

Warning: This article contains references to colonial practices and language and includes details of grave robbing with regards to the ancestors of Indigenous peoples. It includes the names and images of deceased people and illustrations of human remains.

How Arthur Baessler stole human remains from New Zealand

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Abstract. In April 2019, ancestral remains of 109 individuals from several Berlin collections were repatriated to Aotearoa/New Zealand. This followed a request by the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa from 2010, addressed to the *Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin*, custodian of these collections at the time. The handover was preceded by our interdisciplinary and collaborative provenance research. The main goal of this research was to confirm that the remains in question were really from New Zealand, but also to shed more light on the context of acquisition. This article focuses on Berlin collector Arthur Baessler (1859–1907) who had acquired the majority of these remains when travelling to New Zealand in 1896/1897. We combine historical and anthropological investigation to clarify the provenance of the remains and to show how European collectors used the specific conditions in the colonies to collect the remains of Indigenous peoples. Our results are meant to support further research: more generally, when our findings on Baessler may be linked with other comparable collection activities in Germany and/or in the Pacific region, and more specifically to enable more local research in New Zealand to establish the right place and people for the remains to return to.

[*Human Remains, New Zealand, Baessler, Provenance, Restitution*]

1. Introduction

In 2010, the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa submitted a request for repatriation of human remains of New Zealand origin from the *Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin*'s anthropological collections. Following similar requests from Namibia and Australia, both in 2008, Andreas Winkelmann and Thomas Schnalke launched the “Charité Human Remains Project” which was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Foundation) from 2010 to 2013 with the aim of investigating the provenance of a defined number of human remains (Stoecker, et al. 2013). The original plan to include remains from New Zealand in the research of this project could, however, not be realised, as the project team had to devote more time than expected to African and Australian parts of the collections and to the organisation of repatriations to Namibia, Australia and Paraguay. In 2017/2018 two of us (AW, SF) therefore completed the necessary provenance research in a separate project without specific funding and in close contact with the Te Papa museum.

Based on our research, in April 2019 the mortal remains of 109 individuals¹ were handed over to a New Zealand delegation including Māori and Moriori² representatives, who escorted them back to New Zealand. These remains stemmed from three collections housed at *Charité* at the time, the “S collection” (S standing for ‘Schädel’, the German term for skull) of the former *Museum für Völkerkunde* (see below), the anatomical collection (Winkelmann 2013) and the historical collection of dental medicine.³ Our research had confirmed that these remains stemmed without reasonable doubt from Indigenous people of New Zealand and had been brought to Berlin during the late 19th and early 20th century by various collectors, including Arthur Baessler and Otto Finsch

1 Some slight confusion has arisen about the correct number of individuals versus the actual count of inventory numbers as some inventory numbers included the remains of several individuals whereas remains with two separate inventory numbers could be assigned to a single individual. 109 is the agreed upon number at the time of repatriation.

2 The Moriori are the Indigenous population of the Chatham Islands, about 800 km east of mainland New Zealand. In the 1830s, they suffered heavily from Maori invasions. Consecutively, they were often seen as extinct, however until today, hundreds of their descendants still live across the Chatham Islands and mainland New Zealand.

3 The so called Busch collection, named after Friedrich Busch (1844–1916), the first professor of dentistry in Berlin. His collection included one Toi moko. Historical research in this case was conducted by Holger Stoecker.

(Howes 2011).⁴ Only the Toi moko⁵ in the anatomical collection had come to Berlin at an earlier period (before 1840). The majority of the remains (both in our research as well as the subsequent repatriation), representing 73 individuals, was acquired by Arthur Baessler for the “S collection”. This was one reason for our decision to concentrate on these 73 cases for this article. Additionally, available documentation for Baessler is much better as it is for most other collectors, allowing not only to create a more thorough picture of his collection activities, exemplary for other collectors, but also offering a higher potential for enabling additional research in New Zealand.

We are grateful to the editors of the *Baessler Archiv* to be able to publish our findings regarding this collection in the journal that still carries Baessler’s name and, while not founded by himself, was started from funds Baessler had left after his death (Schade 2006). In a way, Baessler thus – unknowingly – facilitated the future critical appraisal of his own collection activities.

The provenance research we discuss here had as its main goal to ensure that the human remains in question were from New Zealand and that it was justified to include them in a planned repatriation from *Charité* to Te Papa. It also attempted to address what was done with the remains in the collections, as this may also be relevant for source communities (Aranui 2017). Whereas many loose ends remain that may need to be completed by further research, we nevertheless believe that enough has been found out to make this publication a worthwhile endeavour. Our aim is to encourage and support other research along these lines and in other collections and we hope to provide possible links and points of departure for other such attempts.

Before presenting our findings, we would like to acknowledge that the language of the historical documents and publications is often steeped in colonialism. Many of the terms or descriptions used, in particular when referring to ancestors or people living at the time, are now regarded as offensive. The geopolitical and ethnic terms used in the documents from the colonial period only serve to identify the historical context, and their colonial origin should be borne in mind. They reflect the attitudes of the period in which they were written. We would also like to caution the readers that this article talks of people who have passed away and in some instances also shows images of human remains, although we have decided to keep these to a minimum and only use them when we think it relevant to illustrate some of our findings or provide other researchers a point for departure.

2. Methods

Our approach to provenance analysis of human remains from colonial collections has recently been described in detail (Fründt, et al. 2021; Winkelmann, et al. 2022). In short, our interdisciplinary approach involves an initial step to inventory the remains in question and establish an overview of existing information (such as labels, inscriptions on the remains, information given in collection inventories). Based on this, the necessary research is planned out. Two largely independent paths follow: on the one hand historical research using information from historical collection records, historical publications, biographical information of collectors, and archival sources, on the other hand the non-invasive bioanthropological investigation of the remains looking for general information on the life of the individual (such as age, sex, signs of injuries or diseases) and on the postmortal fate of the remains (taphonomy) including signs of collection activities like maceration or mounting. From early on, we also contacted the team of the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme at Te Papa in order to exchange and discuss our findings. This discussion has been ongoing and continued after the successful repatriation of the individuals.

4 Other collectors related to the repatriated remains were: Johann von Haast (1822 – 1887), Carl Hüscher (*1849), Otto Finsch (1839–1917), James Hector (1834–1907), Friedrich Krull (1836 – 1914), and Henry Suter (1841 – 1918).

5 Toi moko, also known as mokomokai, is a preserved or dried human head of Māori origin.

The concluding combination of findings had to clarify that the origin of the remains from New Zealand was plausible enough to warrant their repatriation. Ideally, the combination of findings would relate the “object biography” of the analysed human remains to a “subject biography” of the individuals behind the remains. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, biographical information on the deceased individuals remains much more limited than biographical information on the involved collectors and researchers. This mirrors the colonial collection practices of the time which had no particular interest in individual personal biographies but were mostly focussed on acquiring examples of a perceived type that allowed for generalised statements. The lack of individual-specific data must therefore be seen as an immanent problem when dealing with colonial collections that can only be addressed by looking more closely than historical researchers at the individual and also by paying attention to the culture of the people at the time.

3. The Collection and the Inventory

To illustrate our initial research steps aimed at establishing an overview of the ancestral remains in question, we will first present a summary of the history of the “S collection” and what we know about the collector Arthur Baessler.

3.1. The S Collection or Luschan Collection

For this publication, we will refrain from discussing general aspects of collection activities with regards to anthropological collections in colonial contexts and instead focus on our specific case study. There is already ample literature on the subject, focussing on different times and regions, and also spanning from individual cases to more general accounts and overviews (see for example: Berner, et al. 2011; Fforde, et al. 2002; Fründt 2011; Legassick and Rassool 2000; Stoecker, et al. 2013; Turnbull 2017).

The so-called “S collection” (Kunst and Creutz 2013) goes back to Felix von Luschan (1854-1924), an anthropologist with an Austrian background who came to Berlin in 1885 and ever since remained associated with the Berlin *Museum für Völkerkunde* (Museum of Ethnology, today *Ethnologisches Museum*), where he became head of the department for Africa and Oceania from 1904 (Ruggendorfer and Szemethy 2009). In 1909, he also became full professor of anthropology at Berlin University. He travelled to South Africa, Australia and North America, but never to New Zealand (Ruggendorfer and Szemethy 2009).

From the early 1900s until his death in 1924, von Luschan maintained a worldwide network through which he received numerous skulls and skeletons from overseas for his collection at the *Museum für Völkerkunde*. Those remains that were donated to the museum mostly went into the “S collection”, while those for which local collectors or dealers charged money were financed by von Luschan’s own private funds and went into a separate collection. This so-called ‘teaching collection’ comprised more than 5,600 items at the time of von Luschan’s death and was sold to the American Museum of Natural History in New York for \$41,500 by his widow (Stoecker and Winkelmann 2018).⁶ The “S collection”, which included more than 5,000 remains from around the world, stayed in Berlin. At the request of his successor as professor of anthropology, Eugen Fischer (1874-1967), it was administered by Berlin University and, after a short stay at the Institute of Pathology, was moved to the Kaiser Wilhelm-Institute of Anthropology in Berlin-Dahlem, where it was curated by Hans Weinert (1887–1967). From 1943, when the “S collection” had to be moved from Berlin-Dahlem to avoid war damage, it has a confusing history of changes of place and responsibility and eventually ended up at the Institute of Anthropology of Humboldt University in East Berlin (Kunst

6 Remains from this New York collection have been repatriated to Aotearoa / New Zealand in 2014: <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/sites/default/files/media-release-repatriation-history-of-maori-remains-2014.pdf> (15 March 2022).

and Creutz 2013). Much of the original documentation of the collection was destroyed during the war, while surviving correspondence remained at the Museum of Ethnology in West Berlin. Therefore, from 1961, the collection itself and the surviving documentation were separated by the Berlin wall.

