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Porträts von interessanten Personen: A new look at J. F. Blumenbach's typological labels and the exemplars he discussed in his anthropological research

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Abstract: In 1794, Johann Blumenbach asserted that humanity consisted of five racial varieties he labeled 'American', 'Caucasian', 'Ethiopian', 'Malay', and 'Mongolian'. Blumenbach selected eleven individuals as exemplars for his racial varieties. An analysis of the life histories of these individuals indicates that most of them found success in a new environment far from their ancestral homeland. This analysis indicates that Blumenbach selected his exemplars to demonstrate the transformative power of environment, which was also why he jointly chose the labels 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian'. It was not his aesthetic bias which inspired him to label Europeans as 'Caucasians', as some have proposed.

Keywords: J. F. Blumenbach, racial typology, human skulls, anthropology, aesthetics

¹ I would like to thank Wolfgang Böker, Projekt Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online an der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen for his insightful editorial and translation assistance; Janet Monge, The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; Paul Wolff Mitchell, University of Pennsylvania; Ann Michael, DeSales University; Nicolaas Rupke, Washington and Lee University; Kordula Segler-Stahl, West Chester University; Judith Michael; and Carolyn Conwell.

1 Blumenbach's legacy and the skull of the Georgian Woman

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) was a German racial theorist, whom anthropologists and historians now recognize as a pivotal figure in the early development of physical anthropology. Blumenbach was a renowned professor of medicine at Göttingen University and spent over 60 years active in curating the university's museum. His most unique claim to fame was the extensive collection of human skulls which he personally acquired. Today, Blumenbach is best known for having developed a five part classification system, or typology, to describe human racial variation.² Spencer insightfully referred to Blumenbach's five classifications of humanity as 'racial varieties' rather than 'races', because Blumenbach described them using the German or Latin equivalents of the English words 'race' and 'variety'.³

Soon after Blumenbach's death, hagiographic obituaries celebrated him as not only an internationally renowned scholar, but also an egalitarian who held that all peoples of earth had the same capacity for intellectual excellence.⁴ Since the 1990s, a number of publications have argued that, although Blumenbach was more of an egalitarian than many of his peers, key elements of his anthropological research still exhibited a clear pattern of Eurocentric ethnic bias. A common theme of these recent studies is that Blumenbach regarded the peoples of the Caucasus Mountains to be humanity's most beautiful ethnic group. Another repeated narrative is that Blumenbach was inspired to select the name 'Caucasian' as a label for the peoples in and around Europe because he was especially enamored of a skull in his collection, a Georgian woman from the Caucasus Mountain region, which he regarded as the epitome of female beauty.⁵

These recent interpretations of Blumenbach echo those offered in the 1860s by the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), the philologist Robert Gordon Latham (1812–1888), and the zoologist Isidore Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire (1805–1861). Huxley wrote that Blumenbach chose the 'handsomest skull in his collection', that of a Georgian woman, as 'model exemplar' – an ideal specimen against which all other less well-formed human skulls could be compared.⁶ Latham asserted that the supposed 'beautiful symmetry' of this same Georgian skull led Blumenbach to present it as representative of the Caucasian race.⁷ Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire claimed that Blumenbach had 'deduced from the conformation of the head' that each race was distinct and unequal, with Caucasians ranked the highest and most

² Brace, 2005: 44–46; Rupke and Lauer, 2019: 3–10.

³ Spencer, 1997: 185.

⁴ Bendyshe, 1865: 3–63.

⁵ Schiebinger, 1993: 126–134; Gould, 1996: 410; Bindman, 2002: 201; Dain, 2002: 59–61; Painter, 2010: 72–90; Sussman, 2014: 19.

⁶ Huxley, 1865: 273.

⁷ Latham, 1863: 295.

beautiful.⁸ In the following paper, I will revisit these claims which asserted that Blumenbach's studies of skulls, his racial theory, and his sense of beauty were intertwined.

Blumenbach never specifically stated the criteria he employed for 1) selecting 'Caucasian' as a racial label, or 2) for selecting the Georgian Woman's skull as an exemplar. This essay will endeavor to discern his criteria by examining a broad selection of his publications and personal letters. It will focus on the five skulls he selected as exemplars, with the goal of determining whether he selected them based on a uniform set of criteria, or if he selected the Georgian Woman's skull using a methodology that differed from the others. It will also investigate the six highly successful individuals from around the world whom Blumenbach presented as representatives of his five racial varieties, so as to shed light on his views regarding the relationship between skull shape and intelligence. Lastly, this essay will examine the historical origins of two of his racial labels: 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian'.

2 Blumenbach's racial typology: From four racial classifications to five

Blumenbach's theories regarding human racial variation evolved throughout his career, as did the way he described and graphically illustrated his five-part racial typology. A chronological summary of Blumenbach's anthropological studies is therefore useful to provide context essential to understanding why he selected his exemplars and his typological labels.

In Blumenbach's first anthropological study, *De generis humani varietate nativa liber* (1776), he asserted that there were just four racial varieties. He described them in somewhat vague terms that followed a numbering system. He wrote that the 'first' racial variety was that of Europe and 'Asia this side of the Ganges'. The second included 'that part of Asia beyond the Ganges', while 'Africa makes up the third'. The fourth was to be found in the Americas.⁹ In 1779, Blumenbach published his *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte (Handbook of Natural History)*, within which he proposed that there was also a fifth racial variety which consisted of '*Die Australasiaten und Polynesen* (Australasians and Polynesians)', along with Moluccans, Filipinos, and other peoples from in and around the South Pacific.¹⁰ In 1781, Blumenbach published a second, modestly revised edition of *De Generis* which, like the first edition, lacked any labels.¹¹ *De Generis* of 1781 did not include a detailed discussion

⁸ Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 1860–1863:130; Bendyshe, 1865: x–xi.

⁹ Bendyshe, 1865: 99; Blumenbach, 1776: 41–42.

¹⁰ Blumenbach, 1799: 63–64.

¹¹ Blumenbach, 1781.

of the skulls in Blumenbach's collection, which at that time was likely quite small. Prior to 1784, Blumenbach's skull collection consisted of only three individuals.¹²

In 1790, Blumenbach published *Beyträge zur Naturgeschichte (Contributions to Natural History)* in which he again proposed that there were five 'varieties of mankind (*Menschenvarietät[en]*)'.¹³ He did not label these five racial varieties, but instead presented them using a numbered listing which was: 1) the peoples in and around Europe; 2) the peoples in and around China; 3) non-Mediterranean Africans; 4) Native Americans; and 5) Polynesians, Australians, and South Pacific peoples.¹⁴ Blumenbach illustrated his five racial varieties with engravings drawn by the artist Daniel Niklaus Chodowiecki (1726–1801) (see Figure 1). Blumenbach described these illustrations as 'vignettes (*Vignetten*)' of the five 'varieties (*Spiegelarten*)'.¹⁵

According to Hünninger, the five vignettes combined 'various textual and pictorial sources' such that the people depicted are not actual individuals, but rather composites.¹⁶ Hünninger noted that the Middle Eastern and Chinese serving girls have the same foot and head position, an indication that they represent Chodowiecki's own design.¹⁷ As Figure 2 shows, the Polynesian woman, when reversed, also matches the other women's dimensions.¹⁸ Clearly, these stylized illustrations were not drawn from life.

1790 was also when Blumenbach began to publish journal articles and stand-alone papers that presented drawings and anatomical descriptions of some of the skulls in his collection, which by then had increased to 36 individuals.¹⁹ Many of these papers were based on lectures Blumenbach presented to the Göttingen Academy of Sciences. He published them as articles in the proceedings of the Academy, *Commentationes Societatis Regiae Scientiarum Göttingensis*, and also as stand-alone off prints. From 1790 until 1828, Blumenbach published six stand-alone papers, each of them describing ten skulls, and one stand-alone paper describing five skulls. In 1873, five more skulls were addressed in a posthumous stand-alone paper. Today, these eight stand-alone papers are jointly known as the *Decades Craniorum*, which translates to *Skulls in Groups of Ten*, even though two of the papers addressed five skulls each.²⁰ Whenever Blumenbach published one of his stand-alone papers, all of which were written in Latin, he also published a corresponding article in German in the journal *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (or *GGA*).²¹ These German articles, essentially summaries of lectures given by Blumenbach, more or

¹² Böker, 2019: 81–82.

¹³ Blumenbach, 1790: v–viii.

¹⁴ Blumenbach, 1790: vii–viii.

¹⁵ Blumenbach, 1790: vi.

¹⁶ Hünninger, 2018: 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ Blumenbach, 1790: iii, v, 126.

¹⁹ Böker, 2019: 81–82.

²⁰ Blumenbach, 1790, 1792, 1795, 1800, 1808, 1820, and 1828; 1873.

²¹ For *GGA*, see bibliography.

less cover the same information presented in his stand-alone Latin papers, which are now known as the eight ‘volumes’ of *Decades Cranorium*.

