a skull in their possession, natives might draw superstitious conclusions. Coming upon an inhabited village, Kay decided to hide the skull in a nearby bush until they returned. He feared that “in the event of it being observed, or of any of the people getting an idea that such a thing was really in our possession, all would conclude at once that we were carrying about the much dreaded powers and purposes of witchcraft.”⁹¹ In the minds of British collectors, science and witchcraft determined the meaning of the skull. As scientific specimen, the human head was a token of British knowledge and civilization. As a ritual object, it was the subject of indigenous savagery and abjection.

One particular case shows how Xhosa head taking undermined faith in the potential for civilization of the Xhosa. After hearing of the fate of his son James, the Scottish missionary John Brownlee lost all hope. Despite having served the Xhosa for years, his belief in a bond of friendship between him and his assailants did not prevent James from suffering a “cruel death.” Afterwards, George Brown recalls, the Xhosa carried off his head as “a trophy, and a fit sacrifice to their witchdoctor, Umlajeni.” The barbarity of the mutilation undermined Brown’s confidence

⁸⁹ William Ross King also mentions the incident in his *Campaigning in Kaffirland*, 119.

⁹⁰ Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria*, 345.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 352

in the humanitarian cause. “And these are the poor blacks, for whom so many have such lively feelings of sympathy,” Brown fulminated. The mutilation of the remains of James Brownlee seemed particularly horrifying to British observers. “The barbarous treatment of his remains aggravates and adds intensity to the shock sustained by his honoured parents, his wife, and fondly attached brothers and sisters,” Brown recalls, “but his soul safe in the bosom of his Saviour, what matters it all!”⁹² In the end, it turns out that the Xhosa had accidentally taken the wrong head. They were after that of his brother Charles, who had been installed as chief over the Ngqika Xhosa by Harry Smith.⁹³ Brownlee’s cousin later claimed that the Xhosa were not interested in using his head in one of their war rituals; instead, they took out of revenge for the mutilation of Hintsu’s body in 1835.⁹⁴ A similar instance of punitive head taking seems to have occurred when Hermanus Matroos, a leader of the Kat River Khoikhoi rebels who joined forces with Mlanjeni in 1851, brought the severed heads of two British soldiers as “ocular proof” his allegiance.⁹⁵

Despite accounts to the contrary, reports of Xhosa dismemberment continued to link head taking to indigenous witchcraft. Xhosa ambushes near Debe Neck had left several British soldiers dead. British officer Jack Bisset recalls encountering the mutilated bodies of nineteen British servicemen. Their heads, he believed, had been carried off as proof of their deaths and “for the witch-doctors to work their spells upon.” These “devils,” as Bisset calls these witchdoctors, then liquified the brains and, while reciting incantations, sprinkled the substance over other Xhosa warriors, hoping to turn “the soldiers’ bullets into water, and to make her own

⁹² Brown, *Personal Adventure*, 140, 235-6. See also an account of the death and mutilation in Charles Brownlee, *Reminiscences of Kafir Life and History* (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Mission Press, 1896), 6,

⁹³ W. T. Brownlee, *Reminiscences of a Transkeian* (Peitermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1975), 30-1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁵ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1051.

people invisible to the foe.”⁹⁶ Such reports were almost immediately contradicted. Robert Godlonton and Edward Irving, for example, published a different version of what happened after the deaths of these servicemen in 1851. While they did see evidence of mutilation and torture, these otherwise relentless critics of the Xhosa did not mention any heads having been carried away.⁹⁷ Historians and other scholars have since argued that Xhosa war charms only rarely involved human materials. Instead, war medicines used botanical substances such as pelargonium and plumbago.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, not only did the image of Xhosa head taking survive, it continued to confirm their savagery in war and their ignorance and superstitions.

Despite widespread anxieties about Xhosa head taking for the purposes of witchcraft, some English observers recognized that reports of Xhosa mutilation of their enemy’s body were often exaggerated or even fictional. They understood that such head taking occurred only sporadically and within carefully defined ritual. Not everyone bought into Jack Bisset’s account of how the Xhosa liquified the brains of fallen British soldiers to use as an empowering agent. Brownlee disputes this “most disgusting process with the human skull” as “simply imaginary,” and suggests that, if used in ritual at all, human skulls “served as basins for holding charms, to strengthen individuals or to charm an army.”⁹⁹ Brownlee was also “sceptical” of any reports of human flesh being used in charms. During his time as Chief Magistrate in East Griqualand, he had heard of only one case, in which a father had sold his daughter to a witchdoctor who needed her flesh to complete a charm.¹⁰⁰ Like reports about endemic cannibalism rooted in and enhanced

⁹⁶ Bisset, *Sport and War*, 149-50. William Ross King also mentions the incident in his *Campaigning in Kaffirland*, 13.

⁹⁷ Robert Godlonton and Edward Irving, *Narrative of the Kaffir war 1850-1851-1852* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1962), 51.

⁹⁸ T. Dold and M. Cocks, “Mlanjeni’s War Charms – *Ikhubalo likaMlanjeni*,” *Veld & Flora* (March 2006), 26-7. See also Webb, “War, Racism, and the Taking of Heads,” 52.

⁹⁹ Brownlee, *Reminiscences of Kaffir Life*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 260-1.

by human remains found in and around villages in the Pacific, reports about the severed heads of British soldiers and their allies drew their power from and sustained belief among European observers that witchcraft was both savage and pervasive among the indigenous peoples of the Cape.

This anxiety about indigenous witchcraft reinforced British fears for the continuity of their body after death. For the English, the nature of engagement with the enemy itself made dying on the frontier a particularly horrific end. When skirmishes broke out along the banks of the Fish and Kei Rivers, it was easy for British soldiers to become separated from their patrols. The bodies of fallen soldiers would often be left exposed to the elements, wild animals and the enemy. In some respects, the brutality of warfare was both a matter of strategy and technology. T. J. Lucas recalls a patrol stumbling on the remains of thirteen British soldiers. The Xhosa had left them there to tell their pursuers that “theirs was at least no temporizing policy.” They had been disposed of “in hideous array, horribly mutilated, the agony expressed in their glassy upturned eyes showing that they had met with a lingering death by the sharp assegais of the [Xhosa].” British muskets, on the other hand, left the victim “presenting a perfectly peaceful appearance, as if overtaken by sleep.”¹⁰¹

This brutal way of death made British soldiers fear for the fate of their remains. The scattering and decay of the corpse after death, Katharine Park argues, threatened the “bodily continuity” of the deceased, and therefore his identity. How could an individual be resurrected when there was nothing left of him or her to resurrect? This anxiety fueled attempts by British patrols to recover and bury the remains of fallen friends. But the idea of bodily continuity in

¹⁰¹ T. J. Lucas, *Camp Life and Sport in South Africa: Experiences of Kaffir Warfare with the Cape Mounted Rifles* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1878), 179.

Christian attitudes towards the dead, Park argues further, made the fragmentation and loss of the body “horrifying as well as generative and didactic.”¹⁰² British troops often sought to protect the bodies of their fallen compatriots from loss and further mutilation. At the start of the sixth Frontier War (1834-5), Jack Bisset recalls, three British soldiers had fallen to a similar ambush near that very spot. When their fellow soldiers found their bodies, they buried them in a Xhosa hut. They then set it on fire “to hide the grave from the [Xhosa], who were thus prevented from either disinterring or mutilating the bodies.”¹⁰³ The absence of any remains to hold a service over or inter made death in the South African bush a particularly wretched end. As Joël Mostert has argued, being killed in this manner was an “abhorrent *finis* within death itself.” It not only offended the inviolability of the corpse of the fallen soldier, it also jeopardized the resurrection of the body after death.¹⁰⁴

Rumors of indigenous witchcraft that were almost immediately raised when British soldiers found the dismembered remains of their friends only reinforced their pious anxiety about the fate of one’s remains. During the “war of the Axe” (1846-7), for example, ensign Whitle recalls finding the bodies of five officers who had gone out to the Sihota mountains overlooking the Kei River. The Xhosa “devils” had “butchered” and “barbarously murdered” them, cutting off their skin, scooping out their eyeballs, flogging their bodies with chains, and in one instance severing the head.¹⁰⁵ Bisset, too, offers a description of the “horrible sight.” Noticing vultures

¹⁰² Caroline Walker-Bynum, “Material continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 239-98 (especially 254, 280).