From the 1960s, members of the mentioned Institute of Anthropology in East Berlin started to re-inventory the collections, mainly based on inscriptions on the skulls, as there was no documentation available. This massive effort was handed down to us in the so-called *Erweiterte Grundtabelle* (“extended base chart”), an excel file gathering all available information for the collection. This excel file goes back to documentation by new file cards – started in the 1960s – and the use of digital documentation from 1995. In 1986, the Institute of Anthropology and its collections became part of the medical faculty of Humboldt University, called *Charité*. When this institute was eventually suspended in 2004, its collections came into the responsibility of the Charité Medical History Museum. Since 2011, the Luschan collection is curated by the *Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte* as part of the State Museums of the *Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) (Kunst and Creutz 2013).

3.2. The collector – Arthur Baessler

Baessler was born on 6 May 1857 in Glauchau in Saxonia, at the time a kingdom within the German Confederation, as the son of a wealthy owner of a weaving factory. He studied physics, chemistry, and philosophy in Heidelberg, Munich, and Berlin, where he passed his doctoral exam in 1886 with a dissertation on hydroquinone (Schade 2006). As he was independently wealthy, he decided to become a scientific traveller and started to associate himself with the Society for Geography and the Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory in Berlin. He began preparing himself for travels and started to take a special interest in (physical and cultural) anthropology, for which, however, he never had a formal education – some of his obituaries cautiously allude to this lack of scientific training and praise him for the collections he acquired and/or bought and donated rather than for his scientific work (Hantzsch 1909; von den Steinen 1907).

He subsequently went on three big journeys, during which he conducted anthropological research (such as taking bodily measurements), took many photographs, and acquired extensive ethnographic collections (Hantzsch 1909; Martin and Schultz 2006):

- 1887–1889: India, Siam, Indonesia (Dutch East Indies), Philippines, China, Korea, Japan
- 1891–1893: Indonesia, (German) New Guinea, Melanesia, Australia and New Zealand, Polynesia (the “South Sea”)
- 1896–1898: Polynesia, New Zealand, Central America, Peru.

In between these journeys, he lived in Berlin, assorted the acquired collections, donated them to several museums (mostly to Berlin, Dresden, and Stuttgart), and published travel reports and ethnographic findings with a focus on Oceania and Peru – for details of his extensive Peruvian collections see (Fischer 2006). In 1903, when he felt that he might not be able to travel again himself, he decided to give 100.000 Mark⁷ to establish the Arthur Baessler Foundation to fund others’ scientific travels and related publications (Schade 2003). A fourth journey, which was meant to lead him to the Easter Islands, had to be discontinued in 1905 due to failing health. He never entirely recovered and died on 31 March 1907 in Eberswalde near Berlin.

As Schade (2006) analysed, Baessler’s motivation for his collection activities most likely was social recognition, which he received in the form of state medals and decorations in return for his costly donations to museums, and renown in scientific circles, which he was given for example by accepting him as an esteemed member of scientific

7 The equivalent of around 700.000 Euro today, cf. <https://www.bundesbank.de/de/statistiken/konjunktur-und-preise/-/kaufkraeftequivalente-historischer-betraege-in-deutschen-waehrungen-615162> (15 March 2021).

8 In general, this includes only brief summaries and merely gives the results of the investigation and/or the most remarkable findings as they relate to the events established by historical research. The aim is not to give a full account of the analyses but to illustrate how anthropological and historical findings can be brought together in order to support a given interpretation of the past. In line with ethical considerations, images of the remains are kept to a minimum. During the actual analysis, age estimation has been done following age-related changes in bone and dentition (mostly based on: Krishan and Kanchan 2013; Scheuer and Black 2004; Ubelaker 1987; Workshop of European Anthropologists 1980). Cranial fusion rates have only been used as rough indicators for an age range, as there is too much variation here for accurate age estimation, in particular when used for unknown populations (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994; Meindl and Lovejoy 1985). The same holds true for attrition rates of the teeth. Sex estimation was done based on morphological features alone (following the system of Acsádi and Nemeskéri 1970) and is also necessarily limited as no post-cranial elements were present. For description and interpretation of trauma see Reichs (1998) and Kimmmerle and Baraybar (2008).

9 Letters E1383/96, E114/97, E210/97, E1135/97, in: Acta betreffend die Sammlungen des Dr. Bäessler, Vol. 1. Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0548, Akte 869.

societies – the Society for Geography made him secretary and deputy chair in 1902 – or by his admission into the National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina in 1892. Baessler was described as shy and reticent (Schade 2003: 109), but other than that we do not know much about Baessler's character or personal life.

3.3. Initial research and first overview

At the time of the first request from Te Papa, the relevant collections of human remains were held at a special depot of the Medical History Museum of Charité. By consulting documentation of the “S collection” and the anatomical collection, more than 100 remains of possible New Zealand origin could be identified. These were transferred to the Anatomical Institute for provenance research. In the following, only those remains related to Baessler will be considered (see Table 1).

The first identification was done by consultation of the “extended base chart” file mentioned above. This chart listed the following information: the collection number, usually to be found in ink on the frontal bone of the skull preceded by a capital ‘S’, the wider region of origin (Polynesia/New Zealand), the collector (Baessler), the skeletal parts at hand (skull with or without mandible, other parts, fragments), the condition, the age class based on inspection (infantile, juvenile, adult, mature, senile), and a location and/or ethnic group taken from inscriptions. It turned out that six isolated mandibles (numbered 940b, 940F, 955a, 959a, 960a, 982a) were not in the collection anymore and must therefore have been lost at some point after the 1960s. In a first step, we charted all inscriptions in detail. In addition to the location of origin listed in Table 1 this variably included the name Baessler, the year 1896 or 1897, or a separate number preceded by a “B.”.

4. Historical and anthropological research

In the following, we will present a largely chronological report of how the remains in question were acquired by Baessler and came into the Berlin collection. Where appropriate, anthropological findings will be directly included in this report of historical events.⁸ Ethical aspects of Baessler's grave robbing activities will be discussed in a separate chapter.

4.1. Travels to New Zealand and acquisition of remains

During his first visit to New Zealand in 1892, Baessler crossed the entire country from South to North, and tried to get in contact with Māori on the North Island. In one chapter of his book “*Südsee-Bilder* [South Sea Pictures]” of 1895, he reports his impressions of a visit to the “Ngatikaiahi tribe” in “Tapuaeharuru” on Lake Taupō (Baessler 1895: 255–295). There is no evidence that he acquired any human remains during this first visit to New Zealand.

The dates of Baessler's second visit to New Zealand, during which he acquired the remains in question, can be roughly reconstructed from letters he sent. After he had been on the Cook Islands in September 1896 (Baessler 1896), he sent letters⁹ to von Luschan from Auckland on 12 October and 18 December 1896 and another one on 20 January, announcing his departure from New Zealand for the Cook Islands and Tahiti on the same day. Another letter from Auckland on 7 August 1897 shows that Baessler had another short stay in Auckland on his way from Tahiti to San Francisco. In the letter of 18 December, Baessler reported that he had already collected “nearly 80 skulls”. As inscriptions on the remains only give 1897 in two cases and 1896 in 50 cases, it appears that Baessler collected most of the remains in 1896.

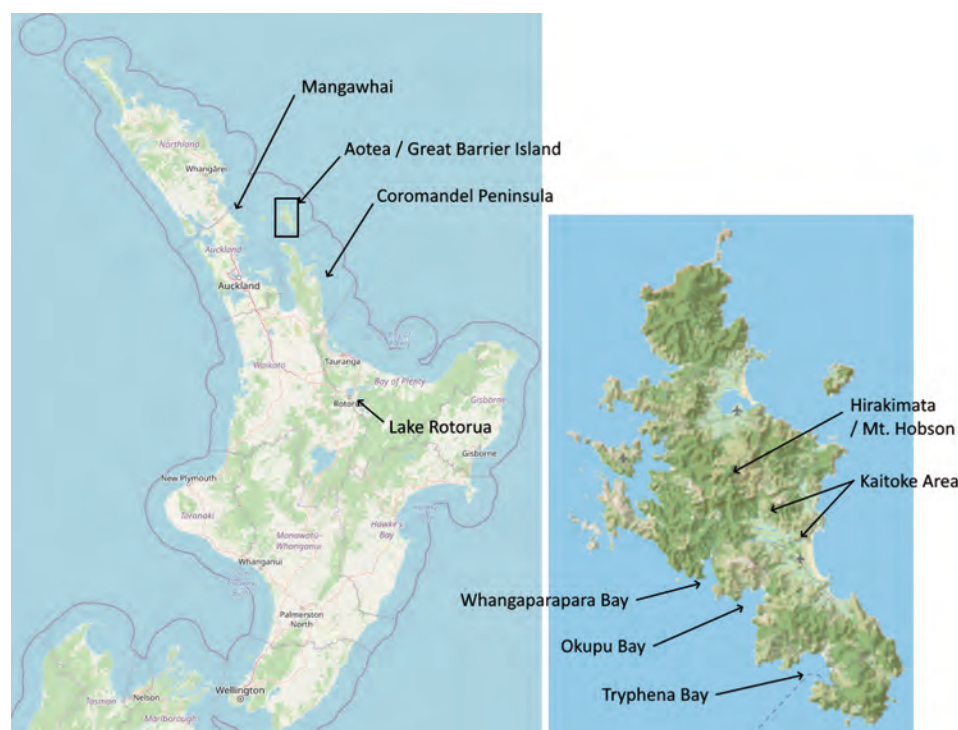


Fig. 1 North Island (left) and Aotea / Great Barrier Island (right) with today's geographic names.
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4.1.1. Acquisition