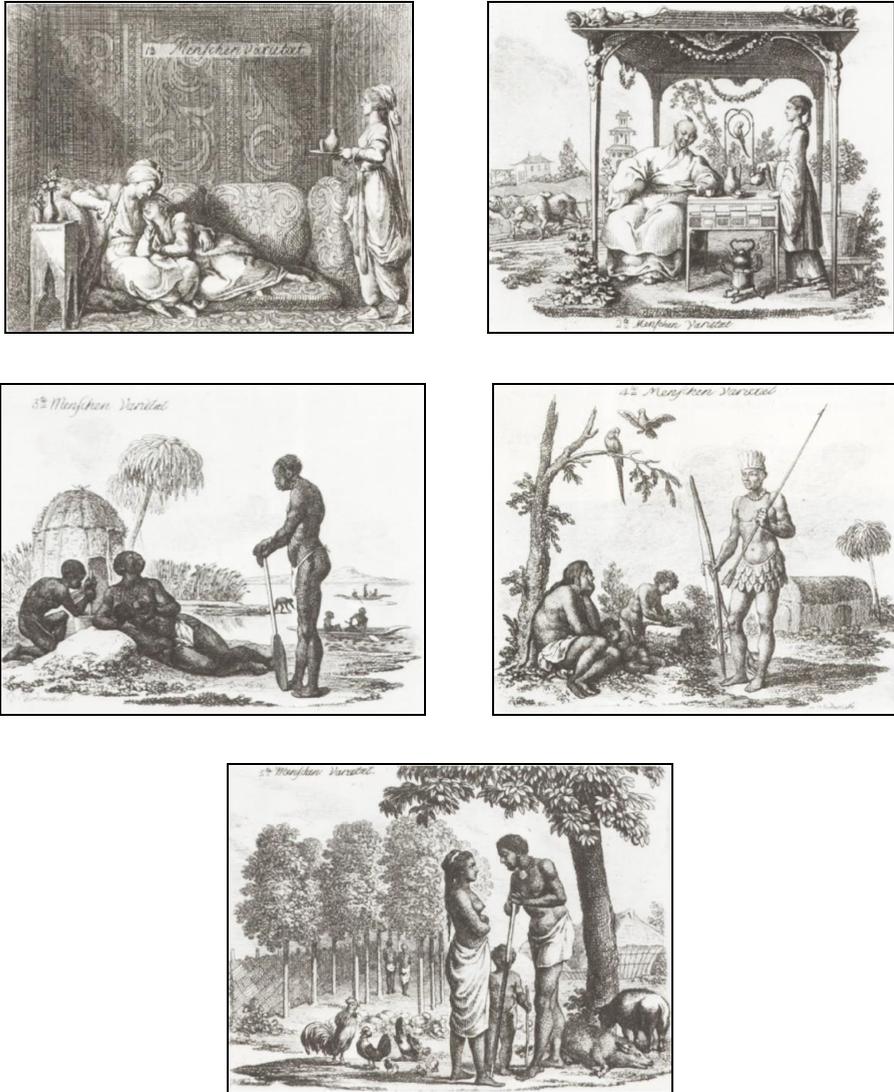
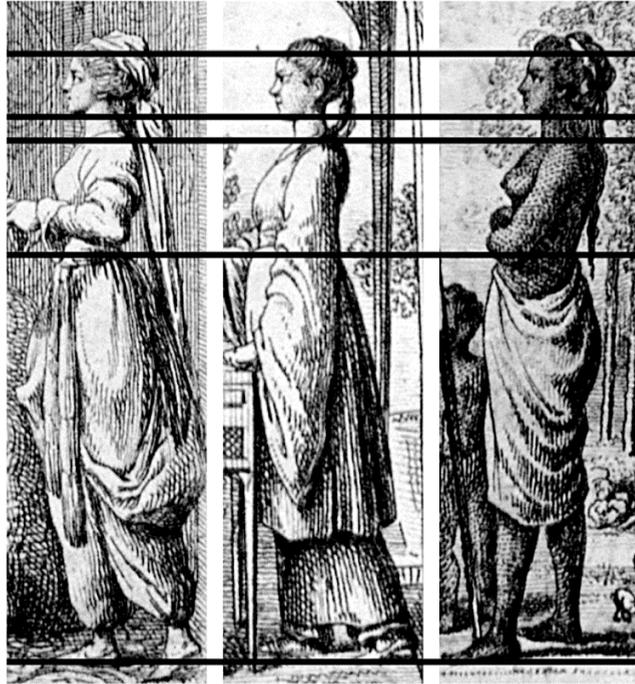


Fig. 1: Blumenbach’s five vignette drawings, each of which was on a separate page, presented in their original order.²² Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project ‘Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online’

²² Blumenbach, 1790: iii, v, viii, ix, 126.

Fig. 2: Close-up insets of women from three of Blumenbach's five vignettes in their original order, enlarged to all be of matching height, with the far-right image reversed.²³ Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project 'Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online'



By 1792, Blumenbach had published the first two volumes of *Decades Craniorium*.²⁴ Thus, he had published a thorough description of just 20 of the dozens of skulls he possessed at the time. One year later, in 1793, Blumenbach penned a draft manuscript, the earliest known document in which he labeled his five racial varieties.²⁵ In 1794, he finally published these labels – ‘American’, ‘Caucasian’, ‘Ethiopian’, ‘Malay’, and ‘Mongolian’ – in one of his few English language publications.²⁶ Blumenbach’s ‘Malay’ racial variety consisted of Pacific Islanders along with the peoples from both within and around Australia.²⁷

By 1795, Blumenbach’s skull collection had grown to circa 83 individuals.²⁸ During this year he also published the third volume of *Decades Craniorium*, which meant that he had published a description and illustration for only 30 of the skulls in his collection.²⁹

²³ Blumenbach, 1790: iii, v, 126.

²⁴ Blumenbach, 1790–1828, Vol. 1 and 2.

²⁵ Vermeulen, 2015: 506.

²⁶ Blumenbach, 1794: 193.

²⁷ Blumenbach, 1795: 320–321.

²⁸ Böker, 2019: 82.

²⁹ Blumenbach, 1790–1828, Vol. 3.

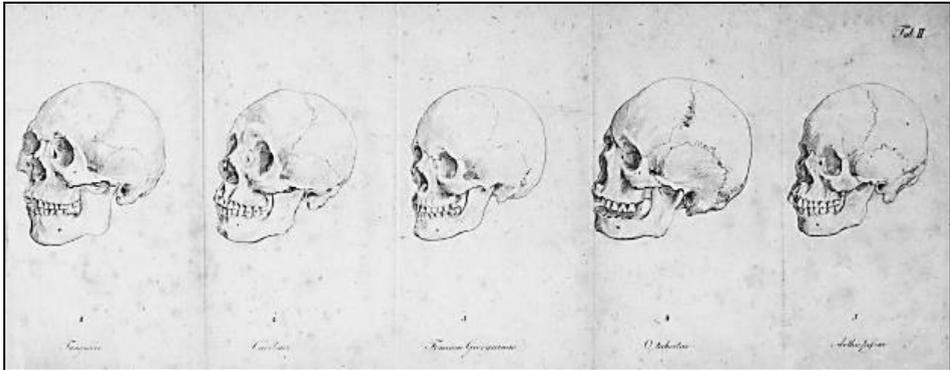


Fig. 3: Blumenbach's skull exemplar drawings of his (left to right) Mongolian, American, Caucasian, Malay, and Ethiopian racial varieties.³⁰ Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project 'Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online'

1795 was also when Blumenbach labeled his racial varieties in Latin as '*Americana*', '*Caucasia*', '*Ethiopica*', '*Mongolica*', and '*Malaica*'.³¹ These terms appeared in Blumenbach's anthropological masterwork, *De generis humani varietate*, 3rd edition, which also included an illustration, credited to Ernst Ludwig Riepenhausen (1765–1840), depicting a set of five skulls (see Figure 3). Blumenbach presented these five skulls as diagnostic examples – or *exemplars* – representing each of his five racial varieties. In 2018, I viewed these five skulls at the Centre for Anatomy and Embryology, University of Göttingen Medical School. I can attest that they generally conform to the 1795 drawings, which suggests that the artist who drew them was reasonably accurate.

In 1796, Blumenbach published *Abbildungen naturhistorischer Gegenstände (Illustrations of Natural History Specimens)*, in which he included a set of portraits depicting five men, each of whom, like the skull exemplars, represented one of the five racial varieties (see Figure 4).³² He noted that these five portrait exemplars 'can be compared' with the five skull drawings he previously published in *De Generis* of 1795.³³ In *Abbildungen* he labeled his racial varieties as '*Aethiopische*', '*Americanische*', '*Caucasische*', '*Malayische*', and '*Mongolische*'.³⁴

³⁰ Blumenbach, 1795: end plate.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 303–319.

³² Blumenbach, 1796: [9–25].

³³ *Ibid.*, [6].

³⁴ *Ibid.*, [7].



Fig. 4: Blumenbach's original five portrait exemplar drawings, each of which was on a separate page, in their original order, Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project 'Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online'³⁵

³⁵ Blumenbach, 1796: [9–25].

3 Blumenbach's skull exemplars: Complete anatomical specimens with a story to tell

The following section will present an analysis of the five skull exemplars which Blumenbach offered as visual evidence that supported the key arguments he presented in the text of *De Generis* of 1795. The goal of this analysis is to document, where possible, the criteria he used when selecting his five skull exemplars, and to determine whether he selected the Georgian Woman as an exemplar based on multiple criteria, or just one criterion: beauty.

It appears that one of the basic criteria Blumenbach used to select his exemplars was that they all came from the pool of 30 skulls which he had already described, or was about to describe, in print.³⁶ Although Blumenbach had the option of choosing exemplars from skulls he had not yet described in print, or skulls from outside his collection, he clearly did not do that. Instead, he selected from his collection those five skulls which best served as evidence supporting the racial theories he was presenting in *De Generis* of 1795. A central theme of *De Generis* of 1795 was that the racial varieties of humankind were not separate, unrelated subgroups with clearly distinct physical features and mental attributes. Rather, they were a spectrum of types that gradually changed across the landscape.³⁷ In the nomenclature of modern zoology, Blumenbach's racial spectrum would be called a 'phenotypic cline'.³⁸ In 1776, Blumenbach wrote that the human racial varieties 'all flow together (*ita omnes inter se confluere*)' with no clear boundaries.³⁹ Later on, he reiterated that 'all people of every time and every climate' had originated from 'one common stock (*einer gemeinschaftlichen Stammrasse*)'.⁴⁰

De Generis of 1795 also emphasized that human anatomy could, over generations, be transformed by the climate in which a given population of human beings lived.⁴¹ Blumenbach wrote that '*clima* (climate)', '*victus* (diet)', and '*vitae genus* (mode of life)' were the primary causes of environmentally driven transformation.⁴² Blumenbach even asserted that intangible human traits like 'speech and reason' were the result of 'external assistance (*durch fremde Hülfe*), cultivation, and education'.⁴³ However, Blumenbach never proposed that the environment could cause one species to transform into a new species. His views were therefore divergent from evolutionary theory as we know it today.⁴⁴

³⁶ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 1, Vol. 2, Vol. 3.

