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Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's 'Neuholländer'

Abstract: The colonisation of Australia, at the end of the eighteenth century, coincided with the birth of (physical) anthropology. In Germany, it was the Enlightenment naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach who began to utilise human skulls as scientific evidence for his hypotheses on human diversity and origin. He assigned selected skulls to be representative of each of his five human 'varieties'. Due to this very fact, Blumenbach's own historiographical representation is ambiguous – he has been depicted as both the forerunner of race sciences that were to follow in the 1900s and the humanist and universalist defender of human unity and universal value in the times of slavery. This article discusses how Blumenbach throughout his writing on humanity incorporated his notion of Indigenous Australians. In 1775, he outlined a sequence of human skulls, including those of 'New Hollanders', long before he began to assemble his (in) famous skull collection. Roughly fifteen years later, he obtained the skulls of two Indigenous Australian men which then represented the 'black race' of his diversified South Pacific 'Malay variety'. The 'Neuholländer' in Blumenbach's work, arguably, also reflects the tension inherent in his aim to scientifically prove humanity's unity on the basis of its diversity.

In 2020, two events spotlighted Germany's Enlightenment "father of anthropology",¹ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, with a view to his theorising on human diversity and the skull collection he used in support of his hypotheses: In February, Göttingen's Georg-August-University announced a research project investigating the "sensible provenances" of "human remains from colonial contexts" held in the university's collections.² This project reflects the growing concern about the historic circumstances of acquisition and scientific utilisation of such human remains. It further aims to investigate the responsibilities and possibilities of their repatriation to the (mostly Indigenous) communities of their origin on a global scale. In June, the busts of Blumenbach and of the German populariser of Darwinism, Ernst Haeckel, were torn down by "anti-racist" activist students of the university. Both busts, located in the Johann-Friedrich-Blumenbach-Institut für Zoologie und Anthropologie (which holds Blumenbach's still intact skull collection),³ were, for the present, removed from public display.⁴ In the activists' view, the politically motivated attempt at the destruction of these busts seemed justified by the need to revise Göttingen's "colonial and racist history". Branding Blumenbach a "racist", they alleged he laid the foundations for „race sciences“, which justified the oppression of non-white people(s) and ongoing "systemic racism".⁵

- 1 For example, Peter J. Kitson, Coleridge and the 'Orang Utang Hypothesis', p. 103; Norbert Klatt, Klytia und die 'schöne Georgianerin', p. 70; Tim Fulford, Romantic Indians, p. 92. I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive suggestions that helped make this piece a better article.
- 2 Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Provenienzforschung Sensible Provenienzen, 2020-2023.
- 3 Wolfgang Böker, Blumenbach's Collection of Human Skulls, p. 81; Joachim Reitner, Blumenbachs Sammlungsobjekte, p. 141.
- 4 Angela Brünjes, Kritik an Göttinger Gelehrten und ein Denkmal, Göttinger Tageblatt, 10 July 2020.
- 5 Basisgruppe Umweltwissenschaften, Stellungnahme der Basisgruppe Umweltwissenschaften zur Entfernung der Büsten von Haeckel und Blumenbach im Zoologischen Institut.

The charge of being “racist” is one of a number of quite disjunct perceptions of Blumenbach, his scientific work and ideas: As Nicolaas Rupke and Gerhard Lauer have recently shown, throughout the centuries scholarly consideration of Blumenbach’s reputation oscillated between reverence for his polymathic teaching as an Enlightenment natural historian with a humanist abolitionist stance on human unity and monogenism, on the one hand, and his condemnation as a theoretical and material enabler of scientific racism and ensuing Nazism, on the other.⁶ This range of opinions reflects, among other things, the inherent tension in Blumenbach’s very work; or, as above authors have suggested, the possibility of co-existing “non-racist” and “racist” narratives.⁷

How do these considerations of the indisputably “most influential theorist of human variety of his day” relate to Australia;⁸ that is, more precisely, to its First Peoples? First of all, two of the currently politically most prominent skulls in the Blumenbach collection are of Indigenous Australian men, acquired from the Australian colonies in the 1790s under suspected violent circumstances.⁹ Their return has not been accomplished to date but will inevitably be part of the ‘Sensible Provenances’ research project.

Additionally, these “ancestral remains”¹⁰ were pivotal for Blumenbach’s considerations of human diversity in general and in the South Pacific in particular, insofar as they represented a human “variety” or “race” that challenged the mere possibility of categorising humanity.¹¹ Namely, Blumenbach thought of Indigenous Australians (then frequently referred to as “New Hollanders”) as part of his fifth, or Malay, variety whose investigation yielded inconsistent results that called into question the idea of the fixity of races.¹² It presented a problem because of the broad variation of physical characteristics in the populations counted as belonging to this category. Variation in skin colour, for example, illustrated gradual varietal transitions, which was pivotal for Blumenbach’s notion of an imperceptible transition between the varieties and his fundamental advocacy for the unity of the human species – despite all apparent differences and on a scientific basis.¹³

This variation further pointed to the great difficulty of conclusively identifying distinctive racial characteristics. That is why, as Bronwen Douglas has argued, “the tension between the rival imperatives of human unity, racial diversity, and

6 Nicolaas Rupke, Gerhard Lauer, *A Brief History of Blumenbach Representation*, especially pp. 3-10.

7 *Ibid.*, 11. See also the respective university professors’ response to the student activism in the local newspaper, Peter Krüger-Lenz, *Blumenbach-Streit in Göttingen*.

8 Peter J. Kitson, *Coleridge and the ‘Orang Utang Hypothesis’*, p. 103.

9 Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown, Honor Keeler, *Introduction to The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation*, p. 3; Antje Kühnast, *Racialising Bones and Humanity*, p. 164.

10 On the consistent use of this term for the skeletal remains of Indigenous peoples, especially in the context of repatriation, see Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown, Honor Keeler, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation*.

11 I refer to Blumenbach’s terminology as historic facts. For reasons of practicality, however, I put quotation marks at first mention, but omit them subsequently.

12 John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*, p. 153; see also Bronwen Douglas, *Climate to Crania*, pp. 38 f..

13 Thomas Junker, *Blumenbach’s Theory of Human Races*.

the taxonomic impulse is an undercurrent in Blumenbach's discussion of the Malay variety".¹⁴

As John Gascoigne has pointed out, Blumenbach's "anthropological researches"¹⁵ formed an integral part of his natural history.¹⁶ His training as a physician in Jena and Göttingen, the contemporaneous German centre of academic research, emphasised the inclusion of the human in the studies of comparative anatomy and natural history – an approach to scholarly enquiry that he maintained throughout his life¹⁷ and which is observable in his eminent work 'De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa' (On the Natural Variety of Mankind). By 1795, Blumenbach declared a system of five human races that many still regard as, in some sense, valid to our day (as, for example, the common use of the term 'Caucasian' as a descriptor for a 'white' person in the anglophone sphere indicates).

Blumenbach increasingly relied on anthropological evidence, particularly the description of human skulls, as a supplement to more traditional sources of information such as travel literature, for his influential theory.¹⁸ And he only finalised the visual representation of his five-fold classification of humanity after receiving the skulls of a Tahitian woman and an Aboriginal Australian, which he thought accurately reflected the two extremes of the Malay variety.

I will take a detailed look at the way Blumenbach incorporated information about the New Hollander into his evolving human taxonomy. The inherent tension between, on the one hand, his understanding of race as being something indeterminable (because its potential physical markers were in constant gradual flux) and, on the other hand, his attempts to, nevertheless, provide characteristics for the concrete distinction of human races, becomes quite tangible through Blumenbach's evaluation of the New Hollander. Blumenbach acquired the first Indigenous Australian skull in 1793, with a second following in 1799. Curiously, he first attempted to categorise New Hollander skulls nearly twenty years earlier, in his doctoral thesis – in fact, without having a skull at hand. The astonishing fact about this initial consideration of the inhabitants of the Australian continent is that he set forth a sequence of South Sea skulls from the "Otaheitan" (Tahitian) to the New Hollander nearly a decade before he even began to assemble human skulls. How then did Blumenbach, in 1775, come to a decision about what I call "the cranial geography" across the Pacific Ocean, and on what empirical basis?