As opposed to many other collectors at the time, Baessler himself provides rather detailed information on where and how he acquired the remains (fig. 1). In the following, we mainly reproduce Baessler's descriptions in his text entitled "*Neuseeländische Alterthümer* [New Zealand antiquities]", a three-page article in the proceedings section of the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* referring to the session of 20 March 1897 of the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* BGAEU¹⁰ (Baessler 1897). In this session, Baessler's "*Reisebericht* [travelogue]" sent in January was presented to the society in his absence. Whether this publication is a complete copy of Baessler's original letter remains unknown. If not mentioned otherwise, the following quotations are from this publication (Baessler 1897). The German text is reproduced in the appendix, translations are our own.

Some rare additional information comes from two sources: first, von Luschan's extensive description of all skulls of the Baessler collection and some others from New Zealand (von Luschan 1907). While published after Baessler's death, it includes introductory remarks by Baessler himself (pp. 17–18), which, however, are virtually identical with those in his 1897 publication. The second source is Baessler's notebook of his third journey, preserved at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin.¹¹ This notebook is not a diary but primarily a list of his ethnographic and anthropological collections. It appears from the list of skulls in this notebook that Baessler numbered remains in the order of their acquisition throughout this journey (1–172), with numbers 66–129 and 141 referring to remains from New Zealand.¹² Baessler's second book publication on the "South Sea" does not contain any reference to New Zealand (Baessler 1900).

In his "travelogue" published in 1897, Baessler gives a short introduction on Māori burial rituals (see below) and then proceeds to describe specific locations from where he took remains with reference to numbers of his collection (cf. table 1). This direct link

¹⁰ Berlin Society of Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory.

¹¹ Arthur Baessler, "3. Reise [3rd journey] 1895–1898", Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0459, Akte 899.

¹² Five pages listing skulls in Baessler's notebook "3. Reise [3rd journey] 1895–1898", Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0459, Akte 899 (not paginated; around p 90).

provides a good foundation for provenance research and in the following we will present our findings for each location.

Two places north of Auckland

Baessler started with the following description of a place 90 km north of Auckland on the opening of the Mangawhai River at the eastern coast of the North Island:

The place is recognisable from far by a small rocky promontory, which clearly stands out from the monotonous sand hills spanning the coast for miles. These hills were once frequently used as burial sites, but merely hold few human remains today. Storms from the east blew away the sand and uncovered the skeletons, which were then washed away into the sea by the waves. [...] Therefore, I only had success with my secondary excavation in one place, on the left bank of the Mangawai, not far from the foothills, where, on a hill, about 1 m beneath the surface of the same, I found two complete skeletons. Unfortunately, despite the greatest care, they disintegrated entirely, when I wanted to take them from the sand, which was slightly wet on this very spot. They rested recumbently, the head, raised slightly, was positioned northwest of the feet oriented towards southwest; after their first burial, they have apparently not been disintered again. The reason was that they date from a battle, which was once fought here against Maoris advancing from the south, to which many local warriors succumbed, who were buried on the hill, but without looking after them later on due to their high numbers. They belong to the tribe 'Ngatiwhatua'. Their remains carry nos. 66 and 67. Not far from these, nearly at the surface, some skeletal parts were lying: no. 68. (p. 113)

Baessler's designation can be identified with the iwi (tribe) of Ngāti Whātua. Of the three mentioned individuals, only the remains of the first one have been preserved in the collection. They stem from an older adult individual and show significant signs of erosion; in some of the cranial cavities, some smaller plant roots can be found. Both would be expected given the described circumstances of burial. Baessler says they likely represent warriors fallen in battle and indeed the present cranium is severely shattered from blunt force traumata inflicted to the top right and the back left of the skull. However, as the fracture lines show no signs of healing, are very straight with chipped edges and have a much lighter colour than the surrounding bone, these are very likely not related to any injuries sustained during life, but represent some rough handling long after death. One large defect is even cutting through part of Baessler's writing, indicating that at least this fracture happened after the remains were collected and inscribed by him. The other fractures may even be damages inflicted during Baessler's excavation, but Baessler does not describe his methods in detail so that it is difficult to judge how damaging they may have been. The individual also suffered from serious bone infections of the upper jaw (including several root abscesses with large bone defects), so it would also be plausible to assume the infection (and a resulting sepsis) might have been the cause of death. Baessler may have gotten the idea to look for remains in this specific location by his contact with Cheeseman or Reischek who are both known to have collected previously in the area.

Subsequently, Baessler reported a second location north of Auckland:

Several years ago, about 60 km north of this place, a cave was discovered, which held many skeletons and in which the curator of the museum of Auckland, who had been informed, found 73 skulls. Of these, he most kindly left the remaining six to me, which bear nos. 69-74, and seven mandibles (no. 75), which, however, do not seem to belong to the skulls. No. 74 is distinguishable as the skull of a chief, as it is completely painted with the red colour 'Kokowai' ¹⁾, – an honour that was only bestowed upon chiefs. [...] 1) red, fired ochre. (p. 113)

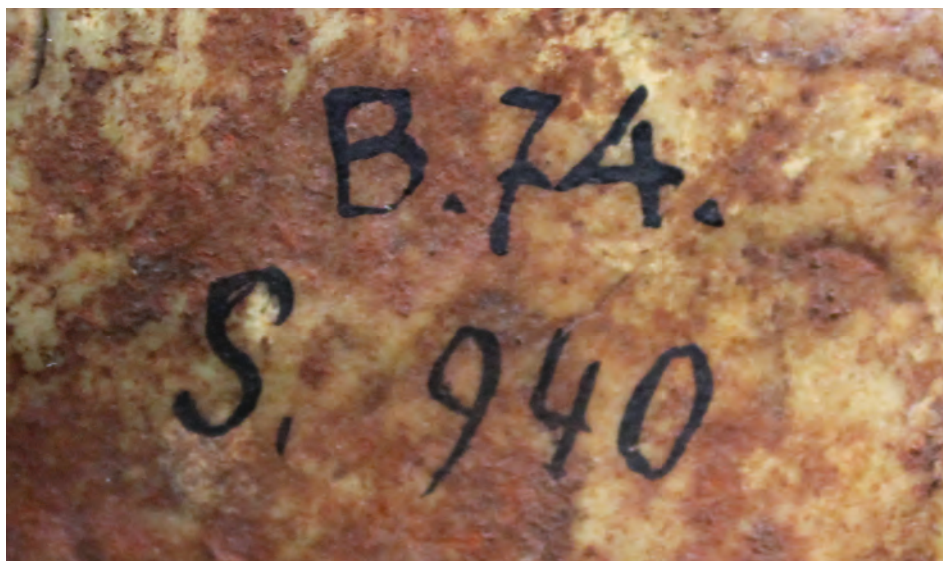


Fig. 2 Detail of an inscription in black ink on the skull given the number 74 by Baessler. The surface is partly covered by remnants of red ochre.

Baessler's notebook specifies the mentioned curator as "Mr. Cheeseman". Thomas Frederick Cheeseman (1845–1923) was curator of the Auckland Museum from 1874 until his death.¹³ Another publication of Baessler describing and depicting Māori burial chests from the collection of the Auckland museum (Baessler 1905) confirms his cooperation with Cheeseman. It is well known that Cheeseman exchanged Maori ancestral remains with international institutions to enhance the collections of his Auckland Museum (Aranui 2018, p. 42). The 2019 repatriation also included four skulls that Cheeseman gave to Otto Finsch, another German collector, in 1881. However, no mention of Baessler could be found in the "Annual Reports of the Auckland Institute and Museum" for 1896 or 1897 and it therefore remains unclear whether Baessler gave anything to Cheeseman in return. The place from which these remains were taken can be identified as the burial cave at Maunu in Whāngārei (Aranui 2018; p. 43).

All the mentioned skulls remained in the collection, while of the seven lower jaws, only four could still be identified. It is interesting to note that within this group of remains, it was possible to allocate three mandibles to three of the crania, making it very likely that these belonged to one individual each respectively. As at least two of these fit perfectly, Baessler's own anthropological expertise may be called into doubt as he stated these mandibles "did not seem to belong to the skulls". But maybe he simply did not check them closely enough, or he referred to the other mandibles. In 1885, Cheeseman had written to Charles Tothill, who had collected for him at Maunu: "I should also be glad to have as many lower jaws as possible — as only a small number of those sent out fitted the skulls" (Aranui 2018, p. 43). This shows that matching mandibles to skulls was already a problem at the time, but also that collecting isolated mandibles was nevertheless appreciated.

