



Physical Anthropology Section – 2010

H95 Ancestry Trends in Trophy Skulls in Northern California

Lisa N. Bright, BS*, California State University, Chico, 400 West First Street, Chico, CA 95928; Ashley E. Kendell, BS*, 808 West 2nd Avenue, Apartment 12, Chico, CA 95926; and Turhon A. Murad, PhD, California State University, Chico, Department of Anthropology, Chico, CA 95929-0400

The goals of this presentation are to: (1) document the ancestry of trophy skulls curated at the California State University, Chico Human Identification Lab (CSUC-HIL); and, (2) assess trends in the ancestry of trophy skull specimens between the 1970s and the present. After viewing this presentation, attendees will gain a greater understanding of the ancestral affiliations of trophy skulls.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by highlighting the broad range of ancestral affiliations that are associated with trophy skulls observed in forensic contexts.

Although research involving human trophy taking has a long history within bioarchaeology and archaeology, few studies have been directed towards human trophies from forensic contexts. Prior studies have focused on trophy skulls brought back to the United States by service men after armed conflicts. However, trophy skulls are routinely submitted for analysis from a broad array of contexts. In many instances, it may be difficult to differentiate trophy skulls from those that derive from archaeological, forensic and souvenir contexts (Sledzik and Ousley 1991).¹ This presentation will discuss osteological and contextual information that will aid in identification of trophy skulls.

Willey and Leach (2003)³ define human trophies as remains that are originally acquired under suspect circumstances and kept as a memento of the event. For this study, trophy remains are defined as skulls that show evidence of postmortem modification, including decoration. According to Sledzik (1991),¹ trophies also include the opportunistic or passive collection of human remains as well as the deliberate peri-mortem collection of skeletal material. Therefore, trophies should not include remains that were obtained unintentionally, or those that did not serve as a form of memento. For this study, one non-modified skull was included because contextual information indicated that the remains were displayed as a trophy.

Eight forensic cases are examined involving trophy skulls submitted to the CSUC-HIL for analysis. Ancestry estimation was conducted using both metric and non-metric traits, and the data are addressed in light of contextual information for each case. Craniometric analysis was conducted using Fordisc 3.0.

	Group/Date	Posterior Probability	Likelihood Ratio
Name	Indonesian Male	0.626	0.401
Case	American Indian Female	0.999	0.783
Location	Black Female	0.894	0.965
Yield	Chinese Male	0.757	0.259
Black	White Female	0.399	0.301
Ball	Black Female	1.000	0.000
Trade	Japanese Male	0.339	0.780
Yield	Japanese Male	0.339	0.681

Of the eight forensic cases included in the analysis, four of the eight skulls were estimated to be female. This finding is inconsistent with the trends observed in trophies brought back to the United States during times of war, which typically are male (Taylor et al. 1984).² Only two of the eight skulls were brought back as mementos during times of war. It is worth noting however, that Fordisc is not always an accurate indicator of sex in gracile specimens and therefore non-metric analyses of sex were also taken into account. Also, postcranial remains were unavailable for analysis and were therefore not used to provide a secondary verification of sex assessment.

The ancestral affiliation of these cases is highly variable. This may be explained by the fact that each trophy skull used in the analysis was

drawn from a unique forensic context. This also may be attributed to the small sample size used for the study. This study highlights the broad range of ancestries that trophy skulls can be attributed to. Trophy taking of human skulls and body parts has a long history, and will continue to impact future forensic anthropological casework

References:

- ¹ Sledzik, Paul S. and Stephen Ousley. Analysis of Six Vietnamese Trophy Skulls. *Journal of Forensic Science* 36(2):520-530.
- ² Taylor, James V., Louis Roh, and Arthur D. Goldman
- ³ Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team (MFAT) Case Studies in Identification: 2. Identification of a Vietnamese Trophy Skull. *Journal of Forensic Science* 29(4):1253-1259.



Physical Anthropology Section – 2010

- ⁴ Willey, P, and Paulette Leach
- ⁵ The Skull on the Lawn: Trophies, Taphonomy, and Forensic Anthropology. *In* Hard Evidence: Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology. Dawnie Wolfe Steadman, eds. Pp.176-188. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Trophy Skulls, Postmortem Modification, Ancestry Estimation