I will probe into Blumenbach's claim of a cranial race sequence in the absence of human skulls after shortly highlighting his methodological approach to the investigation and determination of racial difference as outlined in his doctoral thesis. I suggest that he delineated imagined skulls based implicitly on skin colour, combining both his own already established colour palette and the information

14 Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, p. 107.

15 John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*, p. 154.

16 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach to Joseph Banks, 1 May 1795 (Letter 903), in: Frank William Peter Dougherty, *The Correspondence of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, p. 395. See also John Gascoigne, *Beginnings of Anthropology*, p. 93 and Tim Fulford, *Theorizing Golgotha*, p. 119.

17 John Gascoigne, *German Enlightenment and the Pacific*, pp. 141-171; John H. Zammito, *Policing Polygeneticism in Germany*, p. 44; John Gascoigne, *Beginnings of Anthropology*, p. 93.

18 Wolfgang Böker, *Blumenbach's Collection of Human Skulls*, pp. 85 f.; Tim Fulford, *Theorizing Golgotha*, p. 119.

gathered from the publications of contemporaneous travellers. Finally, through the investigation of the manifold altered editions of Blumenbach's three main publications on human nature, I will trace his equally skin-colour based division of the Malay variety into two elements.¹⁹ Published between 1776 and 1830, these works reflect the addition and omission of arguments and evidence, the ongoing revision of his ideas about humankind and its diversity – including those referring to the New Hollanders.

Blumenbach's Four Varieties, 1775/1776

In 'De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa', one of Blumenbach's main concerns was the origin of human diversity: "Are men, and have the men of all times and of every race been of one and the same, or clearly of more than one species?" Arguing against polygenism – an "insufficiently considered opinion" – he accused its proponents of methodological ignorance.²⁰ The appropriate method to determine the significance of differences between human groups, Blumenbach maintained, was comparative anatomical investigation combined with the study of reliable travel literature.²¹ This approach produced evidence that clearly pointed to the "unity of the human species and ... its mere varieties" whose similarities mattered more than their differences.²²

The most notable physical difference between humans was the variation of their skin colour – essentially a result of environmental impacts and habit, which not only affected an entire variety but also the individuals within it.²³ Africans, for example, were generally "black" but their skin could and would, under certain circumstances, change to a lighter, more brownish tone. And the usually "copper-coloured" inhabitants of the Americas had been observed to be "almost as white as Europeans"²⁴ when they were living close to the Pacific Ocean. Thus, depending on the degree of sun and wind exposure, skin colour underwent an "insensible and indefinable transition from the pure white skin of the German lady through the yellow, the red, and the dark nations, to the Ethiopian of the

19 Blumenbach's thesis 'De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa' is dated 1775. Its first published edition appeared in 1776 in Latin, as were the second (1781) and third editions (1795). The latter editions were adjusted according to the evolution of Blumenbach's ideas. The 1776 and 1795 editions were translated to English in 1865, by Thomas Bendyshe, *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach* (dated 1775 and 1795). For reasons of practicality I refer to this translation despite its many contorting shortcomings. Blumenbach's 'Handbuch der Naturgeschichte' was first published in 1779 with eleven further editions published until 1830. The 'Beiträge zur Naturgeschichte' (1st ed. 1790, 2nd ed. 1806) are composed of two parts, of which the first addresses human varieties. All of these publications, incl. Bendyshe's, have been digitised and are available on the website of the Göttinger Digitalisierungszentrum at the University of Göttingen. Unless indicated otherwise, I have consulted these online digitised versions of Blumenbach's and Bendyshe's work. All translations of German sources are mine.

20 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), pp. 97 f..

21 John H. Zammito, *Policing Polygeneticism in Germany*, pp. 46 f..

22 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 98.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-109.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

very deepest black".²⁵ It could also change through "diverse unions"²⁶ between members of different varieties, resulting in their offspring's blended colourations.

As mentioned earlier, the transitional nature of skin colour presented a fundamental obstacle to the concept of racial fixity, which Blumenbach seems to have acknowledged by evaluating skin colouration as an "adventitious and easily changeable thing [that could] never constitute a diversity of species".²⁷ But he thought it fit for use as a marker for different human varieties, even though the transition from one to another colour was essentially indeterminable. Building on Carl Linnaeus's classification of humanity, Blumenbach grouped four human varieties according to geographical distribution and outer appearance. The "first and most important" variety existed in Europe, but also included the populations of Northwest Asia, Northern America and North Africa because they, despite all their apparent differences, "as a whole ... seem[ed] to agree in many things with ourselves". From this "primitive" original and white variety all others had deviated, due to their migration and subsequent exposure to differing environments in their respective (new) geographical locations.²⁸ Climatic conditions exerted the most effective transformative power on human bodies, modifying skin colouration and influencing way of life. This is how, eventually, the three other varieties emerged after long stretches of time. While they presented a number of characteristics peculiar to them, these, nevertheless, still changed gradually - from variety to variety and within each variety.²⁹ Allotting these three varieties to the remaining continental locations, Blumenbach assigned the above mentioned "dark nations" to the second variety, whose peoples presented a "dark colour, snub noses" and "stiff hair". They inhabited the South Eastern parts of Asia "together with the islands, and the greater part of those countries which are now called Australian" - these Australian, that is, Southern, countries included New Holland. The third variety lived in Africa, and those belonging to the fourth were found on the American continents.³⁰

Blumenbach then explored physical manifestations that could possibly be seen as distinctive of each variety.³¹ Apart from skin colouration, he discussed characteristics such as hair texture, eye form, physiognomy and head form as potentially valid criteria for the distinction of nations and varieties (while he, as enlightened scientist, dismissed individual or pathological traits, "monstrosities" and myths conveyed by the exaggerations of too imaginative travellers).³²

Similar to skin colour, the head was a malleable thing during its infant years until it became "perfectly solidified" to protect the brain.³³ The softness of infant bones made possible the intentional (and unintentionally) interference with the natural shape of the head. While the "Americans" had "wonderful ways" of wil-

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., pp. 110 f..

27 Ibid., p. 113.

28 Ibid., p. 99.

29 Ibid., pp. 98 ff..

30 Ibid., p. 99. See also e.g. Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, p. 107; Norbert Klatt, [Einleitung], p. 2.

31 Cressida Fforde, *Collecting the Dead*, p. 9.

32 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), pp. 101, 121.

33 Ibid., p. 114.

fully and permanently shaping their children's heads, the German custom to lay infants to sleep on their backs formed broad heads with flat backs.³⁴ These cultural practices, performed over generations, resulted in the similarity of cranial forms within a specific population: "For a considerable period of time singular shapes of the head have belonged to particular nations, and peculiar skulls have been shaped out, in some of them certainly by artificial means". It therefore appeared feasible to Blumenbach not only to "consider how far [peculiar skulls] constitute different varieties of the human race" but also to examine the idea of cranial characteristics "which in the progress of time become hereditary and constant, although they may have owed their first origin to adventitious causes".³⁵

Listing all sorts of reports on differently shaped human heads, he thought it "unfair ... to draw conclusions as to the conformation of a whole race from one or two specimens". This was apparent from the very disparate descriptions of Chinese skulls included in his first variety. Additionally, considering the depictions of dog-like skull shapes found in Northern Americans (also of the first variety), he thought "too little of the history of that country and its inhabitants" was known "to be able to add the cause of that singular conformation" to his deliberations.³⁶ Thus, the "innumerable and simultaneous external and adventitious causes" for different "national" head shapes could only be determined on the basis of sufficient cranial evidence, which eliminated erroneous descriptions of travellers and unrepresentative monstrosities.³⁷ Further, they could only be explained through comprehensive knowledge of the cultural practices and living conditions of a variety.³⁸