¹⁰³ The three officers included Lieutenant Chetwynd, Captain Gibson of the Rifle Brigade, and Assistant-Surgeon Howell. Bisset, *Sport and War*, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Joël Mostert, *Frontier*, 692.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from ensign Whitle to his parents, 6 December 1847. In Gordon Everson, ed., “The Whitle letters, 1847-49” (unpublished typescript copy of the letters of Ensign Robert Whitle of the 91st Regiment). Quoted in Webb, “The Taking of Heads,” 52.

circling in the air above, he knew very well what to expect. Rather than one head taken, he reports that all of them had their heads removed “to have diabolical processes of witchcraft and other ‘devilry’ perpetrated on them.” One of them, he was sure, had been decapitated alive. The party sent the carcasses, or what was left of them, back to Koomgha camp, where they received a burial the next day.¹⁰⁶

But the small discrepancy between the two accounts – was it one head or five? – was soon overshadowed by concerns that individuals had exaggerated the accounts of the mutilation of the five soldiers. Harriet Ward, one of the few female commentators in the Cape Colony, simply mentions that the five officers had died in a vicious skirmish and that their bodies had been stripped naked.¹⁰⁷ Ward later added more detail to her account, claiming that they had been tortured and mutilated by “the merciless cruelty of a barbarous foe.” The sight of the stripped and dismembered bodies of their fallen friends “enraged their brother soldiers more and more at every step they took,” and they exacted revenge upon their Xhosa enemy soon after.¹⁰⁸ An official report of the event by the commanding officer General Berkeley does not mention the mutilation.¹⁰⁹ When a missionary later tried to reconstruct the events by interviewing a Xhosa warrior who had survived the attack, he found no evidence for the torture and mutilation.¹¹⁰ As

¹⁰⁶ The five officers included Major Baker, Lieutenant Faunt, Ensign Burnup, Surgeon Campbell of the 73rd regiment, and Assistant-Surgeon Lock of the 7th Dragoon Guards. Bisset, *Sport and War*, 101-2.

¹⁰⁷ Harriet Ward, *Five years in Kaffirland; with Sketches of the Late War in that Country, to the Conclusion of Peace* (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), vol. 2, 309-10. I am indebted to David Webb for these references and the ones in the following footnote. See Webb, “War, Racism, and the Taking of Heads,” 53.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 211-2 and 235-6.

¹⁰⁹ The report simply claims that the men’s horses, clothes and guns were taken. “Copy of a Despatch from the Right Hon. Sir Henry Pottinger, Bart, G.C.B., to Earl Grey, Graham’s Town, November 19, 1847,” in *Cape of Good Hope: Correspondence with the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, relative to the state of the Kafir tribes on the eastern frontier of the colony*, vol. 43 (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1847-8), 148-9.

¹¹⁰ Francis Patrick Fleming, *Kaffraria and Its Inhabitants* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1853), 40-1.

we will see in the following section of this chapter, omissions, or in this case, inclusions in the historical record sought to sustain the image of the other as brutal and inhuman.

Such deeply unsettling anxieties about the loss of the body and the integrity of the individual in the afterlife also infused the practice of repossessing the body of a fallen friend with new significance. Bisset, for example, shortly after having captured and killed the Xhosa leader Hintsa in 1835, recalls returning to the grave of a recently killed frontier soldier major T. C. White, and shedding a tear over his grave. White had been buried on the very spot where he had been brutally killed. His body, he remarks, had been mutilated “in a most fearful manner.”¹¹¹ In the mind of Bisset, White’s makeshift grave had become something of a site of pilgrimage, where English soldiers remembered both the bravery of their own and the inhumanity of the other.

The British and the indigenous both fought over the resilient image of the other as head taker. If British soldiers justified their head taking in the name of science, indigenous witnesses failed to comprehend why they did so. To indigenous men and women, head taking only made sense in a closely circumscribed spiritual economy of war. British observers, in turn, often misunderstood this and saw indigenous head taking as endemic and savage. These misunderstandings were naturalized in and by the enduring image of the other as head taker. British reports often exaggerated the nature and extent of indigenous head taking. Likewise, the few sources we have that shed light on indigenous views of British head taking suggest that they, too, saw it as endemic among their enemy. Head taking both encouraged more head taking and bred an anxiety about the fate of one’s own body. At stake was one’s humanity, or

¹¹¹ Bisset, *Sport and War*, 27-8.

“Englishness,” as Colonel Eyre’s mother called it. The trope of head taking was outspoken on both sides, and it entangled Britons and the indigenous in a cycle of retribution and repossession.

Epistemic Violence in the Historical Record

In the final pages of this chapter I explore the links between historical narration and anthropological objects, and the silences and fictions collectors created about them. Besides the heads themselves, anthropologists at home asked collectors in the field to take notes about the individual’s physical appearance, mental capacities, age, sex, and locality. Such information was critical to theories of race in Europe. Cuvier advised sailors and their superiors to record all they “could discover” about the individuals to whom the remains belonged.¹¹² The President of the Anthropological Institute in London, John Beddoe, similarly advised travelers to “write *at once* on crania &c. any important memoranda, as race, locality, sex, rank, and probable age.”¹¹³ These bits of data are what Europe’s “centers of calculation” were really after.¹¹⁴ They allowed anthropologists to create matrices of race, establishing lower, higher and average values for facial angles, cranial capacities, and jaw lines. But these histories hide from view the conditions of their acquisition. As anthropological objects, divorced from the circumstances that led to their creation, indigenous heads told only one side of the story. Even when historical narration does reveal something about how collectors came to acquire them, these accounts appear to sustain the image of indigenous brutality and savagery. In this section I explore how historical narration

¹¹² Cuvier, “Note instructive,” 70.

¹¹³ John Beddoe drafted the section on “Form and Size” along with the majority of sections. John Beddoe et al., *Notes and queries on anthropology*, 5. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁴ Latour, *Science in Action*, chapter 6.

sustained the trope of indigenous savagery while at the same time silencing British brutality in the histories of these objects.

One of the earliest accounts of British mutilation involves the remains of Hintsa, the paramount chief of the Xhosa, during the war of 1834-5. Having captured Hintsa, in early May 1835, Governor D'Urban ordered Sir Harry Smith to take Hintsa beyond the Kei River together with a large mixed force of soldiers and native allies to recapture the cattle lost during past raids. After leading them in no particular direction for some time, Hintsa mounted his horse and made off towards the safety of a few Xhosa huts. Several British officers, including Sir Harry Smith pursued Hintsa, eventually wounding and cornering him in a nearby river, and shooting him through the head. The circumstances of Hintsa's death reveal not only the participation of British military personnel in acts they perceived as savage, but also their attempts to silence these acts in the historical record.

Several accounts recall the events leading up to Hintsa's death. Having been dragged off his horse by Sir Harry Smith, Hintsa continued towards the safety of the mountain. Several officers, including Bisset, Southey, Driver and Balfour pursued him. Southey fired two shots, one hitting Hintsa in his leg, the other in his side. But Hintsa got back to his feet and made for the bush on the banks of a nearby river. Some of Smith's soldiers intercepted him while he was crossing the stream. Bisset mentions that Hintsa, partially submerged in the river, was poised to launch one of his assegais at Southey. The latter immediately fired a ball through Hintsa's head. Southey was apparently the first to reach Hintsa's body and took from him his assegais and "the charm from around his neck."¹¹⁵ Afterwards, the officers returned to Harry Smith, who had been

¹¹⁵ Bisset, *Sport and War*, 26. Godlonton mentions Southey taking a "brass girdle" off of Hintsa's body and returning to join the other officers. See Godlonton, *Narrative*, 169. Joël Mostert suggests that Harry Smith obtained some of the bracelets and assegai Hintsa had launched at him and had them sent to his wife Juana in Cape Town. See Mostert, *Frontiers*, 726.