Most of the individuals were adult men of middle age or older and did not show any signs of injuries. Some of them were of bad dental health and some show signs of arthritis as would be expected with advancing age. Some have signs of other minor infections (e.g. of stomatitis, an infection of the mouth that can have many different causes), but none of them severely enough to account for the manner of death. In general, this seems to represent a normal burial cave, none that is specifically related to a particular event (like a battle or an epidemic disease).

13 <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c14/cheeseman-thomas-frederick>.

All bone surfaces have eroded significantly and traces of dark-brown earth and sometimes sand and plant roots can be found. In one case, some lime deposit is recognizable. Baessler's descriptions do not detail as to how the burial conditions in the cave have been: were the remains buried in earth or sand or was it a stone cave? These traces could also be an indication for the cave being used for secondary burials, a practice which was common at the time. Cheeseman's original letters, however, do not mention anything about the particular conditions at the site.

Two of the individuals stick out. The first is Baessler's no. 74, that he describes as being still completely covered in red ochre. This ochre is still visible in the collection (Fig. 2). The individual is an adult male for which the cause of death remains unknown. However, his bones are very heavy and robust with very prominent muscle attachment sites. Even without being able to look at the remainder of his body, this points to a very strong and active individual. The use of ochre or *kōkōwai* is commonly recorded, especially in burial caves, and has been used on male and female individuals.

The second individual worth mentioning is no. 70, as the remains belong to a child of around 6-7 years of age. The remains show no signs of injury or disease, and the manner of death thus remains unknown. However, this may shed some light on the demography of the burial site, as it indicates that not only adults or warriors were buried here. In a letter from Thomas Cheeseman to C. Tothill, dated 2 April 1885, referring to the same Maunu burial cave, Cheeseman mentions "five skulls of children which are valueless for scientific purposes".¹⁴ It is highly likely that the above child's skull is one of these five mentioned.

Locations on Aotea/Great Barrier Island

The following descriptions all relate to the island of Aotea or Great Barrier Island (see map), called "Otea" by Baessler. Baessler gives a short general description of the island and states that he found mortal remains that had been buried in crevices and caves within the rocks of the island, before giving the following first description.

The southeastern foothills of the ranges sloping down from the 'Hirakimata' form the 'Kaituki' hills. Here, at an altitude of about 75 m, in rocky, barely accessible terrain, which took the full breadth of one hill, I found the skulls no. 77-88, the skull parts no. 89, and, separated from the others, which were found in groups of two or more, the skulls and bones (a total of 20 parts) no. 90. (p. 114)

All of the remains mentioned in this description are still present (Fig. 3). They represent both male and female individuals, nearly all of them adult, but also two children: one of them was about 10 years at the time of death; of the other one only some cranial fragments remain which make an accurate estimate difficult. Their size and form however clearly point toward a non-adult individual, probably of a similar age as the other child. For the first individual, no cause of death could be determined; the second one shows some irregularities of the inner surface of the cranial vault which might be related to an infection (such as a meningitis). One woman has a circular depressed (and thus incomplete) fracture of about 1.5 cm in diameter that indicates a blunt force trauma. Some of the edges are slightly bend inward, indicating the woman was still alive when the trauma occurred. There are no radiating or concentric fractures, and no other injuries in the vicinity. The bone surface is not damaged, so whatever weapon or tool was used did not have a sharp edge. A high velocity trauma (bullet) would likely have had a larger impact (including resulting radiating fractures). Possibilities are therefore a projectile trauma with little impact force (depending on factors such as distance and type of weapon) or a blow or hit with an instrument that had a circular diameter of the measured dimensions at the impact site. As there are no signs of healing, this might be the cause of death. For all the other adult individuals, no significant diseases (apart from bad dental health or

14 Letter from Cheeseman to C. Tothill, dated 2 April 1885. Archive: Auckland War Memorial Museum, Museum Archive, signature: 96/6 Letter Book 1882-1890, page 273.

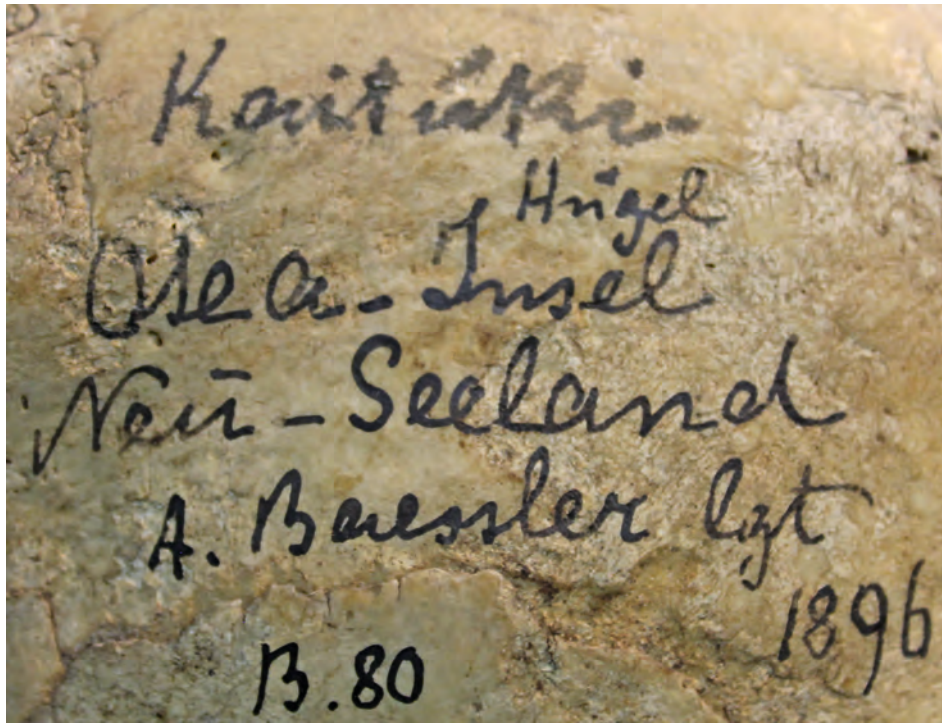


Fig. 3 Detail of an inscription in black ink on a skull taken from the Kaituki hills and given the number 80 by Baessler. Translation: “Kaituki / hill / Otea Island / New Zealand / A. Baessler collected / B. 80 / 1896”.

arthritis) or injuries could be found. Nearly all of the remains are discoloured, eroded, have soil or plant particles adhering, all pointing to a burial context. In some cases, deformation has taken place which could indicate wet environment and significant pressure (e.g. deep burial and thus high soil weight), however Baessler does not stipulate here if he conducted excavations as he did in some of the other places.

Whereas the mandible is lost; all other mentioned remains still formed part of the collection. Baessler does not specify how high above the water level of the bay he found the remains. However, from the changes of the bones it seems likely, that they were at least from time to time submerged under water or at least buried in a very moist environment: the weathering and strong erosion with surface flaking, cracking, and partial deformation suggest an exposure to the elements and some seasonal temperature changes. Additionally, the dark soil and sand particles present could also help narrowing down the location of their burial. Research into the known archaeological sites in the area have identified a number of recorded burials of both Māori and European origin. There is one site at Tryphena Bay in particular, T09/48, which has burials, midden and artefact finds associated with it. The site report (New Zealand Archaeological Association 1975) mentions that the excavation and recovery of the site had to be carried out because a destruction was imminent and the sea face of the area was eroding. This had led to the burials being washed (or dug) out. This description sounds very similar to what Baessler mentioned and it also fits with the condition of the remains. “North of Tryphena, ‘Okubu’-Bay is located. On its western shore I got no. 95–97, on its eastern shore at two different locations a) skull no. 98/98 and 99, as well as mandible no. 100, b) skull no. 101.” (p. 114)

This bay on the southwest coast of Aotea is now called Okupu. Nearly all remains mentioned were still present, with the exception of the mandible which seems to be lost. They belong to adult individuals of either sex, and different age groups. All but two

exhibit blunt or sharp force traumata to the face and head, some of them several. None show any signs of healing, indicating that the injuries were suffered around the time of death. It is thus possible that their burial was related to some form of violent incident. However, not all must have died at the same time: whereas all of them show taphonomic changes consistent with burial (soil, plant remains, erosion, surface flaking, cracking, deformation) the degree varies greatly. Whereas part of this could be due to different specific conditions at the site, it is more likely that the duration of their burial differed, indicating the burial ground was used for a longer period of time.

Okubu bay is separated from the more northern bay “Wangaparapara” by the “Ahu-mata”, which is about 420 m high. The mountain is only covered by a few trees; but ascent is hampered a lot by the dense ‘Manuka’ shrubbery and high ferns, from which ragged rocks stand out everywhere. On a ridge of about 250 m of altitude, from which both bays can be seen, these are particularly numerous and seem to have served as burial sites mainly for the people of “Wangaparapara”. From this place came no. 102/102, 103/103, 104–124; also no. 125: three mandibles; no. 126: skull parts (27 items) and no. 127. (p. 114)

While the bay Baessler described is still called Whangaparapara, inscriptions on the remains imply that Baessler saw this also as the name of a people (table 1). This may just have been an inaccuracy in his understanding of the local conditions.