Blumenbach, on the one hand, insisted that most differences in the skull shapes were caused by the environment and human manipulation; therefore, they had to come into effect anew with each of a people's newborn in order to present a "national" peculiarity. On the other hand, he acknowledged at least the possibility of the (eventual) heredity of such traits, stating "that with the progress of time art may degenerate into a second nature".³⁹ Blumenbach thus did not entirely dismiss the possibility of hereditary skull characteristics, but in general, as John H. Zammito has stated, in 1775/1776 they "were not matters of natural endowment".⁴⁰ Whether hereditary or not, "the head and its conformations"⁴¹ were indicative enough to be used as grouping criteria within his geographically and skin colour based taxonomy, although Blumenbach "had no clear criterion for variety, and indeed insisted repeatedly on the fluidity and arbitrariness of such classificatory schemes".⁴² Observing this fluidity in relation to not only skin colouration but also the very concept of human varieties, he "relativized his findings so substantially as to lead one to question whether he had a firm theory

34 Ibid., pp. 120, 115.

35 Ibid., pp. 114, 116.

36 Ibid., p. 117.

37 Ibid., p. 114.

38 Ibid., p. 121.

39 Ibid.

40 John H. Zammito, *Policing Polygeneticism in Germany*, p. 48.

41 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 114.

42 John H. Zammito, *Policing Polygeneticism in Germany*, p. 48.

of 'race' in 1775".⁴³ Notwithstanding, he categorised humanity according to the physical traits of "different nations" in his doctoral thesis, including the New Hollanders and their skulls.

Blumenbach's Imagined Skulls, 1775/1776

New Hollanders appeared in Blumenbach's published dissertation in three instances: first, as an example for artificial skin colouration; second, in his delineation of race skulls; and third, in his deliberations on the formation of facial expressions in different races. In his elaboration on skin colouration, as a cultural rather than physical marker, he listed New Hollanders as one example among many for the "use of pigments and different kinds of paint", a practice which had been observed all over the world "amongst the most remote and different nations".⁴⁴ Although he did not speculate further on New Hollanders' natural skin colouration, it seems to have crucially informed his cranial taxonomy of the second variety.

The New Hollander formed part of Blumenbach's discussion of "peculiar skulls" belonging to "particular nations". To "consider how far they constitute different varieties of the human race" skulls appeared more reliable than superficial skin shade.⁴⁵ Delineating the head shapes of the second variety's "dark nations", he proposed that the skulls of "New Hollanders make such a transition to the third variety, that we perceive a sensible progress in going from the New Zealanders through the Otaheitans to the fourth".⁴⁶ In other words, he hypothesised a schematic gradual sequence from Africans to Indigenous Australians, Maoris/Morioris and Tahitians to Native Americans.

This arrangement of Southern Pacific human skulls is astounding because, as I have already indicated, Blumenbach had no New Hollander skull on which to base his cranial geography, and he did not provide his readers with alternative evidence for his claim. In fact, there existed not a single piece of cranial evidence, because in 1775 he had hardly begun to assemble the collection for which he later became famous.⁴⁷ There also existed no other scholarly work on New Hollander skulls, given that the acquisition of Indigenous Australian bodily remains only began after 1788, with the British settlement in Australia.⁴⁸

The then sole available witness to Australia's inhabitants was the British world circumnavigator William Dampier, the then widely accepted "authority on the South Seas".⁴⁹ In 1688 and 1699, Dampier had stayed for several months respectively near the north-western shores of the, in his opinion unfavourable, southern continent and through his travel accounts the inhabitants of Australia

43 Ibid.

44 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 128.

45 Ibid., p. 114.

46 Ibid., p. 119.

47 Wolfgang Böker, *Blumenbach's Collection of Human Skulls*, pp. 81, 84.

48 Paul Turnbull, *Anthropology and Ancestral Remains*, p. 204.

49 J. Bach, *Dampier, William* (1651-1715).

first came to Europe's attention.⁵⁰ In contrast to his usually "fairly evenhanded assessments" of the various human populations he encountered throughout his travels, Dampier (in)famously described them as "the miserablest Peoples in the World" who possessed neither technology nor culture. Had their human shape not demonstrated otherwise, they "differ[ed] little from brutes", wrote Dampier. Their bodies and faces appeared to him appalling: "long-visaged", with "great heads, round foreheads, and great brows", "great bottle-noses, pretty full lips, and wide mouths" – these people struck him as being "of a very displeasing aspect, having no one graceful feature in their faces".⁵¹

Nearly a decade later, Dampier described them as being of "the most unpleasant Looks and the worst Features of any People that ever [he] saw".⁵² Douglas has pointed out, he thereby "evoked the most negative analogy available"⁵³ at the time by associating them with Africans: "Their hair is black, short, and curled like that of the Negroes" and "the colour of their skins, both of their faces and the rest of their body, is coal-black like that of the Negroes of Guinea".⁵⁴ Until the publication of the travel narratives from Captain Cook's first exploration of the South Pacific, around eighty years later, Dampier's descriptions of New Hollanders remained the predominant source, and a potent one, for European natural historians. For the next hundred or so years, they in the majority just reiterated his verdict.⁵⁵

If Blumenbach thus knew little about the possibly "adventitious" head shaping of the New Hollanders, how, then, did he conceive of his cranial South Sea Islanders taxonomy? One answer to this question, I suggest, lies in his reliance on skin colour as a determinant for his cranial geography. Blumenbach too drew from Dampier's description (although, at this point in time, he completely ignored the information about their heads, foreheads, eyebrows and missing front teeth). Additionally, he made use of the accounts published after the return of Captain Cook from the first voyage to the South Seas on board the *Endeavour* in 1771.

This journey was undertaken in the spirit of Europe's Enlightenment exploration of the world, which fostered natural historians' empirically based interest in human diversity. Seeking to understand the differences and similarities between ever-increasing numbers of newly encountered peoples, their scientific enquiry included their ordering, classifying and comparing. According to Gascoigne, "the fact that the Pacific was, in European terms, largely virgin territory made it a particularly important instance of the capacity of enlightened thinking to make comprehensible a major section of the globe".⁵⁶

As a consequence, the Pacific Ocean during the late eighteenth century became an important ground on which European Enlightenment discourse on what it

50 Ibid.; Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 7.

51 William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, p. 464. For more on Dampier's consideration of Australian Aborigines and Africans see Bronwen Douglas, *Terra Australis to Oceania*, pp. 200 f..

52 William Dampier, *A Voyage to New-Holland, &c. in the Year 1699 (1703)*, p. 44 quoted in Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 7n21.

53 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 7.

54 Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, p. 464.

55 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 8.

56 John Gascoigne, *German Enlightenment and the Pacific*, p. 149.

meant to be human was played out.⁵⁷ For these enquiries Europe's armchair natural historians predominantly relied on the travel literature published by the more adventurous world travellers.⁵⁸

When he finished his dissertation on "the human body and its members" in 1775,⁵⁹ Blumenbach had a small number of sources on New Hollanders at hand; namely, the published accounts from two British visits to Australian shores: In addition to Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World* (first published in 1697), he could refer to John Hawkesworth's "embellished narrative"⁶⁰ of Captain Cook's first exploration of the South Seas, titled *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (published in 1773) and the chronicle of the same journey by Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in His Majesty's Ship, the Endeavour* (edited and published posthumously also in 1773).⁶¹

In 1770, the Endeavour voyagers, in particular Cook, his knowledgeable companion, the gentleman naturalist Joseph Banks and the latter's draughtsman, Parkinson, were the first Britons to encounter, physically investigate and describe some of New Holland's inhabitants in detail, including measurements of body height, deliberations on skin colouration, hair structure, facial expression and behaviour. All of their accounts painted a picture quite different to Dampier's, especially with a view to his "Negroe analogy".