knocked off his horse, with the news of Hintsá's death. Smith dispatched a group of soldiers from the 75th regiment to recover the body of the Xhosa leader. The party found his body where Southey had killed him, wrapped it in his cloak, and deposited it near some Xhosa huts, "in view of numerous [Xhosa]." The assistant-surgeon of the 75th regiment, Mr. Ford, then performed an autopsy on Hintsá's body, which identified the cause of death as massive head trauma but found no other signs of violence. They then left the remains with the Xhosa.¹¹⁶

Other accounts, however, contradict the events immediately prior to Southey's fatal shot and what happened to the Xhosa leader's body afterwards. At least one account mentions that Hintsá had called out "Mercy!" several times prior to being shot by Southey, transforming a straightforward scene of self-defense into a questionable instance of cold-blooded murder. Later accounts also offer an alternative history of what happened to Hintsá's body after he was killed. Many years after the events, a settler provisional recorded that after some of the officers had ransacked Hintsá's body for his personal affects, George Southey or his brother William cut off one of his ears and the Assistant-Surgeon Mr. Ford collected the some of the Xhosa's teeth. "This was a very wrong and barbarous thing to do," Henry James Halse recalls in his diary, "but we did not think so at the time."¹¹⁷ War had warped the English officer's sense of decency and humanity: his sense of Englishness. "Their insatiable thirst of possessing a relic of such a great man," Captain William Gilfillan tells his readers, had gotten "the better of their humanity and better feeling, which teaches us not to trample on a fallen foe."¹¹⁸ The accounts of Bisset and Godlonton, however, remain silent on the mutilation of Hintsá's body after his death. Godlonton

¹¹⁶ Godlonton, *Narrative*, 169-70.

¹¹⁷ PR 3563/3, Halse Manuscript, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Cape Town. Quoted in Mostert, *Frontiers*, 725-6.

¹¹⁸ W. F. A. Gilfillan, *Story of one branch of the Gilfillan family in South Africa* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Private, 1970). Quoted in Mostert, *Frontiers*, 726.

even sustains this silence through Mr. Ford's postmortem on the body of the Xhosa leader. Harry Smith's report also does not mention either Hintsas' call for mercy, nor the looting and mutilation of Hintsas' body.¹¹⁹

Despite efforts by military command and supporters of the British forces in South Africa, it was hard, if not impossible, to silence what had happened to Hintsas' body after his death. Governor D'Urban was outraged when he heard that a few of the officers had returned to camp with some of Hintsas' "curiosities," but all he could do now was keep this information from jeopardizing British efforts to pacify indigenous tribes.¹²⁰ The news travelled far and fast. By the end of May 1835, Halse's record of the events had reached Charles Lennox Stretch in Graham's Town. In his journal, the latter condemns the "brutal conduct" of his fellow Englishmen. Paddy Balfour, Smith's aide-de-camp, tried to silence Stretch by threatening him that the Governor would not look lightly upon the news getting out. But Stretch was not easily intimidated and simply referred Balfour to other reports that confirmed Hintsas' call for mercy and the ransacking of his body.¹²¹

Halse's and Stretch's accounts were spreading like wildfire in the Cape Colony, and John Bell warned Governor D'Urban that "they are in Cape Town making it out to be a most atrocious murder."¹²² Both the disregard for Hintsas' plea for mercy and the mutilation of his body after his death were an embarrassment to colonial officials in the Cape Colony, and a dangerous one at that. Although his death was a blow to the resilience of Xhosa forces in 1835, the desecration of

¹¹⁹ Smith justified Hintsas' death as the only suitable outcome for a treacherous native like Hintsas: "Thus terminated the career of the chief Hintza, whose treachery, perfidy and want of faith made him worthy of the, nation of atrocious and indomitable savages over whom he was the acknowledged chieftain." Colonel Harry Smith, quoted in *Report of the Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes* (London: William Ball, 1837), 114-5.

¹²⁰ Joël Mostert, *Frontier*, 727.

¹²¹ Charles Lennox Stretch, *The Journal of Charles Lennox Stretch*, ed. Basil A. le Cordeur (Pinelands, Cape Town: Published for Rhodes University, Grahamstown, by Maskew Miller Longman, 1988), 163.

¹²² Joël Mostert, *Frontier*, 728.

the body of their paramount leader was likely to inflame the Xhosa further at a time when the conflict seemed to be more or less over. Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State for the colonies, interpreted the war and the circumstances of Hintsá's death in exactly that way. Not only had the Xhosa been harassed "by a long series of aggressions" and "urged to revenge and desperation by the systematic injustice of which they had been the victims," Lord Glenelg was infuriated that Hintsá had been killed "when he had no longer the means of resistance" and "the dead body of the fallen chief was basely and inhumanely mutilated."¹²³ Colonial officials were outraged by accounts of the taking of body parts by British military men. They were not so much angry about the act itself, but about the repercussions of the news coming out. On the one hand, it could further antagonize the indigenous population, endangering the prospects for a lasting peace. On the other hand, if accounts of such atrocities reached England, they could embolden humanitarian factions in the colony and at home.

As rumors and reports of wanton violence on both sides increased into the mid-nineteenth century, British participation in mutilation and head taking became unspeakable. By then, whatever sympathy existed between colonizer and colonized dissipated into the hot South African air as one act of brutality seemed to elicit another, more savage, one. While British witnesses frequently described the cruelty of indigenous violence in vivid detail, they often exercised more restraint when talking about barbarity of their own. As one highland Sergeant recalls the experience of marching into battle: "Nervousness gives place to excitement, excitement to anger; and anger may be supplanted by barbarism as an infuriated soldiery rush on, heedless of their doom." Only a "masterly general" would be able "to restrain the men from

¹²³ Lord Glenelg, "Extract from Lord Glenelg's despatch to Sir B. D'Urban: 26 Dec. 1835," in Justus, *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation: A Narrative* (London: James Duncan, 1837), 227.

deeds which cannot be named.”¹²⁴ Another soldier, serving during Mlanjeni’s War (1850-3) was unable to speak the atrocities he had seen at the hands of the British. “Not but that some things done were bad enough, I should not like to say all that I have seen and known and suffered when possible.” To this soldier, the unspeakable barbarity of the British was the result of indigenous savagery. He continues: “Great excuse is due when you consider on a white man falling into their hands, they not only kill, but torture him, and treat his remains with the most wonderful brutality.”¹²⁵ The histories that accompanied the skulls sent to the Hunterian Museum and the Natural History Museum often left evidence of British violence unspoken. Instead, indigenous violence emerged as the sole cause of their creation.

On the eve of his departure for the Transvaal in South Africa in December 1880, Henry W. Feilden addressed a letter to William H. Flower at the Hunterian Museum asking him if he wanted any specimens from that region. Suspecting that by then Flower would have a sufficient collection of Zulu skulls, Feilden wondered whether the crania of the Boers were “a desiderata.”¹²⁶ Two years later, Feilden had finally succeeded in procuring five indigenous skulls for Flower. He also provided careful descriptions of the circumstances in which he had found them. The first two had come from the battlefield near Isandhlwana, where Zulu forces armed with assegais routed British forces in January 1879. They had been shot while “advancing to the attack” British troops.¹²⁷ The following two had come from a battlefield near Ulundi, where

¹²⁴ MacKay, *Reminiscences*, 44.

¹²⁵ Captain Roopes, 9 February 1853, Mellish Hodsock Papers, University of Nottingham. Quoted in Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 23-4.

¹²⁶ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 94, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Letter from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 27 December 1880.