Most of the remains were still in the collection. Only nos. 117, 124, and 127 and one of the mandibles numbered 125 have been lost. They are the remains of both male and female adult individuals of various ages, plus one child of about 7–9 years of age. All of them show taphonomic changes consistent with long term burial (surface flaking, cracking, deformation, soil, plant remains, erosion, scavenger activity). Particularly apparent are dendritic patterns in a lot of them: these are surface destructions brought about by the acidic properties of plant roots (White and Folkens 2005). It thus fits the description of a site that is covered in shrubbery and ferns. The individuals show a wide range of healed, partially healed, or fresh blunt and sharp force traumata. Likewise, there is a variation of common diseases or pathologic reactions such as bad dental health, stomatitis, arthritis, non-symptomatic button osteomata, cribra orbitalia or porotic hyperostosis, otitis and mastoiditis. In at least three cases, these might be related to the death of the individuals: in one case an infection of nearly the entire left upper jaw led to an opening into the left nasal sinus which likewise shows severe signs of infection. This may well have led to a sepsis. In another case a dental root infection has also spread to the sinus with similar consequences; in the last case a left-sided mastoiditis has spread to other areas and could thus likewise have been fatal. In general, this seems to be consistent with the site being used as a normal burial ground for a community, although the general level of sickness seems rather high, indicating that life conditions might not have been easy.

Finds from Lake Rotorua

Close to the lake ‘Rotorua’ [...] the small Maori settlement ‘Whakarewarewa’ is located. To make the hot waters, which were long known as salutary to the Maori, also serviceable for Whites, small wooden huts were erected here and there over the last years. During these works, two years ago, a vault was discovered about 1,5–2 m below the surface, in which 13 skeletons were found. One of these is the excellently preserved skull no. 76/76’, of the tribe of ‘Tuhourangi’. (p. 113–114)

The location described here is on the mainland of the North Island, see the map. In von Luschan’s book, Baessler is more specific and describes that skull no. 76 was disinterred in 1894 and given to him by the caretaker of the bathhouses (von Luschan 1907). The

notebook is even more specific and gives the name of “C. A. Nelson” as the person who disinterred the skull. Although the middle initial recorded by Baessler does not fit, this very likely refers to Charles Edwin Nelson, a native of Sweden and the son of Sven Nilsson, professor of natural history at Lund University. Nelson arrived in New Zealand in 1852 and eventually settled in Rotorua in 1891 in order to undertake research in Māori history. He managed the Geyser Hotel (which included the bath houses)¹⁵ and also obtained and then sold the well-known whare [house] Rauru which now resides at the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology (Köpke and Schmelz 2012).

The remains are still found in the collection and belong to a young adult man. He is one of the few in the collection who is likely to have suffered a violent death: three sharp force traumata (cuts) to the occipital (back of the head) can be identified. Two of them run nearly parallel, the third one is crossing the other two. All are between 3.5 and 5 cm long with slightly curling, gapping edges. The latter indicates that the individual was still alive when the injuries occurred. Analysis of the injury is made more difficult by the fact that some of the fracture edges have additionally suffered post-mortem damage (indicated by the lighter discoloration) and some of the fragments are missing. It can still be said that the type of injury suggests a weapon with a long sharp edge that can be wielded with significant force and momentum, such as a sword, a sabre, or a machete. The lack of any signs of healing suggests he did not survive long after he received the blows. The surface of the bone shows a rather dark red-brownish hue; however, it is not entirely clear if this is some form of discoloration brought about by the burial environment or if a similar ochre treatment as in the case of the previously mentioned individual was applied. The young man also suffered from a porotic hyperostosis. This condition is often linked to anaemia and is most often seen in immature individuals, but it can also be an indication of metabolic stress in general. Frequent causes are an iron-poor diet or nutrient losses associated with diarrheal diseases or infections (iron may be sequestered within the body as a defence against infection). There is also a link to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups or groups/people being under some form of (environmental) stress (Steyn, et al. 2016). Both findings might help to find out more about the specific burial context.

Moriori remains

At the end of his 1897 report, Baessler mentions Moriori remains: “From the Moriori on the Chatham Islands, I received the skulls nos. 128/128 and no. 129, the latter is allegedly from a young woman.” (p. 116)

In von Luschan’s book, Baessler discloses that the two Moriori skulls nos. 128 and 129 stemmed from an “*englisches Kriegsschiff* [English war vessel]” returning from the Chatham Islands with “several skulls” (von Luschan 1907). Only in his notebook, he specifies that he was given these skulls by “E. Tregear Wellington”¹⁶. Edward Robert Tregear (1846–1931) came to New Zealand from England in 1863 and was an untrained anthropologist who propagated a controversial theory on the Indian/Aryan origin of the Māori (Tregear 1904). Tregear has published on the Moriori – a short chapter in the 1904 book, and a short paper “The Moriori” (Tregear 1889) – but does not discuss their physical anthropology. The name Tregear has also appeared in connection with some other remains undergoing provenance research at Te Papa, indicating that Tregear’s trading of remains was no singular occurrence.

Both individuals could still be found in the collection. That the latter cranium actually belonged to a young woman is not impossible, but not very likely. Those cranial markers used for sex estimation all fall in between male and female, so either sex would be possible. However, the cranial sutures are mostly fused, and the remaining teeth show very strong (asymmetrical) attrition.¹⁷ Both would rather point towards an older adult individual. Since the source for the historic assessment remains unknown and is

15 Obituary in Waikato Argus [daily newspaper], Volume XXVI, Issue 3994, 26 January 1909, Page 2, cf. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIGUS19090126.2.5>.

16 Five pages listing skulls in Baessler’s notebook “3. Reise [3rd journey] 1895–1898”, Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0459, Akte 899 (not paginated; around p 90).

17 The individual in general has very poor dental health with several root abscesses with fenestration. Arthritic changes to the left tempomandibular fossae might explain the asymmetrical wear of the teeth. They could be both traumatic or age-related. An assessment remains difficult because of the missing lower jaw.

Laufende Nro.	Acten-Nro.	Katalog-Nro.	Gegenstand.	Provenienz.	Von wem erworben oder geschenkt?	Bemerkungen.
158	1465/102	X 30-54	25 Abgüsse von massai - Gebirgen.	O. Afrika	Hauptmann Meier	Geschenk Attest
159		S. 867 -987	Schädel von den Marquesas, Tahiti & Hervey-Inseln und von Neu Seeland	Ozeanien	Joh. Hopf Prof. Dr. Baessler	Geschenk Attest

Fig. 4 Erwerbungsbuch [Acquisition Registry] of the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin 1880–1906. The entry in 1903 gives the catalogue numbers “S. 867–987” and reads: “Schädel von den Marquesas, Tahiti & Hervey-Inseln und von Neu Seeland” [skulls from the Marquesas, Tahiti & Hervey Islands and from New Zealand] and names Baessler as the donor. Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: Inv 3, I/158/1903, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, available at https://storage.smb.museum/erwerbungsbuecher/EB_EMB-B_SLG_SN_0003-0003_LZ_1880-1906.pdf (15 March 2022)

thus dubious, this does not seem a mismatch large enough to assume it might not be the cranium in question. The remains also clearly stem from a burial context, as indicated by soil and plant remains.

The other individual was an older man who lost nearly all his teeth already during his lifetime; this went along with some arthritic changes to the temporomandibular joints. Some white and reddish-brown deposits on the surface likewise suggest a burial context.

Remains not mentioned in the 1897 report

The only remains not mentioned in Baessler’s 1897 publication carry no. 141. This higher number indicates that Baessler may have acquired this skeleton during his short second stay in New Zealand in August 1897 on his way from Tahiti to San Francisco. It was acquired from an unnamed “reliable finder”, unearthed during mining works at the Eastern coast of the Coromandel peninsula (von Luschan 1907: 18). Baessler’s notebook describes it as a “vollständiges Maori-Skelett [complete Maori skeleton]” and does not give a name either, but this is the only item for which he gives a price: 2 Pounds Sterling. This is the equivalent of roughly 200 British Pounds today.¹⁸

Of the alleged entire skeleton, only a cranium without lower jaw remained in the collection. A mix of darker and lighter soil in some of the cranial cavities and the strong erosion of the surface (in particular at the back and base of the head suggesting more exposure here) both support the narrative of this likewise being an individual formerly buried. Looking deeper into the mining history at the Coromandel at the time might help narrowing down a more precise location.

To sum up these findings: in all present cases, Baessler’s descriptions about acquisition could be matched with anthropological findings. There is therefore no reason to fundamentally doubt the information given in his publications, although obviously not every detail needs to necessarily be correct. All remains were collected from burial grounds. Even in the case of the remains not excavated by Baessler himself, the anthropological analysis suggests a former burial.

¹⁸ <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP12-31/RP12-31.pdf>.

The collected remains did not travel with Baessler but were sent ahead to Germany by ship. Baessler packed the human remains he had collected in New Zealand in a box designated as “A.B. 13” and sent it from Auckland to the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin through the firm Seegner, Langguth & Co. on the steamer “Darmstadt”, arriving in Hamburg in June 1897,¹⁹ from where they were transported to the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin. They were entered into the catalogue of the museum in 1903 as a “*Geschenk* [gift]” from Baessler and were given numbers in the “S collection” (Fig. 4).