³⁷ Jahoda, 1999: 64–65; Richards, 2019: 146.

³⁸ Templeton, 2006: 470.

³⁹ Bendyshe, 1865, 98–99; Blumenbach, 1776: 40–41.

⁴⁰ Blumenbach, 1825: 35; Blumenbach, 1821: 67; Vermeulen, 2015: 376.

⁴¹ Augstein, 1999: 106; Bertoletti, 1994: 113.

⁴² Blumenbach, 1795: 88, 93, 96.

⁴³ Blumenbach, 1825: 35; 1821: 55.

⁴⁴ Blumenbach, 1795: 82; Bendyshe 1865: 194.

Blumenbach described the process of environmentally driven transformation using the Latin word, '*degenerare*', commonly translated as 'to degenerate'.⁴⁵ Blumenbach defined 'degenerate' much as it was presented in a 1583 Latin-English dictionary: 'to be unlike to his ancestours in maners. It may be said of fruites which ware wylde'.⁴⁶ In 1825, Richard Gore (1799–1881) noted that Blumenbach used 'degeneration' in its 'literal meaning, to express a deviation in breeding from any given standard, without any reference to inferiority or superiority'.⁴⁷ Similarly, Spencer has written that 'Blumenbach made no effort to rank' the five racial varieties.⁴⁸ Blumenbach proposed that the very first human population originated in Caucasian Mountain region, and had the same anatomical features, like pale skin, as the modern peoples of the Caucasus region. This ancient founding Caucasian population, so Blumenbach postulated, eventually transformed into the other four racial varieties.⁴⁹ On these principles, Blumenbach presented his five part typology to describe what he called '*generis humani varietates quinae principes, species vero unica* (five principal varieties of human kind, but one species)'.⁵⁰ For Blumenbach, all humans were part of one unit which had multiple interconnected parts. A geographical metaphor would be the world's oceans, which have all been assigned distinctive labels, but in reality are just one interconnected body of water whose parts literally 'all flow together'.

By presenting these five skull exemplars in but one drawing, Blumenbach offered his readers the opportunity to compare and contrast all five of the skulls. The function of this graphic is therefore two-fold: it presents each skull as an individual specimen with a characteristic shape, while simultaneously presenting the five skulls as a set of related objects, or parts, which when viewed together create an even larger entity, the human racial spectrum. An analogy would be a map of the earth which details the outlines of each continent, but also shows where each continent lies in relation to the others as part of an even larger entity, the surface of the earth.

When selecting which skulls to present as his exemplars, Blumenbach chose those skulls which, 1) he had published; 2) had skull features which made them diagnostic examples of a given racial variety; and 3) would be ideal elements of a set of skulls that illustrated his racial spectrum theory. However, there is also evidence that he used a fourth criterion: Blumenbach endeavored to select skulls – from his pool of 30 published skulls – that were anatomically complete, as opposed to skulls that were missing a jawbone or had lost most of their teeth. Figure 5 shows four skulls – three adults who are anatomically incomplete and one child – which Blumenbach had published as of 1795, but did not select as exemplars.

⁴⁵ Blumenbach, 1795: 88, 93, 96.

⁴⁶ Elyot, 1538: fol. XXXv.

⁴⁷ Gore, 1825: 15.

⁴⁸ Spencer, 1997: 185.

⁴⁹ Blumenbach, 1795: 303.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 284.

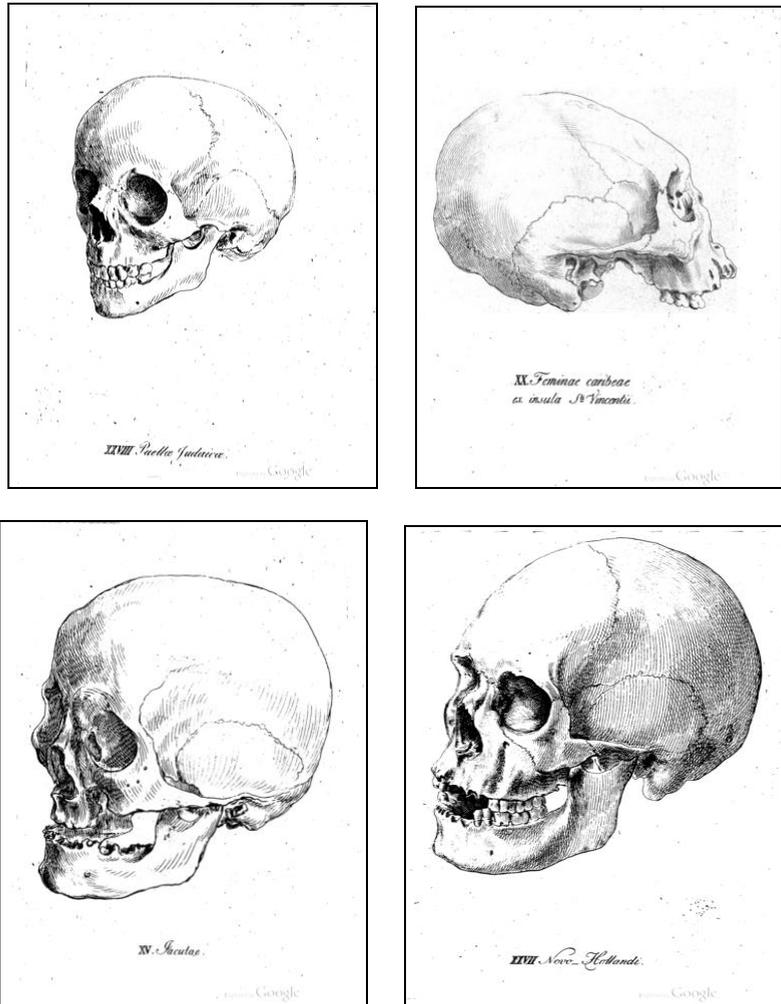


Fig. 5: Many of the thirty skulls which Blumenbach published as of 1795 were either children or were anatomically incomplete, such as a Jewish girl (upper left), a jawless Carib woman (upper right), a toothless Yakut-Sakha man (lower left), and an Australian man missing many teeth (lower right).⁵¹ Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project ‘Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online’

Blumenbach selected a complete skull, rather than one with missing parts, when he chose his American skull exemplar: a ‘Carib chief (*ducis Caribae*)’ from what is now the island nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Blumenbach described the

⁵¹ Blumenbach, 1790, 1792, 1795: Plates 28, 20, 15, and 27.

Carib man as an American ‘*Heerführer* (army commander)’, suggesting that Blumenbach was aware that the Caribs had a history of military conflicts with European soldiers.⁵² From the 1620s until the 1790s, the Caribs fought against French and English forces.⁵³ As of 1795, Blumenbach had only described three American skulls in his *Decades Craniorium*. Of these, one (see Figure 5) lacked a lower jaw, and one was missing many teeth.⁵⁴ Blumenbach’s selection was the Carib, his only complete American skull.

Blumenbach’s five skull exemplars, as graphically illustrated in *De Generis* of 1795, all possessed a full set of teeth, with the exception of his Malay exemplar, who was partially toothless.⁵⁵ This exemplar was an unnamed Tahitian male about whom Blumenbach had little information.⁵⁶ This skull was sent to Blumenbach by the British maritime explorer Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who reported that it was rare because it included a lower jaw, which Banks claimed was often removed during Tahitian funerary practices.⁵⁷

By 1795, Blumenbach had only published the descriptions of two skulls he classified as the Malay racial variety, and both were missing roughly half of their teeth. The skull which Blumenbach did not select was the male Australian or ‘*Novo Holland?*’ (see Figure 5) who died in an English settlement on Botany Bay.⁵⁸ When discussing this Australian, Blumenbach wrote that the two ‘main races (*Hauptrasen*)’ of the Malay variety were the Malayan ‘main race’ – meaning the people from the Malay Peninsula – and the Australian ‘main race’. He further noted that the ‘Tahitian resembles the Malayan more, while the New Hollander more closely resembles the Negro (*mehr dem Neger*)’.⁵⁹ It seems likely that Blumenbach chose the Tahitian because he more closely resembled what Blumenbach regarded as the founding population of both Tahitians and Australians. Clearly, Blumenbach’s selection criteria were not simply based on the condition of a given skull; completeness was not the sole criterion, though it played a role.

Blumenbach’s selection of a Tahitian as his Malay exemplar is also consistent with the reports of the Pacific explorer Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798). According to Forster, Tahitians either shared a common ancestry with, or were directly descended from, Malays. Forster asserted that a population from the Malay Peninsula gradually migrated by sea to Borneo and the Philippines, from there to ‘the Ladrone Islands, the New-Carolines and the Pescadores’, and finally to ‘the Friendly-Islands, the Society Islands, the Marquesas, and Easter Island’ and south-

⁵² *GGA*, 1790: 28.

⁵³ Lafleur, 1993: 3–4.

⁵⁴ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 1, 24, Vol. 2, 15.

⁵⁵ Blumenbach, 1795: end plate.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 325–326.

⁵⁷ Dougherty, 2012: 301.

⁵⁸ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 3, 13–14.