¹²⁷ Although they came with lower jaws found in the same locality, Feilden feared that they might not belong to the crania in question. RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 1, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

British forces inflicted defeat on the Zulu in July of the year, effectively ending the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Despite the confusion on the battlefield, Feilden was sure that they belonged to Zulu warriors since “the few British that fell on that occasion were carefully buried.” One of these skulls (no. 3) was particularly interesting because it showed how the Zulu treated head injuries by scraping the skull.¹²⁸ The fifth skull Feilden had obtained was the “much weathered cranium” of a Xhosa from a cave in the Illovo District of Natal. To Feilden, it was interesting not as an anatomical specimen illustrative of the Xhosa race, but as a relic from a violent episode in indigenous history. The cave, Feilden noted, was the place “where the unfortunate inhabitants retreated from the fury of the relentless destroyer Chaka, the founder of the Zulu dynasty.”¹²⁹

Despite the detail, there are telling silences in Feilden’s account of these indigenous remains. The histories of the first four “Zulu” and Xhosa skulls are remarkable for the lack of detail in their violent histories. He mentions that they had been killed in battle with the British, but even then, their histories betray only indigenous aggression. The third skull was useful for it showed yet another instance of indigenous savagery and wretchedness. Despite what seems like bordering on admiration for the technique of the treatment involved, Feilden speculated that the individual had sustained the head injury by “a blow on his head ... from a knob-kerrie or stick, an event which often happens at their beer-drinking feasts.”¹³⁰ The history of the last skull, that from a Xhosa found in the Illovo District, reveals how Feilden sought to document South African history through historical narration and collecting. It had belonged to a Xhosa refugee, fleeing

¹²⁸ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 1-3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

¹²⁹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

¹³⁰ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 3, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

from Chaka's warriors. Between 1810 and 1820, Feilden recounts, Chaka had "converted Natal into a desert, and Shepstone calculates that he destroyed a million of inhabitants in Natal." Caves all over Natal, Feilden believed, "all contain human remains, belonging to the period of Chaka's massacres."¹³¹

Even when the histories accompanying the skulls contained information about European violence, the narrative exonerated the British from most, if not all, responsibility. In 1881, John Waterston warned Flower that the skulls of bushmen "are very difficult to get, as not only is the race dying out but Africans as a whole decline to touch dead bodies and if a white man was caught desecrating their graves, there would be, to say the least of it, a row." Nevertheless, he had been able to procure two. One of them, he noted to Flower had a bullet wound, which served as an identifying mark. It "is a sort of Hallmark," he assured Flower, "for it shows he was shot by a white man (not an Englishman, I am glad to say) & Bushmen are the only poor wretches that are shot down when caught cattle stealing or supposed to be doing so." Luckily, "English law laid its hands on the men that did it, for more than one Bushman was shot on that occasion."¹³²

It is unlikely that anthropologists at home were ignorant of the ways in which British colonialism produced the very raw materials upon which it depended for justification. In 1867, John Collinson read a paper "On the Indians of the Mosquito territory" to the members of the Anthropological Society of London. After Collinson finished reading the paper, Captain Bedford Pim took the floor. Although he commended Collinson for beginning the valuable work of collecting information on this native tribe of the central America, he took issue with a few of

¹³¹ RCS-MUS/5/2/4, 134, f. 4, RCS, 1878-1883, Museum Letter Book, vol. 4. Notes from Henry W. Feilden to William H. Flower, Curator Hunterian Museum, 15 October 1882.

¹³² RCS-MUS/5/2/5, 37, f. 2-3, RCS, 1884-1889, Museum Letter Book, vol. 5. Letter from John G. Waterston to [?] Boyd[?], 31 August 1888.

Collinson's conclusions. Pim called for a "campaign" to civilize the natives. He also alluded to the presence of one of their own, Charles Carter Blake, on the Mosquito Coast. "I am sure you will agree with me that if the aborigines are not thoroughly handled," he warned the members of the ASL, "it will not be his fault." It is unclear what he meant by this, though it is clear that if not handled, violence would ensue. "My only fear is that, in his zeal and affection for anthropology," Pim added, "he may be tempted to send us skulls and skeletons fresher than we would quite approve of."¹³³ We don't know how the audience responded to Pim's remarks. We do know, however, that the members of the Society were aware of the means by which collections of human remains were growing in Britain.

Conclusion

On the margins of empire, Europeans and indigenous peoples were entangled in a bloody drama. British head taking left a gaping wound of colonial trauma. When Prince Charles visited South Africa in 2012, indigenous leaders drew attention to the bloody struggle, the appropriation of land, and the dismemberment of their countrymen in its former colony. The AmaXhosa leaders insisted that Britain offer an apology "for what their forefathers have done" and that she return the skull of Hintsá, which they claim had been taken shortly after this.¹³⁴ Hintsá's skull had been

¹³³ For example, Pim denied that missionaries had had any success in improving the Mosquito Indians, since "they have hearts as the nether mill-stone as regards missionary teaching." Pim believed that Collinson's appreciation of their intelligence was the result of the coastal Mosquito Indians' prolonged contact with Europeans. Pim also denied Collinson's claim that the debauchery of the natives was the result of European sins imported from the "Wicked Old World" into the New World. Instead, Pim claimed, the natives carry "a good load of sin on their backs quite as heavy as the civilised people of the much abused Old World." "[Comments on] On the Indians of the Mosquito Territory," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 6 (January 1868), xiii-xvii (especially xiv-xv,). See also Alain Flandreau, *Anthropologists in the Stock Exchange: A Financial History of Victorian Science* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 179.

¹³⁴ Lulamile Feni, "Britain Called on to Say Sorry," *Daily Dispatch*, 15 December 2012.

the object of controversy in 1996, when a Xhosa prophet called chief Nicholas Gcaleka claimed he had found the paramount leader's head in the Scottish Highlands. In the end, the skull turned out to have belonged to a middle-aged European woman, but some have suggested that the prophet did succeed in raising the possibility of reintroducing "African religious symbolism into the political realm" in post-apartheid South Africa.¹³⁵ Hintsisa's head was never taken anywhere, but those of his countrymen were.

The violence against the body during the Cape's frontier wars linked both sides in a martial ecology that infused the mutilation of the enemy body and head taking, whether real or imagined, with profound significance. Both sides misunderstood each other's behavior, as they witnessed the savagery and inhumanity of the other in their acts. The fate of the dead body was critical to this colonial entanglement. War itself had become a matter of great intimacy. Crouched to avoid being detected by a Xhosa war party, one British soldier could see "their well-greased bodies shining in the occasional gleams of sunshine that streamed down through the thick foliage of the trees," and he was excited "to watch them pursuing their deadly mode of warfare in their own fastness." But in the end, from the muzzles of twenty British muskets "the treacherous natives met the death they had been plotting for us."¹³⁶ Even in death, colonizers and colonized experienced such intimacy. As one British observer bears witness, the bodies of British soldiers were "piled amongst the black bodies of their furious enemies, now clasped together in one common and awful bond of death."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Normalanga Mkhize, "Nicholas Gcaleka and the Search for Hintsisa's Skull," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (March 2009), 211-21. See also, Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsisa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2009). For an account of this episode that interprets the prophet's claim in terms of political and economic desperation, see Shula Marks, "Rewriting South African History, or the Hunt for Hintsisa's Head," in *Rethinking African History*, ed. Simon A. McGrath and Christopher Fyfe (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1997), 108-9.

¹³⁶ King *Campaigning in Kaffirland*, 148.

¹³⁷ Godlonton, *Narrative*, 84.

War linked the British to their indigenous enemies, and the bond between adversaries forged in battle lasted long after the war was over. Field Marshall Lord Alfred Grenfell, revisiting the battlefield at Ulundi in 1881 called to memory scenes he had witnessed and remembered his encounter with the enemy in terms of friendship. Pausing at one spot on the field, he told his traveling companion that he had seen a Zulu shot in the head by Owen's machine guns. He then carefully retraced the eighteen yards back from where he was standing, and "came to my old friend, a splendid skeleton, his bones perfectly white, his flesh eaten off by the white ants." Nostalgia got the better of him, and Grenfell "could not part with him, so I put his skull into my forage bag, and brought it home with me," where it joined Grenfell's "collection of curiosities."¹³⁸ Collecting indigenous heads was thus also part of a memorial culture. Like the graves they dug for fallen brothers, British soldiers looked upon indigenous heads as mementos of past adventures.

Approaching the links between science and colonialism through the taking of heads, I have tried to show that colonizers and colonized lived in a world of their own making, even if each side believed they were unmaking it. By the mid-nineteenth century, head taking had become both outspoken and unspeakable on the Cape frontier. As a consequence, the biographies of these indigenous remains continue to be distorted by the silences and fictions they have left in the historical record. The image of head taking has proved more resilient (and more real) than the practice itself. In linking the heads of the native dead to the brutality, wantonness and irrationality of indigenous violence, British collectors of native heads hijacked what was up the wars of 1846-7 and 1850-3 still a colonial semiotics of terror, shaped by both sides. In doing so, they heaped epistemic evisceration onto physical annihilation.