In their original journals, Cook and Banks strongly repudiated Dampier's disparaging characterisations. Neither of them equated New Hollanders with the despised "Negroes" from Africa and, as Douglas has put it, they "indulged in well-known primitivist nostalgia" regarding the contemporarily common trope of the "noble savage". They praised the merits of the happy existence of Australia's 'savages' against the destructive corruption of European civilisation. However, because Cook's and Banks's chronicles were not published until the late nineteenth century, Blumenbach had to rely on the heavily edited version, published by John Hawkesworth who transformed their testimonies into a single-voice captain's narrative.⁶²

According to Hawkesworth, the peoples living on the eastern shores of Australia must look similar to those encountered by Dampier in the west. Therefore, he conveyed that Dampier was "in many particulars ... mistaken" in his descriptions. His narrator described them as uniformly "well made, clean limbed" people with long, straight to curly black hair and "bushy" beards. Their "countenances were not altogether without expression" and, while speaking with "remarkably

57 Ibid., p. 142.

58 Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, pp. 99, 106. On the significance of travel literature for the British Empire's Enlightenment natural history and the science of man see John Gascoigne, *The Royal Society, Natural History and the Peoples of the 'New World(s)'*.

59 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 129.

60 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 8.

61 The National Library of Australia has published an online edition of the journals of Captain Cook's first voyage, including Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, and John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages*. I refer to these online editions and their respective page numbers.

62 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, pp. 8 ff.. On Hawkesworth's editing and amalgamation of the Endeavour journals see Ronald L. Ravneberg, *The Hawkesworth Copy*, pp. 9-12.

soft and effeminate" voices, they behaved in a "remarkably vigorous, active, and nimble" manner. In stark contrast to Dampier's unpleasant faces, he attributed to them "features far from being disagreeable". Adding that "their noses [were] not flat, nor ... their lips thick", Hawkesworth at least implicitly rejected the notion of "Negroe" facial features in New Hollanders.⁶³ Parkinson's body descriptions matched Hawkesworth's. He, likewise, proposed no comparisons with Africans although his descriptions of "flattish noses" and "hair black and frizzled" might have easily enticed him to do so.⁶⁴

Blumenbach had much praise for Hawkesworth's reliability and frequently cited his narrator captain's observations about South Sea inhabitants.⁶⁵ Yet, he made only little use of his and Parkinson's eyewitness reports on the New Hollanders. Strikingly, but possibly due to his conviction that skin colour did not have much differential value, Blumenbach made no reference to their actual skin colour although his sources were quite concerned with and speculated repeatedly about their complexion. My survey of Parkinson's and Hawkesworth's narratives of the peoples encountered throughout the Endeavour's passage from Tierra del Fuego to Australia reveals that Blumenbach's 1775/1776 cranial geography largely corresponds with their skin colour descriptions – with the exception of the New Hollander and the New Zealander.⁶⁶ Here Blumenbach appears to have used Hawkesworth's and Dampier's rather than Parkinson's colour estimations to order his imagined skulls.

Regarding Tierra del Fuego's population, Hawkesworth's narrator observed a colour that "resemble[d] that of the rust of iron mixed with oil"⁶⁷ – a label easily interpretable towards the "red" or "copper-coloured" skin of Blumenbach's Americans. Travelling west, Parkinson's and Hawkesworth's reports on Southern Pacific Islanders differed in some respects while they generally agreed on others. For example, the inhabitants of the Two Groups Islands, according to Hawkesworth, were "of a brown complexion" which Parkinson, in contrast, perceived as "almost black".⁶⁸

Both, however, described Tahitians as having lighter skin shades: Parkinson perceived a "pale brown complexion" and Hawkesworth described their "natural complexion [as] ... clear olive, or Brunette".⁶⁹ They also agreed that the Huahine Islanders (Society Islands) had fairer skins than the Tahitians: Parkinson related that they were "not of such a dark complexion as those of Otaheite" and

63 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, pp. 632 f.; see also Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 8. Edited transcripts of Cook's and Banks's journals were published in the 1890s: W. J. L. Wharton, ed., *Captain Cook's Journal During his First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark "Endeavour" 1768-71*; Joseph D. Hooker, ed., *Journal of the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Banks During Captain Cook's First Voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour*.

64 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, pp. 134 (hair), 146 f. (noses).

65 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 122.

66 A comprehensive map charting the Endeavour's path is available on the National Library of Australia's website.

67 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 56. Parkinson remained silent about the skin colour of Tierra del Fuego's population.

68 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 77; Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, p. 12.

69 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, p. 48; John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 190.

Hawkesworth observed their “women were very fair, more so than those of Otaheite”.⁷⁰

The accounts describing the Endeavour’s next destinations, New Zealand and Australia, largely diverged. In Hawkesworth’s narration, New Zealand’s population presented a variety of brown shades, depending on their northern or southern location.⁷¹ He summarised the accounts of the travellers to the effect that “[t]heir colour in general [was] brown; but in few deeper than that of a Spaniard, who has been exposed to the sun; in many not so deep”.⁷² In contrast to this range of browns, Parkinson described New Zealand’s Indigenous inhabitants continuously as “very dark”.⁷³ Of most importance here is, that both contradicted Dampier’s claim that New Hollander skin was “coal-black like that of the Negroes of Guinea”. Hawkesworth’s narrator initially described them as “very dark coloured, but not black”⁷⁴ but he later discovered that they covered their bodies with “dirt and smoke”⁷⁵ which made them “appear nearly as black as a Negroe” and made it “very difficult to ascertain their true colour”. When “wetting [their] fingers and rubbing [their skin] to remove the incrustations” produced no conclusive result, he assumed that “according to our best discoveries, the skin itself is of the colour of wood soot, or what is commonly called a chocolate colour”.⁷⁶ (What the locals thought of these strangers’ investigative methods may be left to speculation.)

Parkinson initially described their skin like that of New Zealanders as “very dark”. After several encounters he described them, repeatedly, simply as “dark”⁷⁷ but eventually New Hollander skin colour appeared to him also “like that of wood soot”.⁷⁸ Parkinson did not associate Indigenous Australians with Africans, as a later comment on New Guineans reveals: “these people were not negroes, as has been reported, but are much like the natives of New Holland”.⁷⁹ Hawkesworth’s rendition of Cook’s and Banks’s journals on the same occasion again referred to the artificiality of New Hollander darkness, reporting that New Guineans were “not quite so dark; this however might perhaps be merely the effect of their not being quite so dirty”⁸⁰ (as the New Hollanders).

Given his doubts about the classificatory validity of skin colouration, Blumenbach presumably was aware that such descriptions demonstrated nicely the pitfalls of subjectivity in relation to skin colour estimation and comparison. This could be the reason why he also did not identify the Tahitians’ skin colour but merely listed them as examples for his environmentalist argument for the alterable character of skin colour.⁸¹ His source was Hawkesworth who stated “[i]n those [Otaheitans] that are exposed to the wind and sun, it is considerably deepened,

70 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, p. 69; John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 260.

71 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, pp. 287, 330, 356.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 445.

73 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, pp. 86, 102 f.

74 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 502, see also pp. 488 and 502.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 576.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 632.

77 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, pp. 133 f., 141 f., 156 f..

78 *Ibid.*, pp. 146 f..

79 *Ibid.*, pp. 159 f..

80 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 655.

81 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 110 incl. n5.

but in others that live under shelter, especially the superior class of women, it continues of its hue".⁸²

In figure 1 I have abridged the above illustrated skin colour descriptions for comparison with Blumenbach's alignment of South Sea Islander skulls and his existing skin colour palette of his then four varieties. It shows that his cranial arrangement within the skin colour category of the "dark nations" reflects his seafaring witnesses' testimonies to the skin colour of the Pacific Island populations. Thus, I suggest, that he placed the conceived New Hollander skull next to the Ethiopian's because both their skin colours were described in the darkest tones. The New Hollander's skin was described not as, but closest to, the "deepest black" of the Ethiopian.