⁵⁹ *GGA*, 1795: 603.

ward to New Zealand.⁶⁰ Vermeulen wrote that ‘mostly likely, Blumenbach consulted Forster’ when choosing the label ‘Malay’.⁶¹

Blumenbach possessed seven West African skulls, all with jaws, from which he selected his ‘Ethiopian’ exemplar. One skull was an infant, while another was a Congolese male who was largely toothless.⁶² The other five individuals still possessed all or most of their teeth. Four of them were simply described as ‘Ethiopians’, an indication that their specific ethnic identity was unknown.⁶³ The only ‘Ethiopian’ skull that had a full set of teeth and a well-documented provenance was a 28-year-old woman born in Guinea.⁶⁴

Blumenbach reported that the Guinean Woman was the ‘concubine of a Dutchman (*Batavi cujusdam concubinae*)’ who died in Amsterdam.⁶⁵ While Blumenbach’s description suggests she was a sex slave or a prostitute, Dougherty described her as the ‘mistress of a Dutchman’.⁶⁶ However, it was not uncommon for Dutch sailors to marry former prostitutes they met overseas.⁶⁷ The fact that someone had paid to sail the Guinean Woman from Africa to the Netherlands suggests that she had become a Dutchman’s wife, even though Blumenbach never described her that way. Blumenbach had a number of anatomically complete Ethiopian variety skulls, yet he selected as his exemplar the one with the best provenance. He knew the life story of the Guinean Woman more than the others. This finding suggests that he had yet another skull selection criterion: the intangible life history of the individual from whom a skull was extracted.

When it came to selecting his Mongolian exemplar, Blumenbach also chose one that was complete and had the most detailed provenance of all the viable candidates. He had a pool of seven East Asian skulls from which to select his ‘Mongolian’ exemplar. One of these skulls had no jaw and was simply described as that of a ‘large headed Asian (*Asiatae marcocephali*)’.⁶⁸ One skull was a child. Two skulls, a ‘Yakut’ of Siberia (see Figure 5) and a ‘Calmuck’ of Mongolia, were toothless. One skull, a ‘Tungus’ of Siberia, had but a few teeth. The remaining two skulls were a Calmuk and Tungus, both of whom were only missing a few teeth.⁶⁹ Blumenbach selected the Tungus as his exemplar, but why?

Although the Calmuck and the Tungus were comparable when it came to anatomical completeness, Blumenbach knew nothing about this Calmuck’s personal

⁶⁰ Forster, 1778: 358.

⁶¹ Vermeulen, 2015: 372–373.

⁶² Blumenbach, 1790–1828, Vol. 3, 14–16, Vol. 2, 13–14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 21–23, Vol. 2, 13, Vol. 3, 14.

⁶⁴ Dougherty, 2010: 253; 2012: 437.

⁶⁵ Blumenbach, 1795: 326.

⁶⁶ Dougherty, 2010: 253.

⁶⁷ Boxer, 1957: 128–130.

⁶⁸ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 2, 10, Vol. 1, 16–17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 19, Vol. 2, 9, Vol. 3, 7–8.

life history.⁷⁰ Conversely, Blumenbach knew that the Tungus was a ‘reindeer Tungus’ named ‘*Tschewin Amureew*’, which is ‘Чевин Амуреев’ in Russian or ‘Chevin Amureyev’ in English.⁷¹ In 1780, Georgi reported that the Tungus called themselves ‘Euveuinikis’, and were divided into ‘Dog Tungus’ who hunted, and ‘Reindeer Tungus’ who herded reindeer.⁷² Today, the Tungus are called the Evenki.⁷³

Amureyev’s skull was mailed to Blumenbach in 1792 with a letter noting that Amureyev had lived 350 versts (370 kilometers) outside of ‘Bargusin’, a town near Lake Baikal now called Barguzin (Баргузин). The letter reported that in 1791, Amureyev committed suicide. He was autopsied at a Russian garrison stationed in the city of ‘Werchne-Udinks’, which is present day Ulan-Ude (Улан-Удэ), located 320 kilometers south of Barguzin.⁷⁴ It is therefore likely that Amureyev came from near Ulan-Ude, which at the time was only some 240 kilometers north of the Mongolian-Russian border.⁷⁵

The skull which Blumenbach selected as his Caucasian exemplar was a female whom he described as a ‘young Georgian woman (*feminae juvenis Georgianae*)’.⁷⁶ It is this skull has led generations of scholars to interpret Blumenbach’s main criterion as beauty. However there is ample evidence that Blumenbach followed the same set of criteria in selecting in Georgian Woman as he did with his other four exemplars. To begin with, he selected her from a pool of six skulls which he had classified as members of Caucasian racial variety. The five skulls he did not select were 1) a very ‘pretty (*hübsche*)’ Jewish girl as shown in Figure 5; 2) a Lithuanian; 3) a Turk killed in a combat zone in Ochakov; 4) a ‘genuine Gypsy who died in prison at Clausenberg’; and 5) the skull of a ‘13th century Tatar’ from Kazan.⁷⁷ All these skulls had jaws, but the ‘genuine Gypsy’ was missing half its teeth. The Jewish girl was a child.

In terms of anatomical completeness, the Turk, the Tatar, and the Georgian were all equal, but Blumenbach selected the Georgian. When it came to provenance, all that Blumenbach knew about the Tatar was his ethnic identity and that he came from the city of Kazan. All Blumenbach knew about the Turk was that he died during the 1788 siege of Ochakov, Ukraine, which occurred during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792.⁷⁸ The Georgian Woman’s skull, however, was delivered to Blumenbach with a letter providing some details regarding her life history.

Blumenbach described the skull of the Georgian Woman as ‘*Feminae juvenis Georgianae quae superiore bello Turcico a Russis capta et Moscoviam translata* (A young

⁷⁰ *GGA*, 1793: 322.

⁷¹ Blumenbach, 1795: 324; Dougherty, 2012: 201.

⁷² Georgi, 1780: Vol. 3, 70, 88.

⁷³ Mamontova, 2016: 44.

⁷⁴ Dougherty, 2012: 201–202.

⁷⁵ L’Isle, 1745.

⁷⁶ Blumenbach, 1795: 325.

⁷⁷ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 1, 14–15, Vol. 2, 3–7, Vol. 3, 5–6, 14; *GGA*, 1793: 322; 1795: 604.

⁷⁸ Tucker, 2010: 959.

female Georgian, who was captured during the latest war between Turkey and Russia, and [was then] transferred to Moscow). Blumenbach added that while in Moscow, she ‘succumbed there to a sudden and unexpected death (*morte subitanea obüssel*)’.⁷⁹

The skull of the Georgian Woman had been collected in Moscow and sent to Georg Thomas von Asch (1729–1807) in St. Petersburg. Asch was a Russian of German ancestry who served as the physician-general to the Russian Army during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774.⁸⁰ In 1793, Asch mailed her skull to Blumenbach along with a letter explaining that the skull came from a ‘Grusinerin’, which was the Germanized version of Грузия (Gruziya), the Russian word for Georgians.⁸¹ Asch stated that the Georgian Woman suffered from venereal disease and died suddenly in Moscow after having been captured by Russian forces. Her corpse was autopsied by an anatomist and then sent to Asch.⁸²

Blumenbach wrote that the Georgian Woman was transported to Russia during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792, which took place at various combat zones located in the Ukraine, Romania, Moldavia, Serbia and Turkey.⁸³ Since Georgian expatriates lived throughout the Ottoman Empire, and were often slaves trafficked far away from their homeland, the Georgian Woman could have been captured in one of the above war zones.⁸⁴ Or, she could have been captured in Georgia. At the very beginning of the Russo-Turkish War, Russian troops were stationed in Georgia, but soon after were redeployed to other locations.⁸⁵

Asch’s and Blumenbach’s brief descriptions of the Georgian Woman do not provide enough details to present an in-depth biography of her. Nonetheless, it has been speculated that she died in a prison, was held as a sex slave in Moscow, or was raped to death.⁸⁶ However, it is equally plausible that she was captured by the Russians, but never imprisoned or enslaved by them. According to Khodarkovsky, it was a traditional ‘standard practice’ for Russians to take hostages, usually ‘one of a chief’s male heirs,’ to secure the loyalty of non-Christians in the North Caucasus frontier.⁸⁷ The Georgian Woman could have been the governess or servant of a boy captured as a diplomatic hostage.

Blumenbach selected the Georgian Woman as the Caucasian skull exemplar based on multiple criteria including: 1) her skull was one of the 30 he had previously published; 2) her skull was anatomically complete; 3) her life story was somewhat known; and 4) her skull was well suited as a component part of his set

⁷⁹ Blumenbach, 1795: 325.

⁸⁰ Vermeulen, 2015: 382.

⁸¹ Sjögren, 1844: 502; Coene, 2016: 93.

⁸² Dougherty, 2012: 256.

⁸³ Tucker, 2010: 959–966.

⁸⁴ Finkel, 2005: 547; Smiley, 2018: 87–89.

⁸⁵ Mikaberidze, 2010: 26.

⁸⁶ Richards, 2019: 143; Painter, 2010: 83–84; Painter quoted in Kuryla, 2015.

⁸⁷ Khodarkovsky, 2011: 24.

of five skulls. These were the same criteria that he also used in selecting his four non-Caucasian skull exemplars, which indicates that he did not select her as an exemplar largely or exclusively due to an aesthetic attraction, as asserted by Latham and Huxley. Although Blumenbach may have regarded her or her skull as especially beautiful, he nonetheless employed the same de facto selection methodology with her as he did with his five other exemplars.

4 Beauty everywhere: Blumenbach's use of aesthetic terms

Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire were clearly familiar with Blumenbach's *De Generis* of 1795. In this book, Blumenbach included discussions of cranial anatomy, of women, and of Caucasians that sometimes employed aesthetic terms. Yet, as I will demonstrate in this section, Latham, et al. were either unaware of, or chose to ignore, Blumenbach's writings in which he expressed an aesthetic appreciation for men or non-Caucasians.

Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire wrote that for Blumenbach, the Caucasian racial variety was 'the most beautiful and that to which the pre-eminence belongs'. Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire further claimed that Blumenbach was 'more or less aware of three truths' namely, the 'plurality of races of man; the importance of the characteristics deduced from the conformation of the head; and the necessity of not placing in the same rank all the divisions of mankind'.⁸⁸ The first and third of these claims were brazen falsehoods.