¹³⁸ Alfred Grenfell, *Memoirs of Field-Marshal Lord Grenfell, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.B.* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1925), 65-66.

CONCLUSION

A Bone to Pick with Colonialism

Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940)¹³⁹

In the register of the prophets, E. P. Thompson writes: "Yet, we also know that global expectations are rising like Noah's flood, and that the readiness of the human species to define its needs and satisfactions in material market terms – and to throw all the globe's resources onto the market – may threaten the species itself (both North and South) with ecological catastrophe."¹⁴⁰ I remember underlining it in my second-hand hardcover copy and writing it down in a now lost notebook. But the line stuck in my mind, and only now have been able to square it with my own work. On the surface of it, the connections are clear. The global opposition between North and South is a part of this story, too, and the circulation of indigenous bodies took place at a time when the groundworks for modern ideas about the human species were being laid.

But the story is also about understanding how indigenous bodies came to be defined "in material market terms" and understood as resources thrown "onto the market." It is about how

¹³⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 255 [emphasis added].

¹⁴⁰ Edward P. Thompson, "Introduction: Custom and Culture," in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1991), 14-5.

indigenous bodies and their parts became commodities. The thrust of my argument has been that attempts to turn the human body, its parts, tissues and fluids, into tradable goods have only been partially successful. Something of their “hosts” (for lack of a better word) still clings to them. Yet despite this incomplete erasure, older realities of inequality and violence threaten to reemerge as newer forms of colonial appropriation appear on the global scene. This is the *human* catastrophe I am hoping to understand in here.

The colonial expansion of Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries set in motion an unprecedented movement of people, goods and knowledge across the globe. But, many contemporaries believed, the twined forces of imperialism and globalization also doomed indigenous populations to disappear. One observer of British colonization noted in 1849: “When the European comes into contact with any other type of man, that other type disappears.” The radical J. A. Roebuck, not so much celebrated their disappearance, as he wanted his countrymen to open their eyes to this hard truth.¹⁴¹ Many of his contemporaries agreed and reports of vanishing “primitive” or “savage” tribes gave rise to the curious mix of “celebration and mourning” that fired the Victorian imagination of the non-European.¹⁴² Collectors at home saw the circulation of indigenous bodies in the nineteenth century as a means of recording knowledge about these vanishing tribes and about their passing. To some, their disappearance was not only inevitable; it was also desirable. Native Americans in North America, Aborigines in Australia, the Xhosa in South Africa, these indigenous peoples dwelt on land European settler colonialists wanted for themselves. In this sense, Roebuck was pointing out a brutal reality. Colonialism has always been a history of winners and losers. All over the world, European expansion was

¹⁴¹ J. A. Roebuck, *The Colonies of England* (London: Parker, 1849), 138.

¹⁴² Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2.

causing the extinction of indigenous peoples, culturally and physically.¹⁴³ And, collections of indigenous bodies in Europe recorded their passing.

But these “bodies of the weak” not only chronicle decline and disappearance; their acquisition, circulation and accumulation also tell a story of resilience and creativity in the face of overwhelming odds. Over the course of the nineteenth century, European and British obsession with indigenous remains forced the forging of new relationships between collectors, their assistants and informants, and indigenous populations. Ironically, the precarious nature of bone collecting itself made it impossible to think in the binary terms of colonizers and colonized. Moreover, rambling for indigenous bodies challenged the very nature of scientific work. Through the eyes and actions of these collectors, we catch a glimpse of collecting not as a disinterested, rational or even respectable endeavor, but rather as an acquisitive, obsessive and obscure act of colonial appropriation and violence that brought European collectors closer to their savage subjects than they would have liked to admit. But in those moments of interaction, indigenous men, women and children found ways to resist the imposition of a classificatory regime that sought to re-order the human terrain. Through conflict, concealment and comedy, the indigenous pushed back against British power. Sometimes they had to give way. But sometimes they won, even for a short while.

These tensions between connection and disconnection, recognition and alienation, dominance and resilience ran through the practice of collecting indigenous bodies on the edge of empire. In the early 1880s, Henry B. Guppy drafted an ambitious scheme for an ethnological expedition to the New Hebrides group in the Pacific. In many ways, Guppy’s plan was the culmination of decades of collecting indigenous bodies, incorporating acquisitive strategies tried

¹⁴³ For a powerful indictment of this sad fact, see John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

and tested in the field (often by himself). Currently surveying the waters around New Hebrides, Solomon Islands, New Ireland and New Britain, Guppy proposed his plan to the Keeper of Zoology at the Natural History Museum, Albert Günther. Guppy came highly recommended. The hydrographer Frederick Thomas Evans had recommended Guppy to Albert Günther as a person who “takes much interest in Geology and Natural History generally, and is desirous of making observations and collecting in these branches of science, whilst employed in those regions.”¹⁴⁴ Guppy also introduced himself as a collector of geological specimens, because, he hoped, they would require less space to store. But it was clear that Guppy’s collecting ambitions ranged much wider than that. By early 1884, he had sent home several specimens of natural history, including fish, reptiles, corals, mollusks, several geological collections, the skull of a crocodile, as well as anthropological specimens such as indigenous pottery, stone edges, hair specimens and several human skulls from the Solomon Islands.¹⁴⁵ His appetite for anthropological collecting had been kindled, and when he proposed his scheme to Günther in 1883-4, he informed the Keeper of Zoology that “my particular business will be geology and anthropology.”¹⁴⁶

Guppy’s reasons for writing to Günther were above all practical. He hoped to enlist his influence in procuring leave from the Admiralty, funds to outfit his expedition, and men to

¹⁴⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/19, 79, NHM, Jan-Jun 1881, Zoology Correspondence A-Z, letter from Frederick Thomas Evans, Hydrographer, to Albert Günther, Kepper of Zoology at the British Museum, 21 April 1881.

¹⁴⁵ Guppy’s letter dated February 1883 mentions the shipment of four human skulls alongside the crocodile skull. But in August of 1883, the Admiralty presented a total of six skulls from the Solomon Islands and Guadalcanal to the Natural History Museum. DF [ZOO/]200/23, 162, f. 2, NHM, Jan-Jun 1883, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, [?] February 1883; DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 335, no. 1-6, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register; DF [ZOO/]200/25, 145b, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Note from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 10 December 1883; DF [ZOO/]200/25, 144c, f. 1, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Note from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, [11 February 1884].

¹⁴⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/25, 145-145a, f. 4, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Note from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 9 December 1883.

accompany him. His experiences on board the *Lark* had taught him that the interiors of two particular islands within the Solomon group, the Bougainville Straits and Guadalcanal, were virgin territory for the collector. Both being between eighty and one hundred miles long, and 8,000 to 10,000 feet high, he believed exploration of their interiors was not only feasible, but “would give a rich harvest to the explorer.” He proposed to leave for Guadalcanal in the Spring of 1885, with a crew of five or six collectors. The expedition was to last three-and-a-half to four months, and he asked Günther to apply his influence to obtain leave from the Admiralty for that period. The party, he reassured Günther, would focus on collections in geology, anthropology, botany and zoology. Guppy had also heard of a collector for the British Museum working on board the *HMS Dart*, and hoped to enlist his services for the scheme.¹⁴⁷

The costs of the expedition, he estimated, would be around £300, which included hiring a party of four men at £50 each and the purchase of collecting gear. He himself would bear his own expenditures and costs. Crucially, Guppy also envisioned enlisting a party of twelve or twenty indigenous, not only to carry supplies and equipment, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to assuage indigenous resistance in the interior. Aware that the indigenous might take issue with their presence and activities, he was convinced that “the hostility of the indigenous may be overcome by judiciously employing coast indigenous who are friendly with those in the interior.” Rather than exploring the interior of Guadalcanal in one long trek, the party would limit its excursions to two or three weeks in each locality. This way, the collectors could bring their collections back to the coast at the end of each excursion, where they would place them “under the care of white traders or friendly chiefs residing in the neighbouring small

¹⁴⁷ DF [ZOO/]200/25, 145-145a, f. 4, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Note from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 9 December 1883.

islands.”¹⁴⁸ The indigenous thus played a crucial role in Guppy’s plan. He sought to utilize the differences between indigenous tribes that European colonization had helped create to ensure the safety of his collections. Indigenous chiefs of the coastal villages, Guppy believed, would be more easily enlisted in his enterprise, since they had had more contact with Europeans. In addition, he hoped to employ them as diplomatic envoys in order to remove suspicion and hostility among the inland indigenous, whose exposure to European explorers had been far more limited, or even non-existent. Guppy thus expected to encounter indigenous resistance. But I wonder whether he imagined all the forms that indigenous resistance took. He surely expected to encounter conflict and he hoped his indigenous assistants would be able to negotiate a truce when it happened. But did he expect to be sent into the woods without a clue as to where to begin looking? Did he expect to run into indigenous indifference? Did he expect to be mocked by indigenous children who found his actions funny?