	Negroes	New Hollander	New Zealander	Otaheitans	Fuegians
Dampier 1697	coal-black	coal-black			
Hawkesworth 1773	black	[very dark but not black]; wood soot, chocolate;	brown, but not very dark; brown, like Spaniard	clear olive brunette	rust mixed with oil
Parkinson 1773		(very) dark; wood soot	very dark	pale brown	

Blumenbach skin colour palette (1775)	3rd Variety Ethiopian deepest black	(part of) 2nd Variety South Sea Islander transitionally dark nations			4th Variety American red, copper-coloured
Blumenbach skull sequence (1775)	Ethiopian	New Hollander	New Zealander	Otaheitan	American

Fig. 1 – Skin colour and skulls according to Blumenbach and his sources, 1775

In summary, while Dampier likened New Hollanders with "coal-black Negroes", Hawkesworth and Parkinson distanced their skin colour and other physical features from those of Africans. Notwithstanding, both Dampier's descriptions and the Endeavour journey witnesses provided Blumenbach with information on the approximation of New Hollanders to the latter. Blumenbach's 1775/1776 series of imagined skulls thus also seems to recapitulate, and thereby systematise, the information on skin colour provided by the published Endeavour accounts. But he did so with reference neither to his witnesses nor their skin colour descriptions nor the respective varieties' assigned skin shades. Therefore, although Blumenbach nominally rejected skin colour as a racial marker (due to its transitional

82 John Hawkesworth, *Account of the Voyages*, p. 190 (Blumenbach referred to p. 187).

and environmentally alterable nature), he at the same time seems to have based his cranial categorisation upon it. Synthesising the available information about South Sea Islander skin colours with his already established skin-colour palette, Blumenbach in 1775/1776 created an imagined cranial sequence of “sensible progress” from the black Ethiopian through the very dark New Hollanders, to the dark to brown New Zealanders, light-brown Tahitians to red Americans.

The New Hollander countenance, 1775/1776 and 1781

Illustrating “sensible progress”, Blumenbach’s early cranial geography of the Southern Sea Islanders concurrently positioned New Hollanders and Otaheitans at opposite ends. This was underscored in his discussion of “the physiognomy and the peculiar lineaments of the whole countenance in different nations”. Like skull shape and skin colour, Blumenbach thought of them as environmentally caused. He also appears to have considered the possibility of physiognomy and countenance as inheritable traits, suggesting that “in many [nations] they are sufficiently settled, and are such faithful exponents of the climate and mode of life, that even after many generations spent in a foreign climate they can still be recognised”.⁸³

Blumenbach’s interpretation of these recognisable traits in the physiognomy and countenance of South Sea peoples set the New Hollander even further apart from the Tahitian than his cranial sequence, namely by juxtaposing somewhat savage New Hollanders with more appealing Otaheitans on the basis of his aesthetic and, to some extent, moral judgements.

With regard to the South Sea peoples’ “sufficiently settled” faces, Blumenbach stated that “the inhabitants of the Pacific Ocean retain evident examples of persistent physiognomy. Every one, for example, will recognize the fierce and savage countenance of the New-Hollanders and New-Zealanders by looking at the magnificent plates of Parkinson whereas the Otaheitans, on the contrary, looked at as a whole seem to be of a milder disposition, as also the many pictures of them by the same well-known author testify”.⁸⁴

Parkinson was among the few who Blumenbach trusted to produce “sufficiently faithful and accurately delineated ... likenesses of nations”⁸⁵ and here he referred to the famous engraving “Two of the Natives of New Holland, Advancing to Combat” (fig. 2),⁸⁶ published in Parkinson’s travel narrative.

83 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 121.

84 *Ibid.* In n1 he referred to Parkinson’s plates xvii (“The Manner in which the New Zealand Warriors defy their Enemies”), xxiii (“The Heads of six Men, Natives of New Zealand, ornamented According to the Mode of that Country”) and xxviii (which does not exist in Parkinson’s journal; he meant plate xxvii (“Two of the Natives of New Holland, Advancing to Combat”), reproduced here in fig. 2. In n2 he referred to Parkinson’s plate viii (“Heads of divers Natives of the Islands of Otaheite, Huahine, Oheiteroah”) as an example for Otaheitans.

85 *Ibid.*, pp. 121 f..

86 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, p. 134 plate xxvii. Copyright for illustrations by the author.



Fig. 2 – 'Two of the Natives of New Holland, Advancing to Combat'

It depicts an incident during the initial landing in Botany Bay, dated 28 April 1770 in Parkinson's journal, when the locals appeared to make it abundantly clear that the foreigners were not welcome. Parkinson described the situation as follows: "On our approaching the shore, two men, with different kinds of weapons, came out and made toward us. Their countenance bespoke displeasure; they threatened us, and discovered hostile intentions, often crying to us, Warra warra wai. We made signs to them to be peaceable, and threw them some trinkets; but they kept aloof, and dared us to come on shore. We attempted to frighten them by firing off a gun loaded with small shot; but attempted it in vain. One of them repaired to a house immediately, and brought out a shield, of an oval figure, painted white in the middle, with two holes in it to see through, and also a wooden sword, and then they advanced boldly, gathering up stones as they came along, which they threw at us".⁸⁷

The travellers did not feel discouraged from landing ashore and were then greeted by two lances, to which they responded with the shot of a gun, injuring one of the two men.⁸⁸ Parkinson's plate thus depicted a specific situation; namely, one of conflict.

He made it to illustrate both the weapons used by the Botany Bay people and their decisive approach towards the strangers. The artist cited the engraving

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. On the first encounter with the locals of Botany Bay see Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here*, pp. 1-48. Descendants of the Dharawal speaking people today maintain that the Endeavour's approach was in fact considered as the return of the "spirits of the dead". Accordingly, their shouting of "warra warra wai" meant "you're all dead". Isabella Higgins, Sarah Collard, *Captain James Cook's Landing and the Indigenous First Words Contested by Aboriginal Leaders*, 29 April 2020.

again in his description of the peoples living near the Endeavour River in Queensland, who he regarded as “very merry and facetious” – this time it served to illustrate that “their noses had holes bored in them, through which they drew a piece of white bone about three or five inches long, and two round”.⁸⁹ Similarly, he described a previous encounter with New Zealanders who “made a mean appearance”, “cut a despicable figure” in their canoes and were “very merry”, giving them “several heivos, or cheers”.⁹⁰

It seems, therefore, that Parkinson described the “countenance” of these peoples according to a specific situation, which Blumenbach then took to be a typical characteristic. Douglas has interpreted the engraving as “ennobling the two men as ‘classical heroes’”, adding that it “in no sense demeans Aboriginal people”.⁹¹ Blumenbach’s perception of Parkinson’s athletic and heroic New Hollanders (and New Zealanders) thus might owe more to Dampier’s unsympathetic remarks about their “very displeasing” features than to Parkinson’s positive descriptions of generally appealing Australian peoples.

This juxtaposition of the New Hollanders’ and Otaheitans’ countenances recurred in a different configuration in 1781. In 1779, in the ‘Handbuch der Naturgeschichte’, Blumenbach introduced a fifth variety to his human taxonomy by separating the “Australasians and Polynesians, or the Southlanders of the fifth part of the world” from the second variety. These Southlanders were “mostly black-brown, broad-nosed and strongly haired”.⁹² Writing for a broad audience ranging from educated specialists to amateurs, Blumenbach made sure to “avoid ... the splendour of citation”.⁹³

This lack of reference was redressed two years later in the second edition of ‘De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa’, when he had “more accurately investigated the different nations of Eastern Asia and America”. In order to present a classification “more constant to nature”, he suggested the fifth variety inhabited the “new southern world” and consisted of “men throughout being of a very deep brown colour”.⁹⁴ Blumenbach then pointed to a racial distinction suggested by Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg who sorted the Southern Pacific peoples into a lighter and a darker group, in varying degrees attaching negative values to the darker peoples.⁹⁵

Father and son were prominent figures in the German Enlightenment who “did most to implant in Germany an interest in the late eighteenth-century European encounter with the Pacific”.⁹⁶ They participated as naturalists in Captain Cook’s second exploration of the South Pacific (1772-1775) in search of ‘Terra Australis’, the hypothetical counterbalance to the continents on the northern part

89 Sydney Parkinson, *Voyage to the South Seas*, pp. 146 f.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 102 f.

91 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 10.