Latham wrote that the term 'Caucasian' was 'incorrect' and 'one of the most imperfect inductions on record'. He stated:

*A particular skull in Blumenbach's collection had the characteristics, real or supposed, of the Greek, Latin, and German families in the highest degree of perfection. It was the skull of a sculptor's model rather than that of an ordinary human being. On the strength of its beautiful symmetry it was taken as a type; and as it belonged when in the flesh, to a Georgian female, it was held to represent all Georgia, just as Georgia was held to represent all Caucasus. Neither assumption was legitimate.*⁸⁹

Latham's claim that the Georgian Woman was an artist's model is unsupported by the historical record. In 1865, Huxley described Blumenbach in a way quite similar Latham's, writing:

Of all the odd myths that have arisen in the scientific world, the 'Caucasian mystery', invented quite innocently by Blumenbach is the oddest. A Georgian woman's skull was the handsomest in his collection. Hence it became his model exemplar of human skulls from which all others might be regarded as deviations; and out of this by some strange intellec-

⁸⁸ Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 1860–1863: 131; Bendyshe, 1865: ix.

⁸⁹ Latham, 1863: 295.

*tual hocus-pocus, grew up the notion that the Caucasian man is the prototypic 'Adamic' man.*⁹⁰

Undeniably, the claims of Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire are at least partially supported by some of Blumenbach's writings. For example, Blumenbach once glowingly compared the skull of the Georgian Woman to a famous white marble bust of a Greco-Roman woman known as 'Townley's Clytie' as seen in Figure 6.⁹¹ This statue, which at the time was thought to be that of the Greek nymph, was the favorite possession of Charles Townley, a British 'gentleman of large fortune' who collected ancient marbles.⁹² After viewing Townley's collection in London, Blumenbach reported that the 'symmetrical proportion and attractiveness (*symmetrica proportio et venustas*)' of the Georgian Woman's skull (see Figure 6) was comparable to 'another female figure of the divine works of ancient Greek art... the marble bust of Clytie of inexpressible conspicuous beauty (*Clyties ineffabili pulcritudine conspicuae*)'.⁹³ Klatt proposed that Blumenbach, who lacked any drawings of Georgian women, presented Clytie as a fleshed out version of the Georgian Woman's skull.⁹⁴

Furthermore, when discussing the Georgian Woman, Blumenbach once described her skull as '*bildschön-proportionir[t]* (picture-perfect proportioned)'.⁹⁵ Similarly, he wrote that her skull was 'an ideally picture-perfect skull of mankind's most beautiful blood (*ein idealisch bildschöner Schedel vom schönsten Blute im Menschengeschlechte*)'.⁹⁶ In a personal letter in which he discussed the Georgian Woman's skull, Blumenbach used the mixed German and English phrase '*unberührte Beauty*', or 'untouched beauty'.⁹⁷ In this letter, Blumenbach is explaining that the skull was stored in a box in his museum to keep it from being damaged. Thus, the specimen was well protected and 'untouched'. Indeed, some of Blumenbach's discussions of the Georgian Woman would seem to support the claims that he held her as the epitome of not just beauty, but a form of beauty only found in women or only in women from the Caucasus Mountains.

⁹⁰ Huxley, 1865: 273–274.

⁹¹ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 3, 5.

⁹² Channing, 1851: 148; Dyson, 2008: 136.

⁹³ Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 3, 5.

⁹⁴ Klatt, 2008: 98–99.

⁹⁵ Blumenbach, 1794–1795: [2], Demel, 2012: 80.

⁹⁶ *GGÄ*, 1795: 60.

⁹⁷ Dougherty, 2012: 256.

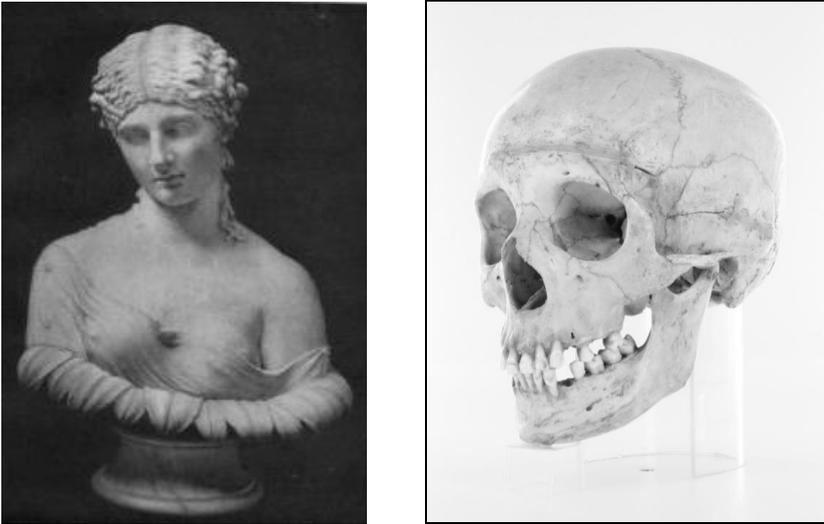


Fig. 6: The marble bust of Clytie (left), which Blumenbach asserted had an analogous anatomical symmetry to the skull of the Woman of Georgia (right). Image of Clytie, 1912 photogravure print photographed and engraved by Emory Walker and sold by Marsell and Co., from the author's personal collection. Image of the skull courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project 'Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online'

However, Blumenbach also praised the beauty of men and non-Caucasians. He described a Turkish man who had a '*schön-proportionirte[n]* Schedel (beautifully proportioned skull)', and wrote that the skull of Raphael was '*bildschön geform[t]* (picture-perfectly formed)'.⁹⁸ Blumenbach wrote about a Tatar man whose skull had 'a noble, beautiful form (*eine edle, schöne Form*)'.⁹⁹ He also discussed skulls from Tahiti and Australia which were both examples of '*ein idealisch bildschöner Schedel*' 'an ideally picture-perfect skull'.¹⁰⁰ Blumenbach deemed skulls from Malaysia to be '*bildschön*'.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, he described Marquesas islanders as cannibals who were warlike 'but beautifully formed (*aber an Wuchs wunderschö[n]*)'.¹⁰² In 1794, Blumenbach noted, in English, how there were 'handsome negros'.¹⁰³

When writing in Latin, Blumenbach wrote that the skull of the Georgian Woman had an elegant form (*formae elegantiam*), wording which may appear to be a celebration of her refined feminine beauty.¹⁰⁴ However, it is not. According to

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 303, 203.

⁹⁹ *GGA*, 1793: 322.

¹⁰⁰ *GGA*, 1795: 601.

¹⁰¹ *GGA*, 1816: 2,085.

¹⁰² *GGA*, 1806: 1,566.

¹⁰³ Blumenbach, 1794: 7.

¹⁰⁴ Blumenbach 1795: 325.

Klatt ‘elegant (*elegans*)’ was one of Blumenbach’s ‘favorite words’; he used it to describe the skulls of Calmucks, Eskimos, Jews, Negros, and Tartars.¹⁰⁵ The word ‘elegant’ was a technical term used by early anatomists to describe skull symmetry. In 1555, the Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) asserted that there was a ‘natural norm’ for human skulls; an ideally symmetrical design which most human skulls did not possess due to illness, injury, or benign asymmetrical growth. Vesalius used the Latin word ‘*elegans*’ when he claimed that Greek and Turkish skulls exhibited the ‘natural norm’.¹⁰⁶ In *De Generis* of 1776, Blumenbach refuted Vesalius’s claim. Blumenbach reported that he had observed non-spherical Greek and Turkish skulls which were of a ‘less elegant shape (*minus elegantis formae*)’, than those of a typical German.¹⁰⁷

Blumenbach also addressed the reported beauty of the peoples of the Caucasus when he wrote about a Turk who was (with his emphasis) a member of ‘the Caucasian race, to which the best formed humans – according to *our* concepts of beauty (*nach unserm Begriffen von Schönheit*) – belong’.¹⁰⁸ In this passage, Blumenbach was emphasizing that he regarded Caucasians as beautiful, but only by the standards of his own northern European culture. This opinion, which he published in 1796, was one he had previously expressed in 1779.¹⁰⁹ In 1816, Blumenbach wrote that the skulls of a Papuan and a Pacific islander were ‘both in their way picture-perfect (*beide in ihrer Art bildschön*)’.¹¹⁰ Through these texts, Blumenbach was indicating that he regarded beauty as culturally relative, a fact which Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire never mentioned.

When viewed as a whole, Blumenbach’s discussions of beauty do not support the claims of Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. Even Blumenbach’s above noted contention that the Georgian Woman was as beautiful as the statue of Clytie is not as straightforward as it might seem. For example, Blumenbach wrote that the Georgian Woman, whom he equated with Clytie, possessed a form (*Form*) that was comparable with ‘the feminine ideals (*den weiblichen Idealen*) in the art of the ancient world’.¹¹¹ And yet, when the 1836 museum catalogue of Townley’s collection described Clytie, it noted that she had ‘features not being conformable to the model of ideal beauty’.¹¹² This 1836 catalogue also documented that Townley’s collection included four bare-breasted statues of Venus, the Goddess of Beauty.¹¹³ But if Blumenbach’s aim was to equate the Georgian Woman with the epitome of female beauty, then why did he not choose one of Townley’s statues of Venus?

¹⁰⁵ Klatt, 2008: 82–83.

¹⁰⁶ Hast and Garrison, 2000: 313.

¹⁰⁷ Blumenbach, 1776: 61: See also Blumenbach, 1790–1828: Vol. 1, 15–16.

¹⁰⁸ Blumenbach, 1796: [18].

¹⁰⁹ Blumenbach, 1779: 63.

¹¹⁰ *GGA*, 1816: 2,085.

¹¹¹ *GGA*, 1795: 602.

¹¹² Ellis, 1836: 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 169, 205, 260, 268.