4.2. Baessler’s grave robbing

Baessler is not only surprisingly transparent in describing his collection activities in much detail. His notes also indicate the resistance he met, which in his view made the collection of remains difficult and dangerous, but obviously did not keep him from going through.

Very early on, during his first stay in New Zealand in 1892, from which he did not bring human remains, he already received a first lesson on the deep connection Māori feel towards the remains of their ancestors. He described meeting a community who disinterred the remains of their “Häuptling [chief]” because they were on the move to another place and wanted to take the remains with them. Baessler wrote “In the past, there was nothing more abusive than to let the remains of a Māori get into the hands of his enemies, not speaking of the misfortune this would mean for his relatives, his entire tribe and himself in the afterworld. Even nowadays there would be no greater insult than if a living man turned out to be irreverent towards a dead man.” (Baessler 1895: 291). To his disappointment, Baessler was not allowed to come close to the disinterment and related ceremonies, but did watch them from a distance with binoculars (p 292).

In the introduction to his short report to the BGAEU on his successful collection activities quoted in some detail above, Baessler makes it clear that the burial places of the Māori “were chosen as hidden as possible, kept secret and were always ‘tapu’” (Baessler 1897: 112). Two sentences below, he repeats the word “tapu” in relation to places of reburial, to which access was forbidden. The German word “*Tabu*” originates from Oceania, first brought to Europe by Cook. It seems to have entered German language more widely around 1900,²⁰ and while it may not have been part of everyday speech in 1897, the way Baessler introduces it demonstrates that it did not need much explanation among Berlin anthropologists. And even if Baessler may not have grasped all aspects of the complex Māori concept of tapu (Aranui 2018: 142), he obviously knew that access to ancestral remains was simply off-limits.

Baessler added to these descriptions of burial places: “Would you be encountered there while searching for skulls, you would have to face uncomfortable hours.” (Baessler 1897: 113). This sounds as if Baessler had himself made such experiences with Māori resistance to his collection attempts. While he does not report them in more detail for New Zealand, he did have such experience from Mangaia on the Cook Islands, where he thought he could have gathered more remains if he had not been “always distrustfully watched over by the natives”²¹ (Baessler 1896). He also published similar experiences recorded in the diaries of his closest friend, ethnographer Wilhelm Joest (1852–1897), who described how on the Solomon Islands he managed to collect ethnographic items secretly while under “tight surveillance”²² by the locals and who expected that other Europeans would have been beaten to death after his departure if he had taken skulls with him (Baessler 1900: 344).

Baessler also knew that Māori actively tried to protect the remains of their ancestors. In his description of the cave north of Auckland from which Cheeseman had acquired ancestral remains (see above), Baessler reports that after hearing of the desecration of this burial cave, the local Māori had “skillfully concealed the access” to an adjacent

19 Letters E743/1899. In: Acta betreffend die Sammlungen des Dr. Bässler, Vol. 1. Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0548, Akte 869.

20 https://www.kuwi.europa.uni.de/de/lehrstuhl/ehemalige_professoren/sw2/forschung/tabu/weterfuehrende_informationen/artikel_zur_tabu-forschung/sprachtabu.pdf.

21 von den Eingeborenen stets argwöhnisch bewacht.

22 scharfe Beobachtung.

cave to prevent collectors from finding it again (Baessler 1897: 113). Similarly, in the description of the burial site on the Mangawhai river (see above), he wrote: “When Whites later searched this area for Kauri gum, they sometimes came upon a skull – instead of gum – with which they often ragged and frightened the Maori, so that these felt induced to transfer the remaining bones to the interior of the island” (Baessler 1897: 113). In his introduction to von Luschan’s book of 1907, which otherwise repeats all descriptions of 1897, Baessler simply adds that one difficulty of obtaining remains was that burial places were simply unknown (to Europeans) (von Luschan 1907: 3). In a letter to von Luschan from Auckland, Baessler wrote that collecting was not just arduous, but “sometimes even dangerous” and had to be done “without any help”.²³

All of these statements show that Baessler knew that his activities were met with significant resistance and protest by the Māori and that he was fully aware how strongly he violated Māori culture. While Baessler’s descriptions in a private letter to von Luschan may simply have served to prove his ‘heroic’ efforts against all difficulties, his open publication of this course of action demonstrates that in the anthropological circles for which he was collecting, his approach was not just accepted but highly appreciated. Not the least from his own culture, Baessler was certainly aware that desecration of graves and disturbing the peace of the dead was immoral (or in today’s words, unethical) and that what he did was simply grave robbing. It is unlikely that Baessler would ever have disinterred human remains in Germany. But on the one hand, in the eyes of Berlin anthropologists of the time, the perceived importance of scientific progress outweighed such moral concerns (much as back in Germany, the importance of science allowed anatomists to use the bodies of those who could not afford burial, likely against their wishes). On the other hand, the colonial view on ‘inferior peoples’ meant that such moral concerns could be disregarded more easily if they were expressed by the colonised.

4.3. Historical Use of the Collection for Research

Despite the intention of collectors and scientists of the time to bring together large anthropological collections as a basis for future anthropological research, surprisingly little such research was published at the time of active collection activities. The major exception in this case is von Luschan’s extensive description of all skulls from New Zealand in his collections, mainly based on the Baessler collection (von Luschan 1907). This book, however, is rather a descriptive catalogue than a publication of anthropological research. For unknown reasons, Weinert, one of the later curators of the collection who published two broad comparative studies of the “S collection” in the 1920s (Weinert 1925; Weinert 1927), did not include remains from New Zealand. Some of the remains in the collection show pencil markings at points that would be relevant for taking measurements; however, no additional study could be found that might have resulted from these measurements. It is possible, that they stem from von Luschan himself and were part of his cataloguing activity.

Only one later study could be identified that included remains from the Baessler collection: Around 1942, the Croatian anthropologist Franjo Ivaniček (1906–1974) took probes²⁴ from skulls of the “S collection” for a comparative study of cranial thickness. At the time, he was a guest scientist at the *Kaiser Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie* in Berlin (where the collection was stored) and a pupil of its director Eugen Fischer. For this study, he used 12 Australian, 7 Maori-, 8 Papua-, 9 Melanesian, 9 Micronesian and 14 European skulls of the “S collection”. His obscure hypothesis, deeply steeped in the context of racial science of the time, was that the bone of Australian skull vaults was supposedly thicker making them more resistant than others to club attacks. The study was published in Polish (Ivaniček 1945), likely because Ivaniček had worked in Warsaw

23 Letter to von Luschan, Auckland 18 Dec 1896. in: Acta betreffend die Sammlungen des Dr. Bäessler, Vol. 1. Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, signature: I/MV 0548, Akte 869, E 114/97.

24 For today’s standard, these probes (circular pieces of bone of 5cm diameter from the parietal bone) were very large. They can be found with individuals S936, 937, 947, 959, and 950.



Fig. 5 The handover ceremony at Charité in Berlin on 29 April 2019. (© Charité | Wiebke Peitz)

in the late 1930s (Solter 2021) and still had connections to Polish anthropologists. He used even more remains than the ones mentioned in his publication, as several other skulls from the “S collection”, including two from Africa (Stoecker and Winkelmann 2018), carry identical probe defects. No further research involving remains of the Baessler collection is on record.

5. Repatriation

On 29 April 2019, the handover of the ancestral remains took place in Berlin. A delegation including representatives of the Māori and Moriori communities and of the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa had come to Europe for the occasion (Fig. 5). After a private ceremony at the Anatomical Institute, where the ancestral remains had been stored, they were ceremoniously carried to the historical lecture hall of the Medical History Museum (which is actually the ruin of Rudolf Virchow’s lecture hall destroyed in World War II). The following ceremony included karanga (calls from woman), karakia (incantations), and waiata (songs), as well as official addresses by Professor Dr Axel Pries, dean of the *Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin*, Professor Dr Thomas Schnalke, director of the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité, Rupert Holborow, Ambassador of New Zealand to Germany, and by Mr Maui Solomon, representative of the Moriori community, and Dr Arapata Hakiwai, representative of the Māori community and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. It was concluded by the official handing over and the signing of the paperwork.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, on Sunday, 5th May 2019, a private welcome ceremony (pōwhiri) was held at the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa to mark the return home of the tūpuna (ancestors) (Fig. 6).²⁵ Afterwards, the tūpuna were set to rest in the sacred repository (wahi tapu) of the museum until they can be returned to their place of origin and their respective community.

²⁵ I (Sarah Fründt) was able to travel to Wellington, New Zealand, to participate in these ceremonies. I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to everybody involved in the process. I was made feel very welcome and included, only adding to the very moving experience the entire process from research to repatriation provided for me.



Fig. 6 Pōwhiri (welcome ceremony) for the return of the ancestral remains from Germany at the Museum Te Papa Tongarewa in Aotearoa New Zealand. © Jeff McEwan/Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2019

6. Summary and conclusion

To enable and prepare the repatriation of ancestral remains from Aotearoa New Zealand preserved in Berlin anthropological collections, we have conducted provenance research on remains of more than hundred individuals including archival and bioanthropological research and engaged in an exchange between German and New Zealand researchers.