Guppy was relentless in his applications for support. Having already detailed his plans for the exploration of Guadalcanal in a letter dated 9 December 1883, he sent four more letters in the space of two months in 1884, each time providing more details and possible changes to the scheme. In a letter dated 2 June 1884, he provides a detailed outline of the proposed expedition. The party would consist of Guppy, a collector he would contract at Sydney, a sailor of the Royal Navy, and a group of indigenous assistants. He again requested £300. Guppy’s estimate for the expedition now included £50 for articles to trade with the indigenous to enlist their services and

¹⁴⁸ DF [ZOO/]200/25, 145-145a, f. 1-6, NHM, Jan-Jun 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Note from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 9 December 1883.

establish amicable relations.¹⁴⁹ The new outline also provides more details as to the party's itinerary, their *modus operandi*, and the extent of their reliance on indigenous go-betweens.

From Sydney or Brisbane, they would catch one of the many merchant-schooners to the Solomon Islands. At Ugi Island, Guppy expected to gain the cooperation of white traders, before landing at Marau Sound on the East end of Guadalcanal. Once there, he hoped to engage 15 or twenty indigenous, who would assist them in making “an ascent into the interior of the island, passing through districts inhabited by tribes friendly with the coast indigenous.” After a fortnight, they would return to Marau Sound and leave their collections with a friendly chief. Then they would proceed along the north coast of Guadalcanal, to the volcanic island of Savo at the Western end of Guadalcanal. After examining the island for two or three days, they would again engage indigenous aides “who are on friendly terms with the indigenous on the north coast of Guadalcanal,” and “penetrate into its interior,” ascending Mt Lammas, 8000 feet above the sea, passing through districts occupied by tribes friendly to our own indigenous carriers and making collections along the way, finally returning to the north coast after about a fortnight.¹⁵⁰

In a letter dated the following day, Guppy reminded Günther of his plans, this time emphasizing the “assistance from white-men resident in that part of the group who are well

¹⁴⁹ He now provided a more detailed list of expenses, including £30 for a five-oared whaler for transportation between the islands to be hired from Mr. John Stephens, a trader at Ugi; £30 for provisions; £50 for articles to trade with the indigenous; £25 for collecting gear; £35 for passage to and from the Solomon Group; £20 for sundries; £30 for the equipment and wages of the sailor; £80 for the payment of the collection. Guppy offered to provide for his own equipment, including an aneroid (barometer), a sextant, and an artificial horizon. DF [ZOO/]200/27, 156, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. “Scheme for the exploration of the interior of the islands of Guadalcanal and St. Christoval in the Solomon Group,” by from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, 2 June 1884.

¹⁵⁰ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 156, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. “Scheme for the exploration of the interior of the islands of Guadalcanal and St. Christoval in the Solomon Group,” by H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, 2 June 1884; DF [ZOO/]200/27, 155, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. “Scheme for the exploration of the interior of the islands of Guadalcanal and St. Christoval in the Solomon Group,” by H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, n. d. [1885].

known on the Guadalcanal coast, and are very eager to reach the interior of the island.” He also explained why he had chosen Guadalcanal. The island was “part of the group most frequented by ships, and because white men live in its vicinity, whose assistance I may obtain in various ways.”¹⁵¹ It is unclear why Guppy decided to emphasize the assistance of white traders at this point. Perhaps, he had perceived some apprehension on the part of those he sought support from about enlisting the services of untrustworthy indigenous assistants. Nevertheless, the role of the indigenous remained crucial to the expedition’s success and the survival of the company.

But Guppy’s confidence in the indigenous had limits as well. He suggested to Günther that if he was unable to obtain the proposed £300, he would “dispense with the collector and employ natives.” This, he believed, would have profound consequences for expedition. “Unassisted and employing only indigenous my expenses would be reduced by half,” he admitted, “but there would be a corresponding decrease in the amount and value of the collections.”¹⁵² Without assistance, Guppy would limit his expedition to Guadalcanal or Bougainville only, and “gain the greater confidence of the natives by a longer residence amongst them.” He dismissed the dangers involved in the expedition as “no more than those which are peculiar to exploring parties in any part of the world, and less than those to which the founders of the first mission-stations in this Group were exposed.”¹⁵³ A few days after proposing the detailed outline, Guppy assured Günther that if the Admiralty granted him permission to leave, he would

¹⁵¹ DF [ZOO/]200/26, 143, f. 3-4, NHM, July-Dec. 1884, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, Surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to Dr. Günther, at the British Museum, 3 June 1884.

¹⁵² DF [ZOO/]200/27, 156, f.1-4, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. “Scheme for the exploration of the interior of the islands of Guadalcananr and St. Christoval in the Solomon Group,” by from H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, 2 June 1884.

¹⁵³ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 156, f.1-4, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. “Scheme for the exploration of the interior of the islands of Guadalcananr and St. Christoval in the Solomon Group,” by from H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, 2 June 1884.

deposit the collections at the Natural History Museum, likely in an effort to secure his support. At this point, Guppy also elaborated on the anthropological side of his plan. “One of the secondary objects of getting into the interior of one of the larger islands,” he informed Günther, “is to find the source of the flints, some of them ‘worked,’ which are not uncommon in the surface soil throughout the group, wherever I have been.”¹⁵⁴ In a final letter dated July 1884, Guppy suggested that it was possible to add new stops to his itinerary, since recent missionary reports indicated that “promising fields” were opening up in New Guinea, New Britain, and New Ireland.¹⁵⁵

By December 1884, it was clear that Guppy’s plan was doomed to fail. While in the Solomon Islands, he had fallen ill due to “overwork and recklessness on my own part,” and feared that he would soon return to England an invalid. His illness rendered any reply from the Admiralty a moot point. Yet, Guppy had the “consolation of having done some useful work out here.” He informed Günther that he was sending home “a few more specimens of fish,” the “skull of a crocodile I shot,” and some “portions of the skull of a cetacean,” along with “two sketches of the animal itself.”¹⁵⁶ In March 1885, around the time his expedition was to leave, Guppy was back home, in Cornwall. He told Günther he was leaving the Navy “on account of my severe illness,” and praised the Admiralty for “treating me very generously.” He planned on writing a book and falling “back on my profession” as a surgeon. He did not abandon his ambitions completely. “I am looking forward, however, to be able to do some more work in the

¹⁵⁴ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 160, f. 3, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to [A. G. Butler, to Chief Librarian of] the British Museum, 8 June 1884.

¹⁵⁵ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 157, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to [A. G. Butler, to Chief Librarian of] the British Museum, 27 July 1884.