92 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* (1779), p. 64.

93 *Ibid.*, Vorrede. See also Klatt, [Einleitung], p. ii.

94 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 100 n4; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (1781), p. 52.

95 On both Forsters’ views about Oceanic peoples or races see Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, pp. 102-106.

96 John Gascoigne, *German Enlightenment and the Pacific*, p. 145.

of the globe.⁹⁷ Their observations of the peoples and cultures they encountered were published shortly after their return to England and their travel accounts provided Blumenbach with information about the physique and way of living of the Pacific Ocean Islanders.

Reinhold Forster distinguished between “two great varieties”. First, the Tahitians, Society Islanders, Marquesans, the inhabitants of the Friendly and Easter Islands and New Zealand were “*more fair, well limbed, athletic, of a fine size, and a kind of benevolent temper*”. Second, the South Pacific inhabitants, “confined within the tropics to its most Western parts” (New Caledonia, Tanna and New Hebrides) were “*blacker, the hair just beginning to become woolly and crisp, the body more slender and low, and their temper, if possible more brisk, though somewhat mistrustful*”⁹⁸ (emphases added). Although New Hollanders were not included in his list of darker peoples (probably due to the unfamiliarity of the Forsters with the Australian continent),⁹⁹ he distinguished New Caledonians as “totally different from the slender diminutive” New Hollanders.¹⁰⁰

A closer look at how Blumenbach made use of Forster's racial distinction between darker and lighter races of the Pacific Ocean seems enlightening, because this, in particular, provided him with empirical evidence for not only his own New Hollander-Otaheitan dichotomy but also his notion of the transitional character of human varieties.¹⁰¹ He argued that “those who inhabit the Pacific Archipelago are divided again ... into two tribes”.

Reciting Forster's Pacific populations, he described “men of *elegant appearance and mild disposition*, whereas the others ... are *blacker, more curly, and in disposition more distrustful and ferocious*”.¹⁰² Although New Hollanders were not listed among the South Sea peoples' second tribe, Blumenbach's characterisations clearly reiterated his earlier distinction between New Hollanders and Otaheitans. The above quotes also show that Blumenbach transformed Forster's more cautious phrasing into more definite terms.

Blumenbach further enhanced this distinction in the 1781 section on physiognomy. He now offered a general description of the facial features of the fifth variety, distinguishing their “strongly pronounced and angular” faces from “Chinese well-formed and flat faces”. Although he cautioned that not enough information was available to determine a general rule, such restraint did not apply to his evaluation of New Hollander physiognomy. Omitting his reference to Parkinson's engravings, he restated the “fierce and savage” countenance of New Hollanders (and New Zealanders) and described Tahitians not only as of a “milder” but also “more human disposition”¹⁰³ by adding the Latin term ‘humaine’ to their identification. Thus, in the second edition of ‘*De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*’, Blumenbach underscored his physiognomical and temperamental distinction

97 Ibid., p. 149.

98 Reinhold Forster, *Observations*, p. 228.

99 John Gascoigne, *Banks and English Enlightenment*, p. 153; Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, p. 105.

100 Reinhold Forster, *Observations*, p. 228.

101 Bronwen Douglas, *Novus Orbis Australis*, p. 103.

102 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), p. 100 n4.

103 Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (1781), p. 93.

between “fierce and savage” New Hollanders and more appealing Otaheitans. He also removed the cranial series of the South Sea Islanders.¹⁰⁴ The reasons for this deletion cannot be reconstructed; however, given that Blumenbach aspired to base his hypotheses on empirical evidence it is plausible to assume that its scientific foundation proved too insubstantial.

Until the publication of the third, most prominent, edition of ‘*De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*’, New Hollanders vanished altogether from his deliberations about the fifth variety. My survey of his works on human diversity published between 1781 and 1795 points to the possibility that they were subsumed under the South Sea Islanders of various denominations in the fifth variety.¹⁰⁵

Following Captain Cook’s subsequent journeys to the Southern Pacific, Blumenbach acknowledged the necessity to (re)consign its peoples to “their proper place”.¹⁰⁶ This refinement can also be seen as reflecting the puzzlement natural historians experienced when trying to systematise the overwhelming volume of information generated by the era’s ongoing exploration of regions and encounters with peoples hitherto unknown to Europeans. And this uncertainty called for the constant reconsideration of their conclusions about racial typologies.¹⁰⁷

Blumenbach’s “Five Principal Varieties of Mankind”, 1795

As Douglas has termed it, in 1795, the New Hollanders “embodied the key qualification to Blumenbach’s [taxonomical] project”.¹⁰⁸ By then Blumenbach took a much more systematic approach in all of his areas of investigation, basing his argument to a higher degree on his anthropological specimens, complementary to travel reports. From the mid-1780s onwards, he began to systematically collect and investigate human skulls as representations for human varieties.¹⁰⁹ As they “exhibit[ed] the firm and stable foundation of the head, and [could] be conveniently handled and examined, and considered under different aspects and compared together”¹¹⁰ they presented objects appropriate for anthropological research. By 1795, he had acquired a significant number of human skulls and developed his own method of cranial investigation.¹¹¹

Blumenbach was not the first to examine human skulls for reasons of classification. Already in the eighteenth century, the Dutch anatomist and artist Pieter Camper constructed and compared the ‘facial angle’ of a set of human skulls,

104 Ibid., 87 f.

105 See, e.g., Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* (1788), pp. 61 f. and (1791), p. 55; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Beyträge zur Naturgeschichte* (1790), p. 83.

106 Introductory Letter to Joseph Banks in: Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), pp. 149 f.; Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, p. 92.

107 See for example Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, pp. 91 f.; Paul Turnbull, *Anthropology and Ancestral Remains* p. 207; John Gascoigne, *Banks and English Enlightenment*, p. 149.

108 Bronwen Douglas, *Seaborne Ethnography*, p. 13.

109 See, e.g., John Gascoigne, *Beginnings of Anthropology*, p. 90; Wolfgang Böker, *Blumenbach’s Collection of Human Skulls*, p. 82.

110 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 234. See also Paul Turnbull, *Anthropology and Ancestral Remains*, p. 214.

111 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), pp. 155 f..

albeit for facilitating the drawing of facial profiles.¹¹² Blumenbach, gathering “daily experience and ... familiarity” with his skulls, criticised Camper’s method; firstly, because it classed “the most different nations” together while it separated members of the same. Secondly, the facial line considered only one aspect of the skull shape.¹¹³

Blumenbach therefore introduced the “norma verticalis” as additional cranio-logical measure: Seeing the skull “from above and from behind” revealed “all that most conduces to the racial character of skulls, whether it be the direction of the jaws, or the cheekbones, the breadth or narrowness of the skull, the advancing or receding outline of the forehead &c. strikes the eye ... distinctly at one glance”.¹¹⁴

Until 1793, his cranial comparisons were limited to only four of his varieties. This made him “so anxious above all to obtain”¹¹⁵ representative skulls of the South Sea Islanders that, in 1787, he sought the assistance of Banks to acquire some of these. Banks was the appropriate addressee for such a demand, as he had long established an extremely effective international network for the exchange of natural history specimens and information and had provided Blumenbach previously with a number of natural history items, including a human skull from the Americas in 1789.¹¹⁶ In 1793, Banks finally presented the requested “very rare skull of a New Hollander from the neighbourhood of Botany Bay” and, a few months later, one of a “Tahitian female”.¹¹⁷ In a letter to Banks, Blumenbach expressed his delight about these eagerly awaited acquisitions, as he now held in his hands the cranial representations “of both the two principal Races which constitute this remarkable variety in the 5th part of the world; viz. of the black race & of the brown one”.¹¹⁸

Following these acquisitions, Blumenbach settled on the cranial sequence of “five principal varieties of mankind” made up by the Caucasian, American, Mongolian, Ethiopian and Malayan. He represented each of these main varieties by a particular human skull (fig. 3),¹¹⁹ and re(de)defined their positions in relation to each other following a reconsideration of his deviation hypothesis from an original white variety.¹²⁰ He maintained that the Caucasians (that is, Europeans) remained closest to the original ancestor from which all had deviated under the influence of specific environmental, foremost climatic, conditions.