Our research showed that in some cases, collectors' notes and publications can include significant information related to the provenance of human remains and that in an interdisciplinary approach, historical and anthropological findings can be combined to support and strengthen each other. In his own publications, the collector Arthur Baessler gave detailed descriptions of all the locations where he collected mortal remains, making it easy to follow his path and sketch the extent of his activities. This historical information could be supplemented with details from his preserved notebook and correspondence.

In line with this historical information, anthropological findings showed that Baessler included individuals of all ages and both sexes into his collection, some of which may have suffered a violent death, while the majority will have succumbed to everyday diseases, most of which have not left any traces on their bones. While this can of course never be completely excluded, there is no indication that people were intentionally killed for collection purposes or that the remains of executed prisoners, inmates of state institutions, or other direct victims of colonial violence were used as it has been the case in other contexts, for example in the case of human remains from the colonial genocide in Namibia (Stoecker and Winkelmann 2018). Instead, even in cases where signs of trauma point to violent death, the remains seem to have been buried for longer or shorter periods of time. Many of the remains show advanced signs of decomposition or erosion, and with most of them at least some soil or sand particles, plant remains, or root imprints were found. For the most part, their specific postmortal changes were consistent with Baessler's descriptions of the respective environment in which he located them.

This means that anthropological and historical findings both demonstrate that for all these remains, grave robbery is the most likely context of collection.

We have further shown that Baessler was fully aware of the importance the Māori attach to their ancestral remains, of the resistance his collection activities met, and of the taboos he broke by taking remains from graves. It can therefore be said that he consciously and willingly committed grave robbing, an offence that did not require much cultural sensitivity to recognise as it was also an offence in his own culture “at home”. Baessler was, however, not alone in feeling vindicated to proceed nevertheless because of the perceived higher purpose of the scientific endeavour of the anthropology of his time and, we must assume, the perceivedly negligible moral standards of a people he saw as “uncivilised”. This is in line with the perspectives of most European collectors in New Zealand at the time (Aranui 2018).

Historical and anthropological findings also converge to show that Baessler’s own anthropological expertise was small, as was insinuated in some of his obituaries (see above). He did not succeed in matching dispersed remains of individuals and he did not record any own observations taken directly from the bones – a more experienced scholar might for example have indicated the age of individuals (particularly in the case of children’s remains), or significant pathological changes. In contrast to other German researchers travelling in Oceania like Otto Finsch (Howes 2011) or Hermann Klaatsch (Erckenbrecht 2010), neither did Baessler bring any specific hypotheses with him to test them “in the field”, nor did he acquire any new anthropological insights or propose related theories. As we have stated above, his main motivation for his collection activities was most likely social recognition within German scientific circles (Schade 2006).

Whatever Baessler’s motivation may have been, the disinterment and removal of ancestral remains is painful for their descendants and must be called unethical. It is therefore rewarding to see that the ancestral remains could now return home where they belong, and we would like to thank everyone who took part in this process and supported our efforts. Further local (provenance) research in Aotearoa New Zealand, which so far has partly been halted by the Corona pandemic, will be required to allocate individual ancestral remains to their respective iwi. We hope that the detailed findings we have reported here will support this process.

Table 1

Overview of repatriated remains from Baessler's collection. Next to numbers, original inscriptions on the skulls did also often include the name Baessler, the year (mostly 1896), and the term "Neu-Seeland", which are not repeated here.

No.	B-No.	Inscription	Translation / research results	Remains	Sex	Age
S935	69	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland	„from a cave 150 km north of Auckland“, Burial cave at Maunu in Whāngārei, North Island	Cranium	male?	adult
S936	70	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland		Cranium	?	7±2 years
S937	71	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland		Cranium	male?	adult (older)
S938	72	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland		Cranium	male	adult (older)
S939	73	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland		Cranium	male	adult
S940	74	Aus einer Höhle 150 Kilomtr. nördl. von Auckland		Cranium	male	adult
S940a	75	mao..		Mandible; belongs to S937	male?	adult (older)
S940c	75	maori		Mandible	male?	adult (older)
S940d	75	maori		Mandible	female?	adult (older)
S940e	75	maori		Mandible; belongs to S936	?	6±2 years
S940G	75	Maori		Mandible; belongs to S939	indifferent	adult (older)
S941	77	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; hill (or mountain/ridge) in the Kaitoke area	Cranium	female	adult
S942	78	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Cranium	female	adult
S943	79	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calvaria plus fragments	male	adult
S944	80	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calvaria + piece of skin with hair	indetermined	adult
S945	81	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calvaria	male	adult (young)
S946	82	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calotte	male?	adult
S947	83	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Cranium (incomplete)	female	adult
S948	84	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calotte (fragmented)	n.a.	10±3 years
S949	85	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Viscerocranium (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S950	86	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calvaria (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S951	87	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S952	88	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S953	89	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Calvaria (incomplete)	n.a.	child
S953a	90	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Skull fragment	n.a.	adult
S953E	90	Kaituki-Hügel, Otea-Insel		Skull fragment	n.a.	adult
S954	91	Otea-Insel, Tryphena-Bucht	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; Tryphena Bay	Cranium	female?	adult (young)
S955	92	Otea-Insel, Tryphena-Bucht		Calvaria (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S955B	94	Neu-Seeland		Skull fragments	n.a.	probably adult

No.	B-No.	Inscription	Translation / research results	Remains	Sex	Age
S956	95	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; Okupu Bay, Western shore	Cranium (incomplete)	male?	adult
S957	96	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult (young)
S958	97	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel		Viscerocranium (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S959	98	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; Okupu Bay, Eastern shore, location I	Cranium (incomplete)	female	adult (young)
S960	99	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel		Cranium	male	adult (older)
S961	101	Okubu-Bucht, Otea-Insel	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; Okupu Bay, Eastern shore, location II	Calvaria	n.a.	adult
S962	102	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; „Wangaparapara tribe“; location between Whangaparapara and Okupu Bay	Skull (Cranium and Mandible)	indifferent	adult
S963	103	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Skull (Cranium and Mandible)	male?	adult (older)
S964	104	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	female?	adult
S965	105	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S966	106	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	?	around 7 years
S967	107	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	male?	adult
S968	108	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	female?	adult (young)
S969	109	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	male??	under 16/18
S970	110	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	male?	adult (older)
S971	111	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	male?	adult
S972	112	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	male?	adult (young)
S973	113	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calvaria (incomplete)	male?	adult
S974	114	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calvaria (incomplete)	male?	adult (older)
S975	115	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S976	116	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calvaria (nearly complete)	n.a.	adult
S977	117	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium (incomplete)	male?	adult
S977a	118	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calotte (incomplete)	female?	adult
S978	119	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calvaria (incomplete)	n.a.	adult
S979	120	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Several skull fragments	n.a.	adult
S980	121	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Cranium	female?	adult
S981	122	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm		Calotte (incomplete)	n.a.	adult

No.	B-No.	Inscription	Translation / research results	Remains	Sex	Age
S982	123	Otea-Insel, Wangaparapara-Stamm	Aotea/Great Barrier Island; „Wangaparapara tribe“; location between Whangaparapara and Okupu Bay	Skull fragments	n.a.	adult
S982A	125	Neu-Seeland		Mandible	female?	adult
S982C	125	-		Mandible	?	6/7 ±2 years
S982D [F]	126	Otea		Several fragments, including one mandible, of 7 individuals, carrying additional letters	n.a.	adult
S982D [J]	126	-			n.a.	adult
S982D [K]	126	Otea			n.a.	adult
S982D [M]	126	Otea			n.a.	adult
S982D [T]	126	-			n.a.	adult
S982D [y?]	126	Otea			female?	adult (young)
S982D [no additional letter]	126	-			n.a.	adult
S982P	126	Otea		Mandible	male?	adult
S982Y	126	-		Skull fragment	n.a.	adult
S983	128	Mariori, Chatham-Inseln	Moriori, Chatham Islands	Skull (Cranium and Mandible)	male?	adult (older)
S984	129	Mariori, Chatham-Inseln	Moriori, Chatham Islands	Cranium	indifferent	adult
S985	66	vom Stamme Ngati... am linken Ufer des M...wai	North Island, Mangawhai River, Ngāti Whātua	Skull (Cranium and Mandible)	female?	adult (older)
S986	141	Neu-Seeland, Nordinsel	North Island, Coromandel Peninsula, East Coast	Cranium	male?	adult (older)
S987	76	Maori vom Stamme der Tuhourangi	North Island, Tūhourangi, from Whakarewarewa area at Lake Rotorua	Skull (Cranium and Mandible)	male?	adult (young)

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Appendix

Reproduction from the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* [journal of ethnology] of Baessler's original description of his collection activities (Baessler 1897).

(11) Hr. A. Bässler übersendet aus Neu-Seeland, Januar, einen weiteren Reisebericht, speciell über

neuseeländische Alterthümer.