In 2010 Painter wrote that the odalisque – a type of idealized artistic image depicting a beautiful, helpless Caucasian slave girl, nude save for some chains – was a popular artistic motif in the 19th century Orientalist movement.¹¹⁴ Painter documented that in *De Generis* of 1795, Blumenbach quoted the travel narratives of Jean (later “John”) Chardin (1643–1713), who was one of the earliest authors to set into print the concept of the stereotypical beautiful Caucasian harem girl.¹¹⁵ Thus, Painter proposed that Chardin’s odalisque-like vision of Caucasian womanhood influenced Blumenbach’s decision to select the Georgian Woman as his Caucasian exemplar.¹¹⁶ Blumenbach’s 1790 vignette of a Turk in a harem would seem to support this interpretation (see Figure 1). Yet when Blumenbach actually selected a work of art as comparable to his skull exemplar, he chose Clytie – who was clothed, free of chains, and, as a supernatural being, not helpless.

5 Successful expatriates: Blumenbach’s evidence for human racial equality

Latham and Huxley both commented that Blumenbach chose the label ‘Caucasian’ because he regarded the skull of the Georgian Woman as being the most beautiful in his collection. Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire commented that Blumenbach’s craniological studies led him to conclude that ‘Caucasians’ outranked all other racial varieties in terms of beauty and overall superiority. All three of these commentators stressed the ways in which Blumenbach described differences between his five racial varieties, which was indeed one of the many facets of his research. In *De Generis* of 1795, Blumenbach both discussed and graphically illustrated the anatomical differences which characterized his five racial varieties.¹¹⁷

However, in 1796, Blumenbach published his portrait exemplars, which, as I shall document below, was a means for him to illustrate that all five of his racial varieties had equal intellectual abilities, even though their skulls exhibited different forms. When viewed as a set, Blumenbach’s portrait images illustrated both differences and similarities for the reader to contrast and compare. This was the same approach he took with the drawings of his set of five skull exemplars. When Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire interpreted Blumenbach’s research, they focused only on the differences, overlooking the similarities.

Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire were all presumably attempting to understand Blumenbach’s racial theory, especially as it related to skull anatomy. Yet they never mentioned Blumenbach’s portrait exemplars, which is a significant oversight. Blumenbach explicitly stated that each portrait exemplar could be com-

¹¹⁴ Painter, 2010: 52–58.

¹¹⁵ Painter, 2010: 45–47; Blumenbach, 1795: 30; Chardin, 1686: 267.

¹¹⁶ Painter, 2010: 88.

¹¹⁷ Blumenbach, 1795: 284–326.

pared with a corresponding skull exemplar.¹¹⁸ Thus, to fully understand Blumenbach's craniological research, it is necessary to study his portrait exemplars: successful men who shared many similarities in terms of their life stories.

Blumenbach published his portrait exemplars in 1796, the same year in which he published the fifth edition of his *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte (Manual of Natural History)*. This book, which had no graphic illustrations of humans, addressed a wide range of topics relating to the natural world. In 1796, Blumenbach also published a complementary picture book (or 'atlas') mostly illustrating specimens from the Göttingen University's museum.¹¹⁹ This atlas included engraved images of five individuals (Figure 4) whom Blumenbach selected as his portrait exemplars.¹²⁰ Blumenbach described these as portraits of 'interesting people (*interessanten Personen*)' each of whom displayed the 'characteristic model heads (*characteristische Musterköpfe*)' of his five racial varieties, respectively.¹²¹ Clearly, Blumenbach sought to emphasize that the overall craniofacial anatomy of these five exemplars were demonstrably different.

According to Eigen, Blumenbach's 'primary medium of communication' was 'the textbook' and thus his atlas of drawings permitted him to visually – rather than verbally – document his anthropological theories.¹²² She argued that although Blumenbach's portrait exemplars were not idealized composites, they were still somewhat ideal representations because they all depicted noteworthy individuals.¹²³ Reill asserted that Blumenbach selected portraits of 'real people' and 'made it clear that all of these people were highly intelligent, capable and worthy of equal respect'.¹²⁴ Stieglitz wrote that Blumenbach placed great value on selecting persons whose 'artistic talents, importance, education, military skill, or manners met European requirements'.¹²⁵ For Richards, these were 'individuals of conspicuous talents' who had been 'raised in Europe or spent a significant time there', and who exercised their talents 'in European pursuits'.¹²⁶ There is a clear consensus that Blumenbach's portrait exemplars were individuals of uncommon achievement.

Blumenbach also wrote that his five examples were all persons who had traveled to Europe and had been observed in person by Europeans. Thus, he had reliable primary sources who could testify that his five examples were genuinely as impressive as he claimed. He wrote that he chose examples of people who were currently in Europe, or had recently been there, so that 'the striking similarities of these images (*die vollkommen getroffene Ähnlichkeit dieser Abbildungen*) can be attested by

¹¹⁸ Blumenbach, 1796: [6].

¹¹⁹ Eigen, 2007: 277–279.

¹²⁰ Blumenbach, 1796: [4–27].

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, [4–5].

¹²² Eigen, 2007: 279, 281.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 281–283.

¹²⁴ Reill, 2019: 179.

¹²⁵ Stieglitz, 2018: 138.

¹²⁶ Richards, 2019: 161.

valid judges who knew these people themselves'.¹²⁷ In general, Blumenbach was skeptical of reports written by rank-and-file world travelers like sailors or European colonists. He emphasized the need to seek out the observations of 'capable and credible witnesses (*von fähigen und glaubwürdigen Zeugen*)'.¹²⁸ As Marx noted, Blumenbach 'took special pains to shed light on doubtful questions'.¹²⁹

The individual Blumenbach selected as the Mongolian portrait exemplar was a talented European-trained artist named Feodor Iwanowitsch (1765–1832).¹³⁰ Iwanowitsch was born to the Calmuck people, now known as the Oirats, who were the western-most population of Mongols. As a child, Iwanowitsch was enslaved by Cossacks, who sold him to a family of means in European Russia. His Russian mistress freed and adopted him.¹³¹ In 1795, Blumenbach wrote that Iwanowitsch was fortunate to have 'studied the classics' in Rome. Dougherty has documented that as far back as 1776, Blumenbach knew of Iwanowitsch's artistic achievements.¹³²

Blumenbach's American portrait exemplar was Thayendanega (or '*Tayadaneega*') (1743–1807), also called Joseph Brant.¹³³ Thayendanega was born in British Ohio territory to Christian Mohawk parents, and was educated in Connecticut at a school that would later become Dartmouth College. In 1775, he travelled to England and met with the King.¹³⁴ Thayendanega fought for the Crown against General Washington's Army, and in 1780 became a commissioned officer in the British Army. Decades later, when he had become a resident of Canada, Thayendanega met with the President of the United States to discuss relations with native nations.¹³⁵

Blumenbach described Thayendanega as a 'so-called savage (*sogenannte Wilde*)', suggesting Blumenbach knew of Thayendanega's achievements and intellectual acumen.¹³⁶ Blumenbach once cited a 1786 article published in an English journal which included a letter written by Thayendanega describing how some Mohawks 'shave with razors in the same manner as Europeans; but they generally pluck out the hairs of the beard by the roots'.¹³⁷ Clearly, Blumenbach was well aware of Thayendanega's literary eloquence and the ease with which he participated in learned discussions about Native American cultural practices.

¹²⁷ Blumenbach, 1796: [5].

¹²⁸ Blumenbach, 1790: 68; Dougherty, 1990: 98.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Bendyshe, 1864: 12.

¹³⁰ Blumenbach, 1795: [9–11].

¹³¹ Lieber, et al., 1857: 78–79; Eigen, 2007: 285.

¹³² Dougherty, 2012: 224.

¹³³ Blumenbach, 1796: [14].

¹³⁴ Kelsay, 1984: 40, 72, 165.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 290, 470.

¹³⁶ Blumenbach, 1796: [15].

¹³⁷ Quoted in McCausland, 1786: 232; Blumenbach, 1796: [14–15].

Blumenbach selected Thayendanega, a Mohawk who improved his lot in life through education, as his American exemplar. Similarly, Blumenbach selected, as his Mongolian exemplar, a Calmuck educated in Rome. With Thayendanega and Iwanowitsch, Blumenbach was highlighting men from cultures with no writing systems, and no tradition of urbanized living, who adapted with great success to life in the cities and educational institutions of Europe and its New World colonies. Blumenbach continued this trend when he selected for his Ethiopian exemplar Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein (c. 1717–1747), a Ghanaian-born former slave who went on to graduate from a Dutch university.¹³⁸

Capitein was shipped to the Netherlands as a child slave, but was eventually freed and adopted by his master. After attending university, Capitein attempted to become a missionary in Ghana, but was unsuccessful in part because he was so culturally Dutch that his ancestral people could not relate to him.¹³⁹ Eigen asserted that Blumenbach chose Capitein to ‘dispel myths about natural racial limitations’.¹⁴⁰

Blumenbach knew about Capitein’s achievements as far back as 1788, when he received a letter mentioning Capitein’s doctoral dissertation of 1742.¹⁴¹ Blumenbach also owned some sermons which Capitein had authored. These may be some of the publications Blumenbach collected in a library which he dedicated to authors from West African nations, or New World ‘Negros’ of African ancestry.¹⁴² This library included books by the Boston poet Phillis Wheatley (c.1753–1784) and the Maryland surveyor Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806). Other books were penned by former slaves who resided in Europe, such as Anton Wilhelm Amo (c.1703–c.1759), Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), and Olaudah Equiano (c.1745–1797).¹⁴³ Blumenbach could have selected any one of these gifted authors as his Ethiopian exemplar. However, he chose Capitein, who was trained at university, rather than one of the above-mention authors, most of whom were self-educated. It is plausible that Blumenbach selected Capitein because he, like Thayendanega and Iwanowitsch, was born to a non-literate ethnic group, yet thrived when given the chance to learn to read.

Blumenbach’s Malay portrait exemplar was a young Tahitian man named Omai (c. 1751–1780), also known as Mai or O-Mai.¹⁴⁴ Omai sailed from his native Tahiti to Britain with Captain Cook’s flotilla. There, Omai met the King and charmed London society with his exotic ways, his politeness, and his intelligent, inquisitive manner. Blumenbach even acquired a sample of Omai’s hair.¹⁴⁵ Scholars now

¹³⁸ Blumenbach, 1796: [25–27].