But, instead of the linear sequence from 1775/1776, he now delineated two branches of deviation from the original Caucasian, each entailing an intermediate

112 On Camper’s “discovery of the facial angle” see Miriam Claude Meijer, *Race and Aesthetics*, pp. 105-109.

113 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), pp. 235 f.

114 *Ibid.*, 237. See also Wolfgang Böker, *Blumenbach’s Collection of Human Skulls*, pp. 88 f.; Tim Fulford, *Theorizing Golgotha*, p. 123 and Peter J. Kitson, *Coleridge and the ‘Orang Utang Hypothesis’*, p. 98.

115 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 149.

116 Wolfgang Böker, *Zur Geschichte der Schädelsammlung Johann Friedrich Blumenbachs*, p. 12.

117 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), pp. 239, 162.

118 Blumenbach to Banks, 1 November 1793 (original emphasis) quoted in: John Gascoigne, *Banks and English Enlightenment*, p. 153.

119 The image appeared in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (1795), plate iv.

120 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), pp. 264 f.

and an extreme element: One branch led via the American to the Mongolian; the other placed the Malayan between the Caucasian and the Ethiopian.¹²¹ Thus, the Malay variety remained in an intermediate position, but its reference to the other varieties changed. It appears that in 1775/1776 Blumenbach regarded all skulls as segments on a continuum, with those of the Southern Seas connecting the third (Ethiopian) with the fourth (American) variety; and now he seems to have pronounced an arguably more hierarchical sequence of symmetrical mediate and extremes.¹²²

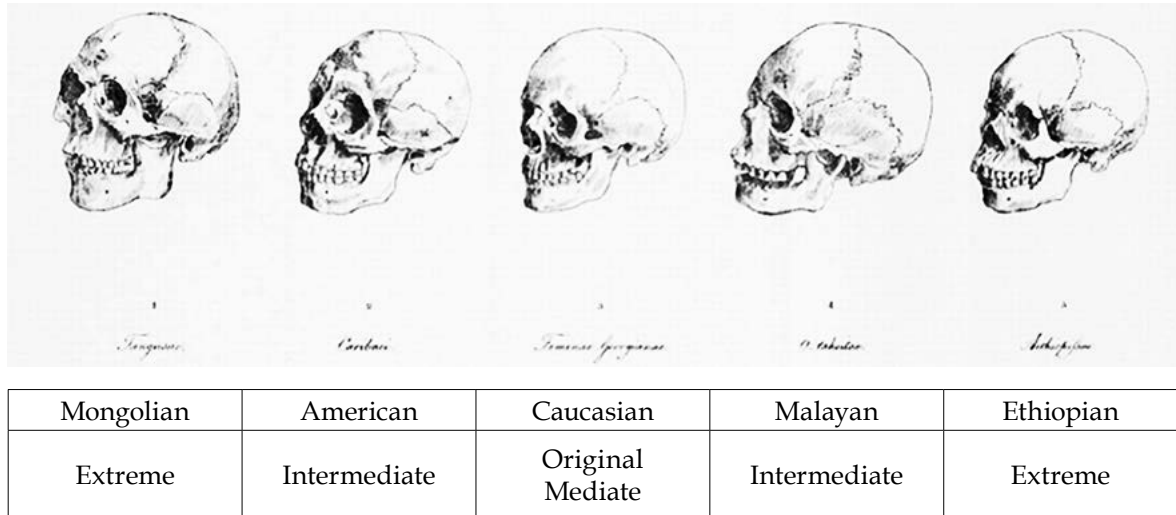


Fig. 3 - Blumenbach's cranial race classification

As is shown in figure 3, the Tahitian skull henceforth represented the Malayan variety, illustrating “the transition from that medial [Caucasian] variety to the other extreme, namely the Ethiopians”.¹²³ In the third catalogue of his cranial collection Blumenbach finally illustrated the skulls of the “original barbarians inhabiting the Southern Ocean Islands; one of which is of course the New Hollander”.¹²⁴ He found it was generally similar to the Tahitian skull, albeit the norma verticalis revealed a slightly narrower shape and thus “approach[ed] the Ethiopians very much”.¹²⁵

A missing tooth confirmed reports on the New Hollanders’ habit of extracting the incisors (which Dampier had also mentioned).¹²⁶ In the 1795 edition of ‘De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa’ he referred to the New Hollander skull in his discussion about the causes for the “racial variety of skulls”.¹²⁷ He maintained that, despite “all sorts of licence in individuals”, human skulls demonstrated a

121 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 209. See also Hanna Franziska Augstein, *Caucasus and Beyond*, pp. 62 f..

122 See, e.g., Sabine Ritter, *Natural Equality and Racial Systematics*, pp. 102-116 or Stephen Jay Gould, *Mismeasure of Man*; and compare criticism of a hierarchical interpretation of Blumenbach’s system by Thomas Junker, *Blumenbach’s Theory of Human Races*, pp. 105-111.

123 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 275.

124 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Decas Tertia*, p. 3.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 13. See also Paul Turnbull, *Anthropology and Ancestral Remains*, p. 218.

127 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 239.

“consistency of characteristics which cannot be denied”.¹²⁸ The skull was shaped on the inside by the brain and on its exterior surface through the modelling effects of the facial muscles. While the climate remained the “primary cause” for racial skull form, its impact was partial and indirect¹²⁹ as the most important “accessory” cause lay in “racial habit”;¹³⁰ namely, the manipulation of particular areas of the skull.¹³¹

The New Hollander skull was “conspicuous beyond all others for the singular smoothness of the upper jaw”. Explaining the feature in accordance with his idea about the eventual inheritability of artificial head formation, Blumenbach cited the New Hollanders’ “paradoxical custom” of inserting wooden sticks through the nasal septum which exerted “perpetual pressure”, gradually resulting in a racial characteristic.¹³²

The New Hollander – a transitional race

The New Hollander subsequently (re)appeared in Blumenbach’s works on human nature, predominantly as a testimonial to the transitional nature of racial characteristics, proving not quite Malayan but also not Ethiopian. Skin colour, as Blumenbach repeatedly assured, was transient as it seemed “to play in numberless ways between the snowy white of the European girl to the deepest black of the Ethiopian woman”. It was, on the one hand, largely associable with the five varieties but, on the other hand, none of these colours were exclusively characteristic of their respective varieties.¹³³ Dark skin derived from the content of carbon in the human body and its chemical reaction with the atmospheric oxygen of specific climatic environments, such as the “torrid zones” of Africa which produced black Ethiopians. Therefore, the darkest hue also occurred in “others of the most different and most widely separated varieties”; among them “the islanders of the Southern Ocean, where, for instance, the New Caledonians ... make an insensible transition from the tawny colour of the Otaheitans, through the chestnut-coloured inhabitants of the island of Tongatabu [Tonga], to the tawny-black of the New Hollanders”.¹³⁴

Subsequent to the 1795 edition of ‘De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa’ Blumenbach introduced both the transitional colour scheme of the Malayan variety and his hypothesis on the extreme and intermediate varieties, to the ‘Handbuch der Naturgeschichte’. From its sixth edition (1799) onwards, he explained the differences in the darkness of Ethiopians and New Hollanders by their slightly different climatic environments: “The Ethiopian race in burning hot Africa has degenerated [from the white Caucasian] to the other extreme in the stages of the human varieties, while it fades into the Malay race through the rather milder

128 Ibid., pp. 234 f..

129 Ibid., p. 239.

130 Ibid., p. 235.

131 Ibid., pp. 240 ff..

132 Ibid., pp. 239 f.; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Decas Tertia*, p. 13.

133 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 209.