Die Maoris pflegten früher die in der Erde ruhenden Todten nach einer gewissen Zeit wieder auszugraben und von den Knochen die letzten Fleisch-Anhängsel mit Muscheln abzukratzen, um sie nach Abhaltung eines „Tāngi“ entweder an einer anderen Stelle neuerdings zu vergraben oder in Höhlen niederzulegen. Diese Orte wurden möglichst versteckt gewählt, geheim gehalten und waren stets „tapu“. Häuptlinge bestattete man abseits von den Uebrigen und so verborgen, dass ihre Ueberreste niemals in die Hände ihrer Feinde fallen konnten, was für den ganzen

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Stamm ein grosser Schimpf gewesen wäre. Verliess ein Stamm seinen Bezirk, um sich wo anders niederzulassen, so grub man — und das thun die Maoris auch heutigen Tages noch, vergl. meine „Südsee-Bilder“ — die Knochen nochmals aus, reinigte sie wiederum, hielt abermals ein „Tāngi“ ab und nahm sie dann nach dem neuen Wohnort mit, wo dieselben neuerdings verborgen wurden. Von da ab war der Platz „tapu“ und wurde und wird nicht mehr betreten, theils aus Ehrfurcht vor den Todten, theils — und wohl noch mehr — aus Angst vor den den Platz umschwebenden Geistern. Würde man daselbst beim Suchen nach Schädeln angetroffen, so könnte man sich auf unangenehme Stunden gefasst machen. —

Ungefähr 90 km nördlich von Auckland ergiesst sich an der östlichen Küste der Nordinsel Neu-Seelands der Mangawai-Fluss in's Meer. Der Ort ist von Weitem kenntlich durch ein kleines felsiges Vorgebirge, das sich von den monotonen, meilenweit sich erstreckenden Sandhügeln der Küste deutlich abhebt. Diese Hügel sind einst vielfach zu Begräbniss-Stätten benutzt worden, bergen aber jetzt nur noch wenige menschliche Ueberreste. Stürme aus Osten verwehten den Sand oft derart, dass sie die Skelette freilegten, die von den Wellen in's Meer gespült wurden. Als später Weisse jene Gegenden nach Kauriharz durchsuchten, stiessen sie manchmal auf einen Schädel, statt auf Harz, mit dem sie dann oft Unfug trieben und die Maoris erschreckten, so dass diese sich bewogen fühlten, die noch vorhandenen Gebeine weiter in's Innere der Insel überzuführen. So kam es, dass ich bei meinen Nachgrabungen nur noch auf einer Stelle Erfolg hatte, und zwar am linken Ufer des Mangawai, unweit des Vorgebirges, wo ich auf einem Hügel, ungefähr 1 m unterhalb der Oberfläche desselben, zwei vollständige Skelette fand. Leider zerfielen sie trotz grösster Vorsicht vollständig, als ich sie aus dem gerade hier etwas feuchten Sand nehmen wollte. Sie ruhten liegend; der Kopf, etwas aufgerichtet, lag nordwestlich von den nach SO. gerichteten Füßen; nach ihrer ersten Bestattung schienen sie nicht wieder ausgegraben zu sein. Das hat darin seinen Grund, dass sie von einer Schlacht herrührten, die einst gegen von Süden vordringende Maoris hier geschlagen wurde, in der viele der heimischen Krieger fielen, die man auf diesem Hügel begrub, ohne sich ihrer grossen Zahl wegen später um sie zu kümmern. Sie gehören zum Stamm „Ngatiwhatua“. Ihre Reste tragen die Nrn. 66 und 67. Nicht weit davon lagen in trockener Sandschicht, fast an der Erdoberfläche, einige Skelettheile: Nr. 68.

Etwa 60 km nördlich von diesem Platze wurde vor mehreren Jahren eine Höhle entdeckt, welche eine Menge Skelette barg und in welcher der Curator des Museums von Auckland, der davon benachrichtigt worden war, 73 Schädel fand. Von diesen überliess er mir gütigst die noch vorhandenen sechs, welche die Nrn. 69—74 tragen, sowie sieben Unterkiefer (Nr. 75), die aber nicht zu den Schädeln zu gehören scheinen. Nr. 74 ist als Häuptlings-Schädel dadurch kenntlich, dass er vollständig mit der rothen Farbe „Kokowai“¹⁾ bemalt ist, — eine Ehre, die nur Häuptlingen zukam. Unweit dieser Höhle soll sich, nach Aussage des Entdeckers, noch eine zweite befunden haben, die mindestens ebenso viele Skelette barg. Dieselbe ist nicht mehr auffindbar. Das Fortschaffen der Schädel war den Maoris zu Ohren gekommen, und um Wiederholungen vorzubeugen, haben sie den Zugang zu dieser anderen Höhle so geschickt verborgen, dass man nur durch einen Zufall dieselbe nochmals auffinden wird. —

In der Nähe des Sees „Rotorua“ liegt, zwischen augenblicklich sehr stark arbeitenden Geisern und unzähligen Schlamm-Vulkanen; die kleine Maori-Nieder-

1) rother, gebrannter Ocker.

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lassung „Whakarewarewa“. Diese intensive Thätigkeit der Geiser u. s. w. steht in Verbindung mit mehreren heftigen Ausbrüchen des „Tongariro“, die in den letzten Wochen stattfanden. Um die heissen, den Maoris schon längst als heilbringend bekannten Gewässer auch für Weisse nutzbar zu machen, hat man in den letzten Jahren hie und da kleine Holzhütten errichtet. Bei einer solchen Arbeit stiess man vor 2 Jahren auf eine ungefähr 1,5—2 m unter der Erdoberfläche liegende Gruft, in der man 13 Skelette fand. Von diesen stammt der vorzüglich erhaltene Schädel Nr. 76/76', vom Stamme der „Tuhourangi“. Weitere Nachgrabungen, die ich in dieser Gegend anstellte, wo sich noch andere Begräbnissplätze finden sollen, blieben erfolglos. Ob auch hier die Maoris die Todten nochmals aus- und anderswo wieder eingegraben haben, konnte ich nicht ermitteln; jedenfalls hatten sie sich seiner Zeit, als sie von der Ausgrabung der 13 Skelette gehört hatten, Beschwerde führend an die Regierung gewendet und der Finder war aufgefordert worden, die Gebeine wieder an Ort und Stelle zu vergraben, was er auch, bis auf die Schädel, gethan hat. Aber auch diese Knochen sind, wie ich mich überzeugte, seitdem verschwunden, — ob durch Maoris oder durch Weisse, wird wohl niemals aufgeklärt werden. —

Im Nordosten der Nordinsel Neu-Seelands, nördlich von der Halbinsel Coromandel und von dieser nur durch den Coromandel-Canal getrennt, liegt „Otea“ (jetzt Great Barrier Island genannt), eine Insel, die sich über 32 km von Süden nach Norden erstreckt und an ihrer breitesten, ungefähr in der Mitte gelegenen Stelle von Westen nach Osten beiläufig 19 km misst. Von dem inmitten der Insel gelegenen etwa 800 m hohen „Hirakimata“ laufen verschiedene Höhenzüge aus, die zumeist an der Küste als steil abfallende Hügel enden. Dichter Wald bedeckte einst die Insel überall da, wo nicht Felsen und steiniger Boden jedes Wachstum hinderten. Damals dienten diese Felsen als Begräbnissplätze; die Knochen wurden in vor Regen und Wind geschützten Spalten, zwischen oder noch lieber in natürlichen Höhlen unter den Felsen, niedergelegt, genau wie es auf „Moorea“ geschah. Alle Skelette, die ich gefunden, waren derart entweder allein oder zu mehreren zusammen aufbewahrt.

Die südöstlichen Ausläufer der vom „Hirakimata“ kommenden Höhenzüge bilden die „Kaituki“-Hügel. Hier fand ich in einer Höhe von etwa 75 m in felsigem, fast unzugänglichem Terrain, welches die ganze Breitseite eines Hügels einnahm, die Schädel Nr. 77—88, die Schädeltheile Nr. 89, und abseits von den übrigen, die je zu zweien oder mehreren bei einander lagen, die Schädel und Knochen (im Ganzen 20 Theile) Nr. 90. —

Im Südwesten von „Otea“ liegt die Bucht „Tryphena“. An ihrem Ende erheben sich über einem steilen Hügel schroffe Felsen; unter diesen fand ich die Schädel Nr. 91 und 92, den Unterkiefer Nr. 93 und die Schädeltheile Nr. 94.

Nördlich von Tryphena liegt „Okubu“-Bay, an deren westlichem Ufer ich Nr. 95—97 erhielt, an deren östlichen ich an zwei verschiedenen Stellen a) Schädel Nr. 98/98 und 99, sowie Unterkiefer Nr. 100, b) Schädel Nr. 101 fand.

„Okubu“-Bay ist von der nördlicher gelegenen Bucht „Wangaparapara“ durch den etwa 420 m hohen „Ahumata“ getrennt. Der Berg ist nur wenig mit Bäumen bewachsen; doch wird man bei der Besteigung sehr gehindert durch dichtes „Manuka“-Gebüsch und hohe Farnkräuter, aus denen überall zerklüftete Felsen hervorragen. Auf einem ungefähr 250 m hohen Kamm, von dem man beide Buchten übersehen kann, sind diese besonders zahlreich und scheinen hauptsächlich den Leuten von „Wangaparapara“ als Begräbniss-Stätte gedient zu haben. Von hier stammen Nr. 102/102, 103/103, 104—124; ferner Nr. 125: drei Unterkiefer; Nr. 126: Schädeltheile (27 Stück) und Nr. 127: Skelettheile. —

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Von den „Mori“ auf den Chatham-Inseln erhielt ich die Schädel Nr. 128/128 und Nr. 129; letzterer ist angeblich der einer jungen Frau. —

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