¹⁵⁶ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 158, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to [A. G. Butler, to Chief Librarian of] the British Museum, 1 December 1884.

exploring way - if the opportunity presented,” he wrote to Günther while recovering, “but I should not attempt anything unless well supported.”¹⁵⁷

It is very likely that Guppy did resume collecting. There are two letters from Guppy acknowledging the receipt of collecting materials in the records of the Natural History Museum in London. However, the records also indicate that not much came of Guppy’s anthropological ambitions after his illness in 1884-5. His last donation to the Natural History Museum dates from 25 April 1884. It consists of a collection of twenty-six hair samples he had collected while serving in the waters of the Solomon Islands on the *HMS Lark*. In the note accompanying the samples, Guppy attempts to summarize the anatomical characters, commenting, besides the color and consistency of the hair, on the color of the skin, the stature of the indigenous, and the shape of their skulls.¹⁵⁸ Three years later, Guppy published his book on *The Solomon Islands and Their Indigenous* (1887), in which he paid particular attention to the anatomy (skulls, hair and skin color) of the indigenous peoples he had encountered on his travels.¹⁵⁹

Guppy’s ethnological expedition never left port, but the scheme does succeed in exposing the fault lines of colonial power, scientific collecting and the indigenous body on the margins of empire. The new relationships between colonizer and colonized that took shape on the edge of empire found expression in and evolved through strategies to overcome indigenous resistance, marshal the energies of indigenous assistants and glean information from their indigenous

¹⁵⁷ DF [ZOO/]200/27, 159, NHM, Jan.-June 1885, Zoology Correspondence A-Z. Letter from H. B. Guppy, former surgeon of *HMS Lark*, to [A. G. Butler, to Chief Librarian of] the British Museum, 18 March 1885.

¹⁵⁸ While the inhabitants of the islands on the western end of the Solomon Islands (specimens 15-26) were “of a somewhat lighter colour, a rather shorter stature, with mesocephalic skulls, and hair of the characteristic Papuan type;” those indigenous living on islands in Bougainville Straits, “in addition to being darker, (corresponding with Broca’s colour-types 35 & 42) are taller, brachycephalic, and there is here an infusion of an almost straight and coarser-haired element.” DF [ZOO/]218/2/5, 344, no. 1-26, NHM, 1861-1890, Vertebrata accessions register.

¹⁵⁹ H. B. Guppy, *The Solomon Islands and their Indigenous* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887), 49, 51, 54, 111, 114, 116-9, 121, 134-5, 137-8.

interlocutors. Guppy proposed acquiring his prized indigenous specimens through prospecting and trade. He also suggested employing indigenous assistants, though he regarded them with suspicion and doubted their acumen. On the one hand, collectors often frightened or infuriated the indigenous, provoking them to quiet resistance or at times open violence. British collectors had learned to anticipate and prepare for indigenous resistance. On the other hand, however, collectors realized that they needed the help of the indigenous peoples whose remains they were after. Indigenous informants pointed out burial sites. Indigenous carriers guided British collectors and their equipment through thick inland forests in search of precious specimens. And, indigenous allies provided a diplomatic vanguard to assuage their more hostile countrymen.

For Guppy, once indigenous bodies passed into his hands, they came to be understood in material market terms, as trade goods whose value could be calculated and whose ownership could be transferred in rational exchange. Here, the alienation of the indigenous from his body was complete. Isolated and insulated from the spiritual economy from which they derived their meaning, indigenous remains became commodities. Once part of the global exchange network of natural history specimens, the indigenous body as commodity became – in the words of Michael Taussig – “a self-enclosed entity, dominant over its creators, autonomous, and alive with its own power.”¹⁶⁰ But the indigenous body as commodity, Taussig has also argued elsewhere, remained an unsettled and unsettling object, migrating between different regimes of value in which the meanings exploiters and exploited sought to articulate were never quite stable.¹⁶¹

But Guppy’s scheme not only illustrates the way in which the bodies of the indigenous dead became commodities. It also records how they became instruments of colonial power. They

¹⁶⁰ Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 124.

¹⁶¹ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987).

provided the raw materials for regimes and classifications of human difference that sustained the colonizing ethos. Their acquisition from indigenous burial grounds, homes and colonial hospitals, their circulation on British ships, and their accumulation in European centers of calculation instituted a measure of control over what happened to the indigenous body after death. As Taussig suggests, South American labor regimes crafted and deployed a devastating politics of the indigenous body through mutilation and terror to secure the labor of indigenous peoples.¹⁶² Collecting indigenous bodies was not only about classifying the dead, it was also about ordering the living. This politics of the indigenous body saw these remains as the raw materials of “classificatory regimes” that were not only descriptive, but also prescriptive. Through indigenous bodies, these regimes dissembled and reassembled human groups as social categories and waged colonial conflict. As Patrick Wolfe has shown, these anatomies of difference on the margins – harnessed within and buttressed by what he calls “regimes of difference” – were not “the uniform workings of a discursive monolith called ‘race’.”¹⁶³ Like the body parts onto which observers inscribed variety, difference was robust enough to maintain its meaning across time and space, but it was also capacious enough to adapt to the local demands of colonialism. Nevertheless, as part of colonialism’s mission of appropriation, collecting the indigenous body was about reordering the human terrain.¹⁶⁴

The bodies of the indigenous dead were truly global objects. The indigenous body also became an object of interimperial jealousy and competition. Collectors in national institutions across Europe and America saw their collection of indigenous bodies as reflections of their own scientific expertise and imperial strength. Colonial scientists guarded them jealously, using them

¹⁶² *Ibid.*.

¹⁶³ Wolfe, *Traces*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

as leverage to enlarge their storerooms and enhance the prestige of scientific collections on the margins of empire.

The appropriation of the indigenous body thus also offered indigenous peoples opportunities to evade and resist colonial power. In many ways, the circulation of the bodies of the weak was an extension of colonial domination, but it also presented strategies to reject and undermine the imposition of power. Fragmented, plundered and traded, the remains of the indigenous were not only commodities, they were also political objects. This is what makes the everyday forms the indigenous used to trick, ridicule and resist British collectors so important. Some indigenous individuals offered British collectors random skulls and bones for sale, passing them off as those of their relatives or fellow tribesmen. Indigenous traders also peddled counterfeits. Collectors at home were aware of this, and in 1863 Rowland Hamilton warned his friend and collector in Yokohama “against having the skulls of casual strangers forced [sic] upon him.”¹⁶⁵ Even when the skulls were genuine, indigenous peoples could often determine the terms of exchange, demanding desired European goods such as firearms in return. They ridiculed the European fascination with indigenous bodies through imitation and exaggeration. In the hands of indigenous men and women, indigenous bodies became both sites and instruments of subversion, evasion and resistance. In deploying these forms, which were often only partially understood by British travelers, they were undermining, even turning-upside-down, the very classifications that sustained and justified colonial power. To recognize this, is to recognize the power hiding within the bodies of the weak.

¹⁶⁵ RCS-MUS/5/2/1, p.18, f. 1, RCS, 1857-1868, Museum Letter Book, vol. 1. Letter from Rowland Hamilton to Edmund Belfour, the Secretary of the Hunterian Museum, 7 November 1863.

Today, the bodies of the weak are being threatened by new forms of appropriation. Modern medical science, often associated with developments in the geographic region we call the West (Europe and North America), continues to commodify and colonize the indigenous body, though in radically different ways. Over the past few decades, social scientists and historians have turned their attention to how the human body has been fragmented and transformed by innovations in the transplant surgery, reproductive medicine, and bio-ethics and biotechnology. Such inquiries have stressed how the encounter of these modern advancements – which have undoubtedly saved lives – with long-standing processes of industrialization and capitalism has given rise to an economy of health and health care in which human body parts circulate as anonymous tissue samples, invisible DNA sequences, and biocapital. Non-European bodies have suffered more than others. The circulation of indigenous remains in the nineteenth century is therefore an important part of the history of biocapitalism in the early modern and modern periods. The indigenous body continues to be the site where newer forms of colonialism, capitalism and collecting continue to converge.