¹³⁹ Finkelman, 2009: Vol. 1, 236–237.

¹⁴⁰ Eigen, 2007: 291.

¹⁴¹ Dougherty, 2010: 154–156.

¹⁴² Blumenbach, 1806: 89–94.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Blumenbach, 1796: [22].

¹⁴⁵ Dougherty, 2012: 298.

know that Omai later returned to Tahiti, but died before the age of thirty of an infectious disease.¹⁴⁶ Omai was not university educated, but nonetheless adapted well to urban London even though he was a man of humble origins from a non-literate culture.

Both Omai and Thayendanega met with the King of England. Such was also the case for the man Blumenbach initially selected as his ‘Caucasian’ exemplar: Yusuf Agah Efendi (1744–1824), whom Blumenbach called ‘*Jusuf Aguiab Efendi*’.¹⁴⁷ Modern scholars know that Yusuf Agah was born in southern Greece, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, to an ethnic Turkish family of rank. He spoke Greek, and was the first Ottoman ambassador to Britain, where he periodically met with the Prime Minister and the King.¹⁴⁸ Blumenbach wrote that he selected Yusuf Agah as his Caucasian exemplar even though he could have chosen highly respected European figures, like ‘a Milton or a Raphael’. But instead, Blumenbach chose Yusuf Agah because ‘*seine Heimath dem Caucasus näher liegt* (his homeland lies closer to the Caucasus)’.¹⁴⁹

In 1810, Blumenbach selected a new exemplar for his Caucasian racial variety, Mir Jumla (1591–1663) (see Figure 7), in place of Yusuf Agah. Jumla was the son of an impoverished Persian oil merchant of ‘Sayyid’ or Saudi Arab ancestry who nonetheless became a general and governor serving the Mughal Empire in India.¹⁵⁰ Blumenbach, who does not appear to have known that Jumla was ethnically Saudi, based his brief biography of Jumla on a book written by Dow.¹⁵¹ According to Dow, Jumla ‘arose to the summit of greatness from a low degree’.¹⁵² Jumla’s life story, as a man of low social standing who found success as a military officer in the service of a foreign king, parallels that of Thayendanega.

When, in 1810, Blumenbach replaced Yusuf Agah with Jumla, he also revised the introduction describing all five of his exemplars. Blumenbach deleted the above noted text stating that all of his portrait exemplars had traveled to Europe, which was warranted since Jumla never left Asia.¹⁵³ Yet, there is evidence that well-placed Europeans may have interacted with Jumla, who served under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707). The court physician to Aurangzeb was a François Bernier (1620–1688), a Frenchman and author. In his 1670 book *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668*, Bernier described Jumla as ‘a Persian by birth... celebrated throughout Hindustan’ whose ‘lineage was not noble, but his talents were of the first order’.¹⁵⁴ Bernier is now famous for an 1684 essay in which he

¹⁴⁶ Connaughton, 2007: xv–xvii.

¹⁴⁷ Blumenbach, 1796: [18].

¹⁴⁸ Yalçinkaya, 2010: 48, 72, 143.

¹⁴⁹ Blumenbach, 1796, [18].

¹⁵⁰ Sarkar, 1979: 2; Richards, 1995: 155–158.

¹⁵¹ Blumenbach, 1810: [18].

¹⁵² Dow, 1803: 384.

¹⁵³ Blumenbach, 1810: [4].

¹⁵⁴ Bernier, 1826 (1670): 18.

was the first author to use the term ‘race’ in the modern sense as describing large-scale human populations.¹⁵⁵ Blumenbach is known to have been familiar with Bernier’s writings, and may have read his discussion of Jumla.¹⁵⁶



Fig. 7: Blumenbach’s 1810 Caucasian replacement portrait exemplar drawing of “Mahommed Jumla”.¹⁵⁷ Public Domain. Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project ‘Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – Online’

Blumenbach never explained why he replaced Yusuf Agah with Jumla. Stieglitz noted that it may reflect a desire to move the assumed origin of the Caucasian racial variety farther to the east.¹⁵⁸ It is also plausible that Blumenbach selected Jumla because he – like Iwanowitsch, Thayendanega, and Capitein – had humble

origins. By contrast, the high-born Yusuf Agah had achieved his success in his native land prior to living in London.

Blumenbach’s portrait exemplars and their life stories were crucial components of his racial theory, which complemented the physical anatomical evidence provided by his skull exemplars. His portrait exemplars also provided real world evidence, not just theoretical arguments, that supported his contention that the social environment could transform even the intangible features of an individual regardless of racial origins. Such was the case for Iwanowitsch, Thayendanega, and Capitein who thrived in environments far from their native homelands when given the sort of educational opportunities their ancestors never had. Although they were not northern Europeans, they like Omai and Yusuf Agah, adapted to life in northern Europe better than most natives of London or Amsterdam. Jumla’s experience was the same, except his new social environment was India. What unified these exemplars is that they all shared an inherent mental aptitude that permitted them to adapt and succeed. Their skulls, like the skulls that Blumenbach illustrated in *De Generis* of 1795, may have been anatomically different. But their intellects, like those of all humans everywhere, were fundamentally the same and equal, with none ranked above or below the other.

¹⁵⁵ Baum, 2006: 52–53.

¹⁵⁶ Blumenbach, 1790a, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Blumenbach, 1810: [16].

¹⁵⁸ Stieglitz, 2018: 138.

6 The politics of labeling: Blumenbach's reframing of the term 'Caucasian'

Latham's and Huxley's discussions of Blumenbach suggest that they believed Blumenbach had coined the term 'Caucasians' to describe the peoples in and around Europe. However, the term 'Caucasian' was first used as a race descriptor by Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), who was a professor of philosophy at Göttingen University at the same time Blumenbach was teaching there. According to Meiners, Europeans, whom he labelled as 'Caucasians', were more beautiful and intellectually superior to all other peoples of the earth, whom he collectively labelled as 'Mongolians.' Thus for Meiners, the term 'Mongolian' described not only East Asians, but also sub-Saharan Africans and all the native peoples of the Americas.¹⁵⁹ For Meiners, the terms 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian' were foundational elements underpinning his unabashedly race supremacist theory of human origins and human racial variation.

There is no question that Blumenbach, a man described by his contemporaries as an egalitarian opposed to race supremacy, chose to adopt Meiners's racially charged terms: 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian'.¹⁶⁰ Adopting Meiners's racial labels does not, however, mean Blumenbach was endorsing Meiners's race supremacist theories. Rather, Blumenbach simultaneously adopted the terms 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian', in 1795, as a way to refute Meiners's racial theories, which Blumenbach adamantly opposed. In a quiet but pointed scholarly rebuke, Blumenbach reframed Meiners's terms, redefining them to be consistent with Blumenbach's own egalitarian theories. Furthermore, I contend that Blumenbach selected his skull and portrait exemplars, in part, as a refutation of Meiners's race supremacist worldview.

To understand Blumenbach's opposition to Meiners's racial theory, it is useful to briefly examine their competing anthropological theories. Meiners first debuted the typological labels 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian' in 1785, when he argued that humanity consisted of only two primary divisions, which he called the *'zween Hauptstämmen'* or 'two primary stocks': Caucasian and Mongolian.¹⁶¹ Carhart described Meiners's two-part typology, as 'binary'.¹⁶² Although Meiners was the first scholar to use the typological label 'Caucasian' in print, the concept that humans originated in the Caucasus long predated his writings.¹⁶³ Similarly, the typological label 'Mongolian', initially debuted by Meiners, had long been used by Europeans to describe all East Asians, due to the Mongol incursions into Eastern Europe under Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227).¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Vermeulen, 2015: 384; Mazzolini, 2007: 362.

¹⁶⁰ Bendyshe, 1865: 9, 60.

¹⁶¹ Meiners, 1785: [xx].

¹⁶² Carhart, 2007: 255.

¹⁶³ Figal, 2014: 175–177; Baum, 2006: 59.

¹⁶⁴ Demel, 2012: 75; Keevak, 2011: 73–75.

When, in 1785, Meiners argued that humanity consisted of only two divisions, he was brazenly rebuking Blumenbach's 1779 assertion that there were five divisions.¹⁶⁵ And while Blumenbach offered the monogenist theory that all five racial varieties shared a common origin, Meiners offered the effectively polygenist counter-theory that the 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian' stocks of humanity were each the result of a 'very different creation (*einer ganz andern Schöpfung*)'.¹⁶⁶ Meiners regarded his 'two primary stocks' as a pair of quasi-metaphysically linked opposites, with Caucasians exhibiting lightness, intelligence, and beauty, while the Mongolian stock was dark, stupid, and ugly.¹⁶⁷

As noted above, Blumenbach regarded his five racial varieties as parts of an interrelated racial spectrum with no distinct boundaries, an idea that was anathema to a polygenist. Furthermore, Meiners asserted that West Africans were mentally inferior to Europeans. He argued that the best way to improve West Africans, as a whole, was for them to be enslaved and impregnated by their ethnically European masters.¹⁶⁸ Unlike Meiners, Blumenbach opposed slavery and wrote that 'Negroes' possessed an innate potential for 'perfectibility' and even the capacity for 'scientific cultural capability (*von... wissenschaftlicher Culturfähigkeit*)'.¹⁶⁹

Meiners's anthropological theory held that the Mongolian primary stock originated in Mongolia, and from there migrated outward, giving rise to the peoples of East Asia, South Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Meiners also claimed that the Caucasian primary stock, which consisted of the people of the European Peninsula, originated in the Caucasus region.¹⁷⁰ Thus, for Meiners, the ugly primary stock gave rise to the ugly East Asian, African, and American peoples of the earth, while the beautiful peoples of Europe were descended from the ancient Caucasians who were also beautiful. Meiners argued that the evidence supporting his theory could be found in history books and travel narratives written by Europeans who explored or resided in lands outside of Europe.¹⁷¹

During the late 18th century, Blumenbach and Meiners espoused markedly different racial theories, which was not unusual at the time. Scholars from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Georges-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon (1707–1788) to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Johann Georg Zimmerman (1728–1795) each espoused their own unique racial theories and typologies.¹⁷² However, the Blumenbach-Meiners debate led to an intra-campus feud at their shared workplace, Göttingen University. In 1840, K. F. H. Marx (1796–1877), the Göttingen professor who penned Blumenbach's obituary, wrote that Blumenbach was colle-

¹⁶⁵ Blumenbach, 1799: 63–64.