134 Ibid., pp. 209-212.

New Holland and on the New Hebrides".¹³⁵ The New Hollanders' transitional position however turned into a racial subcategory by 1806, in the second edition of the 'Beyträge zur Naturgeschichte'. Here, the Malay were "mostly" brown within the variety where there existed "one or another people" that differed from the other in their division. Accordingly, "the black Papoos on New Holland etc. are divided from the brown Otaheitans and other Islanders of the Pacific Ocean as separate sub classes" – a distinction Blumenbach henceforth carried on in all ensuing 'Handbuch' editions.¹³⁶ His differentiation between the Malay variety's "black race" and "the brown one", announced upon the receipt of his South Sea skulls, thus persisted in his discussions of skin colour.

Blumenbach named the New Hollanders' inconclusive, intermediary position most clearly in his delineation of four hair varieties, categorised by colour and texture. While most Pacific Ocean Islanders' hair was "black, soft, in locks, thick and exuberant", the Ethiopians' was "black and curly, which is generally compared to the wool of sheep".¹³⁷ Again, each of these characteristics was not unique to their respective variety because there were "races of Ethiopians" that had long hair while some "copper-coloured nations again ha[d] curly hair". Such was the case with a strand of New Hollander hair in Blumenbach's possession, which demonstrated "perfectly the middle place" between Ethiopian curliness and South Sea Islander locks. To Blumenbach, its intermediary position testified to the "wonderful difference in opinion" of his witnesses about the properties of New Hollander hair.¹³⁸ In his examination of racial physiognomy Blumenbach in 1795 emphasised the individuality and variance of facial traits within all human varieties, ranging from Europeans to the "barbarous nations". But he also insisted that "it is not less undoubtedly a fact that every different variety of mankind (and everywhere, even in the inhabitants of single provinces) all over the world has a racial face peculiar to each of them by which it may be easily distinguished from the remaining varieties".¹³⁹

The causes for the formation of a variety's "national face"¹⁴⁰ were complicated. While attributing "much" to the mixing of races, Blumenbach conjectured that climate presented the "principal cause": different people(s) of the same race living in the same climatic conditions presented a consistency in their facial conformation, and the migration of peoples to regions with a climate different to their origin (for example, due to colonial endeavours) eventually adapted their faces to those of the peoples of that climate. The specific impact of a climate on the eventually fixed characteristics of a "racial face" appeared "extremely difficult" to ascertain.¹⁴¹ In this context, Blumenbach referred to Dampier, tentatively suggesting "that accessory causes sometimes endemical to peculiar climates ... may do something towards contracting the natural face of the inhabitants" of

135 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Handbuch* (1799), p. 64n.

136 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Beyträge* (1806), p. 72. He transformed this passage of the 'Beyträge' into a footnote in the 'Handbuch' editions.

137 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795), p. 224.

138 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

140 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

141 *Ibid.*, pp. 229 ff..

that region. The additional causes were the “constant clouds of gnats” inhabiting the same climatic region as the New Hollanders, who therefore, according to Dampier, “never open[ed] their eyes like other people”.¹⁴²

Whether Blumenbach thought that the contractions represented a fixed “national face” is unclear. He made no mention of either ferocious physiognomy and temperament or Parkinson’s engravings (although he did refer earlier to the Botany Bay warriors’ nasal adornments as example for artificial skull modification). This could be due to the methodological limitation to the examination and comparison that he introduced for the evaluation of faces as race characteristics. His discussion of the face only concerned the “proportion and direction of its parts ... peculiar and characteristic to the different varieties of mankind”, whereas “looks, expression” were merely indicative of “temperament”, and thus to be excluded from (anatomical) racial categorisation.¹⁴³ Thus, it can be argued that, in comparison to his previous considerations of the New Hollanders, Blumenbach’s more systematic approach and change in methodology brought with them the elimination of the cruder comparison of New Hollanders with Tahitians.

Conclusion

Blumenbach’s selective utilisation of his sources indicates the New Hollanders’ racial position within a tacit continuum, as both an extreme element within one variety and the boundary-blurring element between varieties. From 1775 onwards, he distinguished between New Hollanders and Otaheitans as two ends of the human groupings living in the Southern Pacific region, which he would only later describe as the fifth variety. He thought of this distinction based on a diversity of characteristics and methodological approaches. Skin colour, although identified as transient and thus not a suitable racial marker, became increasingly potent for this distinction. In the first two editions of his dissertation Blumenbach distinguished “fierce and savage” New Hollanders from more appealing Otaheitans. In the original version, as I have argued, this distinction was based concurrently on Blumenbach’s explicit interpretation of Parkinson’s engravings and his implicit, underlying transient skin colour palette. In 1781, Blumenbach underscored this juxtaposition with reference to Reinhold Forster’s differentiation of darker and fairer South Sea peoples. By 1795, the distinction had shifted through a change in methodology, from the interpretation of mild versus ferocious physiognomies to the clear identification of skin colours. From then on, Blumenbach upheld the New Hollanders’ position as part of the Malayan, climatically caused, skin colour range although he also contended that they could be conveniently classed with the darker Ethiopians. And from 1806 onwards, Blumenbach separated New Hollanders as “black Papoos” into a separate sub-category within the Malayan variety, again in stark opposition to the “brown Otaheitans”.

142 Ibid., p. 232 incl. n4.

143 Ibid., p. 229.

When Blumenbach, in 1775, created an imagined cranial sequence of the Southern Seas' "dark nations" by positioning the Otaheitan on the lighter end towards the American skull while the New Hollander skull presented a link to the "very deepest black" Ethiopian, this proposition lacked any empirical basis. Throughout the following twenty years, however, Blumenbach obtained significant numbers of human skulls as empirical evidence for his hypothesising. This shift towards examining and comparing human skulls has gained him the title of "father of physical anthropology" already in the late nineteenth century when early practitioners of the science in Germany looked to Blumenbach's cranial investigations as a starting point for their own, newly defined physical anthropological research. But Blumenbach's utilisation of Australian Aboriginal skulls in 1795 also points to his clearly environmentalist concept and his intentional inclusion of the non-physical sphere into his human taxonomy.

As Thomas Junker has argued, Blumenbach's primary concern was to scientifically prove monogenism rather than categorising humanity along racial lines.¹⁴⁴ And indeed, that was the ascertained objective and conclusion of his dissertation on human diversity. The incorporation of the New Hollander into his theorising on humanity, its variations and its fundamental unity, I suggest, reflects the struggle between Blumenbach's need to ascertain, indeed defend, the unity and universality of humankind, on the one hand, and his acknowledgement of human differences and individuality, on the other. This may be underscored by the way Blumenbach concluded his 1795 treatise: Pointing out that even within the Tahitians a distinction was possible between lighter and darker skinned races, he stated that the latter "then come very near those men who inhabit the islands more to the south in the Pacific Ocean, of whom the inhabitants of the New Hebrides in particular come sensibly near the Papuans and New Hollanders, who finally on their part graduate so insensibly towards the Ethiopian variety, that if it was thought convenient, they might not unfairly be classed with them".¹⁴⁵ This reiteration of the gradual transition of human characteristics (in conjunction with his ideas of racial deviation) led him to make the final statement – an unambiguous stance on the unity of the human species.¹⁴⁶

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