For example, commodification of the body, driven by rapidly accelerating medico-technological advancements and pre-existing socio-economic inequalities, Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues, has resulted in “new forms of late modern cannibalism,” in which fragmented bodies and their owner-sellers rationally circulate in and respond to the demands of the market. Commodification, she and her fellow contributors suggest, is the transformation of human bodies into “the tokens of economic exchanges that are often masked as something else – love, altruism, pleasure, kindness.” Key to this analysis of commodification, she adds, are the economic relationships fostered by and within “late capitalism and the new global economy” and characterized by individualism, autonomy, and impersonality. Moreover, she argues, the uneven

relationships at the heart of this new global economy are reproduced in the free market of organs. Donors are “an invisible and discredited collection of anonymous suppliers of spare parts,” and recipients are “cherished patients,” “moral subjects,” and “suffering individuals.”¹⁶⁶

Studies such as these have shown how the twin processes of medico-scientific development and the spread of global capitalism continue to shape the fate of the human body in our own times. They beg, of course, the question how the haphazard process of globalization in the past, Europe’s ‘discovery’ of the Americas and the emergence of Europe’s overseas empires from the sixteenth century onwards, interacted with scientific, medical and technological improvement to produce the indigenous body as commodity. This dissertation has tried to illuminate that process in one historical moment.

The latest challenges posed by the circulation of human tissue in a global context have come about at a much smaller level. But here, too, a study of collections of indigenous bodies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century reaches into the present, most notably with continued fragmentation of the human body into pieces and tissues no longer readily identifiable as belonging to a human individual, such as, for example, so-called “cell lines. Increasingly, as biotechnology reduces the scale of human tissue, it increases the scope of its use and abuse. Cell lines and other genetic material have now joined more archaic forms of human substances such as skulls, bones, skin, blood, sperm, ova, embryos, umbilical cord blood, bone marrow, cancerous material, human fat, and saliva as the raw materials of scientific knowledge. Their movement, Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell have argued, exposes uncertainties about identity, property and reciprocity in the encounter between science, society and the individual.

¹⁶⁶ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Bodies for Sale – Whole or in Parts.” *Body & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2-3 (2001), 1-8 (quotes from 1, 2 and 4). Scheper-Hughes adds that besides the new medico-technological impulses, the present commodification of the body also shows continuities with older discourses about the use of human bodies in religious edification, healing, dissection, recreation, and medical experimentation.

These raw materials can be both the building blocks of community but also icons of inequality. “The medical capacity to fragment the body and the techno-social systems that manage and distribute these fragments,” Waldby and Mitchell argue, therefore “raise fundamental questions about ontology, power, economy, and community.” For them, the circulation of human tissue forces us to rethink our ideas about gifts and commodities. First, unlike blood transfusion and organ transplant, most human tissues no longer pass from one individual to another, but enter a network of researchers, labs and storage facilities that makes it hard to see who the recipient is. Second, the international nature of the circulation strains the community-building potential of giving human tissue. Third, whereas laws in the U.K. and the U.S. prohibit an individual from selling tissue drawn from his body, once he or she has donated, companies can fragment, engineer and sell it on.¹⁶⁷

The circulation of genetic materials from indigenous peoples in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has thrown these tensions into stark relief. Questions of ownership, human rights, violence and violation, moral order and cultural identity, Margaret Lock has shown, are at the heart of efforts by geneticists and drug companies to harvest, store and engineer the DNA of indigenous populations. In her examination of the efforts of the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP), created in 1991 by Allan Wilson and Luca Cavalli-Sforza, she highlights how gene-hunting scientists, accompanied by anthropologists in one case, risk exposing the indigenous peoples they intend to study to the dangers associated with “biocapitalism,” such as the denial of donor rights, the neglect of donor interests, and the misrepresentation of

¹⁶⁷ Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-29 (quote from 6). See also Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially 252-60.

information. But more interestingly, she suggests that this form of “bioprospecting” shows continuities with the past. “History is repeating itself on a scale unimaginable,” she cautions us, “and hammering out bargains about some share of the possible profit for local peoples may well result in the creation of new dependencies in the globalized economy of today.”¹⁶⁸

Moreover, the HGDP’s singling out of “unique, historically vital populations that are in danger of dying out or being assimilated,” has echoed throughout this dissertation.¹⁶⁹ Salvaging the indigenous body lost was a powerful trope in the nineteenth century. The dead and dying continue to be at risk today. Maori activist Aroha Te Pareake Mead, Foreign Policy Convener and Deputy Convener of the Maori Congress in Aotearoa, has put forward similar concerns, linking the gathering of genetic material the histories of exploitation, expropriation and extermination of European colonialism. Recalling a time when body parts of indigenous peoples were “pickled and preserved in glass jars so scientists could study them in vitro,” she now sees a time when “human genes are being treated by science in the same way that indigenous ‘artifacts’ were gathered by museums; collected, stored, immortalized, reproduced, engineered - all for the sake of humanity and public education, or so we are asked to believe.” Her critique is couched in the language of sacredness and genealogy, and like the appropriation of human remains two centuries earlier, the gathering of genes implies a sense of desecration and dehumanization that runs counter to Maori beliefs.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Margaret Lock, “The Alienation of Body Tissue and the Biopolitics of Immortalized Cell Lines,” *Body & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2-3 (2001), 63-91 (quote from 69). I am greatly indebted to the work of Margaret Lock for thinking about the connections between the accumulation of human remains in the past and the more modern forms of bioprospecting.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Lock, “The Alienation of Body Tissue,” 79.

¹⁷⁰ Aroha Te Pareake Mead, “Genealogy, Sacredness, and the Commodities Market,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2 (July 1996), 46-51 (quotes from 48).

However, like in the nineteenth century, the appropriation of the indigenous or non-western body, in all its forms, is not a story of neo-colonial domination alone. Much like indigenous collaborators and informants in the nineteenth century recognized and exploited European appetite for indigenous bodies, some non-western donor communities today have found ways to benefit from the exchange of human commodities. While western demand for transplant organs has dramatically increased with improvements in transplant technology, domestic supply has lagged far behind. As Michele Goodwin has shown, terminally ill Americans are increasingly turning to less than legitimate international markets for organs. In these “black markets,” organs are harvested from politically, socially and economically vulnerable population groups in regions across the world where biocapitalism is advancing unchecked. These groups include felons in Chinese prisons as well as the poor in Brazil and India.¹⁷¹

But even in the twenty-first century, the bodies of the weak continue to offer ways of asserting non-western forms of re-appropriation. During his fieldwork in a Chennai slum, for example, the anthropologist Lawrence Cohen heard how several of the Indian women he was interviewing had sold one of their kidneys to alleviate debt and feed their families. Interestingly, Cohen notes that besides the poverty and debt, which could be found elsewhere in India in even deeper measures, the urbanization of South India, resulting in large metropolitan centers such as Chennai, improved access to health care across class lines and thus made the harvest of organs logistically easier. In addition, Cohen suggests that here in urban South India, in particular, women’s bodies had a “prior operability.” Yet, Indian women in these slums had come to see a

¹⁷¹ Michele Goodwin, *Black Markets: The Supply and Demand of Body Parts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

medical operation as a “modality of citizenship,” a claim to independence and agency.¹⁷² Despite their disadvantaged position, destitute Indian women seized their own bodies as a means of asserting their power, claiming citizenship and alleviating poverty.

Understanding the history of the acquisition, circulation and accumulation of the bodies of the weak allows us to “decolonize” scientific knowledge. It brings to light the conditions of its creation, not merely as the result of disinterested and detached curiosity, but as the product of imperial and commercial interests. The acquisition of these indigenous bodies depended on and deployed a form of exchange that reflected the needs and desires of an industrializing society obsessed with raw materials and also imported a way of seeing the world and the people in it. Today, those interests have become more global and more obscure. The catastrophe here is that history threatens to repeat itself. The indigenous body, living and dead, is again at risk of being misappropriated. But like all prophecies, there is hope, too. These bodies of the weak are not only the victims of regimes that seek to exploit and profit from the indigenous body, but they also embody the means to challenge those systems of power that threaten them. Although the dead may not be safe from the enemy if he wins, an understanding of the acquisition, circulation and accumulation of the indigenous body may just provide the living with the means to defend what they have left behind.

¹⁷² Lawrence Cohen, “Where It Hurst: Indian Material for an Ethics of Organ Transplantation,” *Daedalus*, vol. 128, no. 4 (1999), 135-165 (quote from 139). In a later article, Lawrence Cohen documents the way in which pharmaceutical science has responded to the demand for human organs by developing powerful antirejection drugs, thereby increasing the potential donor population. See his “The Other Kidney: Body Politics Beyond Recognition,” *Body & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2-3 (2001), 9-29.

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