¹⁶⁶ Meiners, 1785: 6.

¹⁶⁷ Painter, 2010: 88; Mazzolini, 2007: 362.

¹⁶⁸ Meiners, 1790: 386, 643.

¹⁶⁹ Blumenbach, 1806: 97.

¹⁷⁰ Meiners, 1785: 18–30; Rupp-Eisenreich, 2014: 72.

¹⁷¹ Mazzolini, 2007: 362–363.

¹⁷² Blumenbach, 1795: 296–300.

gial with all of his university colleagues save one: Meiners.¹⁷³ Vetter and Dougherty noted that the Blumenbach openly faulted Meiners for relying too heavily on travel narratives, while incautiously failing to consider anatomical or zoological evidence.¹⁷⁴

In 1790, Meiners criticized Blumenbach, the skull collector, by opining that it was best to put one's faith in the 'observations from witnesses who have studied hundreds and thousands' of people from all over the world, rather than the study of 'one or even several skulls of uncertain origin'.¹⁷⁵ That same year, Blumenbach penned a pointed critique of Meiners, saying 'My esteemed colleague Mr. Hofr. Meiners has seen many things differently than I do, which I must not withhold from my readers.'¹⁷⁶ Zammito has posited that Blumenbach may have even written his very first anthropological study, *De Generis* of 1776, in part as a response to the race supremacist views that Meiners had been verbally espousing on campus.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, Spencer has proposed that Blumenbach collected books authored by former slaves specifically to refute Meiners's claims of West Africans mental inferiority.¹⁷⁸

Meiners was reported to be an uncompromising, brash man prone to making enemies, including the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the South Sea explorer Georg Forster (1754–1794).¹⁷⁹ In 1821, Philipp Albert Stapfer (1766–1840) wrote that Meiners had the habit of publicly pointing out the flaws in the research of his fellow scholars with 'excessive boldness'.¹⁸⁰ Some of Meiners's contemporaries found his Mongol-centered theory to be so misguided that they gave him the unflattering nickname 'Mongol Meiners'.¹⁸¹ Perhaps due to these critiques, Meiners eventually abandoned both of his binary labels. In 1793, he re-labelled his Caucasians/Europeans as the 'white, or light-colored and beautiful peoples, (*weiße oder hellfarbige und schöne Völker*)', while his Mongolians/non-Europeans became the 'dark-colored and ugly (*dunkelfarbigen und häßlichen*)' peoples.¹⁸² Meiners wrote that this revision was needed to clarify his contention that the Mongolian primary stock did not live exclusively in Mongolia. He also stated that he wanted to clarify that his 'Caucasians' only originated in the Caucasus Mountains, but later on spread into Europe.¹⁸³ It was only a few years later, circa 1795, that Meiners abandoned

¹⁷³ Quoted in Bendyshe, 1865: 23.

¹⁷⁴ Vetter, 1996: 226; Dougherty, 1990: 98, 100–10; See also Blumenbach, 1790:62–78.

¹⁷⁵ Meiners, 1790: 407; Rupp-Eisenreich, 2014: 78–79.

¹⁷⁶ Blumenbach, 1790: 62.

¹⁷⁷ Zammito, 2006: 44–45.

¹⁷⁸ Spencer, 1997: 185.

¹⁷⁹ Stapfer, 1821: 156–165; Encyclopedia Britannica, 1857: 473; Zantop, 1997: 30–31.

¹⁸⁰ Stapfer, 1821: 162.

¹⁸¹ Rupp-Eisenreich, 2014: 75–76.

¹⁸² Meiners, 1793: 5–6.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3–5.

his anthropological studies altogether. He shifted his career to that of a university administrator.¹⁸⁴

As noted above, Meiners stopped using the labels ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Mongolian’ in 1793, which was the very same year that Blumenbach began using them.¹⁸⁵ Painter noted that ‘Blumenbach may well have borrowed the name ‘Caucasian’ from Meiners’.¹⁸⁶ However, the evidence presented herein suggests that Blumenbach appropriated both of Meiners’s labels – ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Mongolian’ – as a set, to undercut the Meiners’s polygenist race theory. When Blumenbach published his third edition of *De Generis* in 1795, he appropriated Meiners’s two labels so thoroughly that generations of scholars presumed the race label ‘Caucasian’ originated with Blumenbach, not Meiners.¹⁸⁷ It is quite plausible that Blumenbach’s refutation of Meiners’s views in *De Generis* of 1795 was a key factor which led Meiners to give up on his anthropological research program.

There is also reason to suspect that Blumenbach selected his exemplars in part to thwart Meiners’s race theory. Blumenbach’s Mongolian exemplars were a man from a Mongol tribe and another who lived near Mongolia. His Caucasian exemplars were a woman from the Caucasus Mountain region and two men from close to it. It cannot be simple coincidence that Blumenbach selected these five exemplars whose geographic origins so closely match the very same regions – Mongolia and the Caucasus – which were central to Meiners’s binary classification system.

Blumenbach’s opposition to Meiners’s race theory may even explain a key passage from *De Generis* of 1795:

*Nomen huic varietati a Caucaso monte, tum quod vicinia eius et maxime quidem australis plaga pulcherrimam hominum stirpem, Georgianam foveat; tum quod et omnes physiologicae rationes in eo conspirent, in eandem regionem, si uspiam, primos humani generis avtochthones verisimillime ponendos esse.*¹⁸⁸

In this passage, Blumenbach stated that he chose the name ‘Caucasian’ to describe the peoples in and around Europe because 1) the peoples of the Caucasus region, especially Georgians, are humanity’s most beautiful peoples, and 2) all physiological considerations indicate that the first population of humans probably originated in the Caucasus region. Through this passage, Blumenbach was refuting Meiners’s claim that there were two distinct founding populations, one which gave rise to ugly peoples and a second which spawned the beautiful. Contra Meiners, Blumenbach argued that there was just one founding population, which was beautiful. Thus, all humans – pale, tan, and brown – are the descendants of beauties.

¹⁸⁴ Dougherty, 1990: 92.

¹⁸⁵ Vermeulen, 2015: 506.

¹⁸⁶ Painter, 2010: 88.

¹⁸⁷ Huxley, 1865: 273; Schiebinger, 1993: 129.

¹⁸⁸ Blumenbach, 1795: 303–304.

Finally, Blumenbach stated that his theory of human origins was based on physiology, not just history books. Blumenbach's desire to present physiological evidence might also explain why he waited until 1795 to reframe the labels Meiners debuted in 1785. It was only in 1795 that Blumenbach had five rigorously-studied, complete skulls representing each of his racial varieties. He needed more than just books to refute Meiners; he needed skulls, the type of evidence that Meiners, who was not an anatomist, would be unqualified to refute.

7 Reassessing the impact of aesthetic bias on Blumenbach's research

The above investigation focuses on Blumenbach's exemplars and typological labels, which were only two aspects of his decades-long anthropological research program. My conclusions are that Blumenbach selected his exemplars, including the Georgian Woman, based on multiple criteria, not just aesthetics, and that he choose to use the terms 'Caucasian' and 'Mongolian' as a set, in order to thwart the polygenist race theory of Meiners. These findings largely refute the claims of Latham, Huxley, and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire and weaken the arguments of modern scholars, beginning with Schiebinger, who have argued that aesthetic bias influenced many, if not most, aspects of Blumenbach's studies.¹⁸⁹ While it is plausible that certain aspects of Blumenbach's multi-faceted studies may have been significantly influenced by his aesthetic bias, such was not the case when it came to his exemplars and typological labels.

In recent years, some scholars have critiqued Schiebinger's interpretation, and its de facto reworking by Gould, as an overreach.¹⁹⁰ These critics share a frustration that aesthetic bias has become overused as a boilerplate answer for any and all questions about Blumenbach's research. For example, there is still no clear consensus as to why Blumenbach listed Europeans/Caucasians first when he numerically listed his racial varieties, or why he asserted that the people of the Caucasus were the earliest form of humanity.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, some modern scholars have interpreted these aspects of his research as being driven by an aesthetic bias.¹⁹² At times, it seems as if every question asked about Blumenbach gets the same answer: aesthetic bias.

The evidence presented herein demonstrates that two aspects of Blumenbach's anthropological research program were not driven by aesthetics, even though luminaries like Huxley argued that they were. Indeed, it is problematic that so many essays written about Blumenbach do not sufficiently reflect the nuance and com-

¹⁸⁹ Schiebinger, 1993: 126–134; Gould, 1996: 410; Bindman, 2002: 201; Dain, 2002: 59–61; Painter, 2010: 72–90; Sussman, 2014: 19.

¹⁹⁰ Junker, 1998: 498–501; Zammito, 2006: 49; Cook, 2006: 32; Demel, 2011: 231.

¹⁹¹ Blumenbach, 1776: 41–42; 1790: vii–viii; 1795: 303.

¹⁹² Gould, 1996: 403–411; Baum, 2006: 89; Dain, 2002: 60.

plexity of his research. Future studies of Blumenbach should therefore seek to determine if other aspects of his research were, or were not, driven by aesthetics. Unquestionably, Blumenbach's aesthetic bias is a topic worthy of investigation. But it should not be the default explanation for every inscrutable decision he made.

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