Skull of Mozart: the owners since January 1891

in English-language papers by PUECH Pierre-François

The digger, remembering the composer Mozart and the exact place in which he had put his coffin, took the uppermost skull, wrapped it in linen, and kept it in a cupboard at his home, showing it only to his most intimate friends. The finding of the skull was recorded in the museum, and when the grave digger died, his successor found both the skull and the calendar, where they had been deposited. The new grave digger, being an enthusiastic lover of music, kept them with a reverence exceeding even that of his predecessor.

"The cemetery was frequently visited by the engraver Hyrtl, owing to its containing his mother's remains, being ever taken there by a terrible storm, he was invited by the grave digger into his dwelling, where he was shown the supposed skull of Mozart, which was subsequently presented to him, the engraver Hyrtl having mentioned that his brother, the professor, was a phrenologist, and that to him the skull of Mozart would be of the greatest interest. In this way the Hyrtles came into possession of the relic, and the professor, who wanted to verify the story of the grave digger about his predecessor, sent his brother, the engraver, to an official in the Town Hall who kept the records of the St. Marx Cemetery.

"This official, instead of giving information, abused the engraver, telling him that no one had ever been buried there except for ten to rest in consecrated earth, and threatening both the engraver and the grave digger with serious consequences for keeping the information from the authorities. Herr Hyrtl, the engraver, therefore, exclaimed the skull from all persons, one professor, who claimed that he must return it to the grave digger, and he afterward said that they had thrown it into the Danube to avoid further inconvenience. But when the engraver Hyrtl died, the skull was found, wrapped in old paper, on his premises. The professor immediately recognized it as the same he had examined before, and as he was sole heir to his brother, the skull came into his possession. The grave digger's calendar, which was searched for with the greatest care, could not, however, be found.

"All this sounds at least possible, and the Moritzgasse in Salzburg, where it comes into possession of the relics, will regard the skull as among its greatest treasures. It is curious to remember that the skull of Haydn was also secured from the body, and is at present in possession of the Vienna Anatomical Institute, while the rest of the remains are buried at Eisenstadt, on Prince Esterhazy's estate. The relic of saints were it, seems, not more coveted by the faithful than are those of the great masters of music by their admirers.

The New York Times

January 19, 1891 © The New York Times
The newspaper *The Standard* was founded in 1827 and gained eminence for its detailed foreign news contributing to a rise in circulation. By the end of the 19th century, the evening edition eclipsed its morning counterpart, which folded.

*The New York Times (NYT)* is an American newspaper, founded and continuously published since September 18, 1851.
It is clear that circumstances in which Mozart's skull has been conserved in the Mozarteum (Salzburg place devoted to Mozart) up to now were related to the acquisition coupled of a cultural context. But today scientists, who study skeletal remains and view the skull as sources of information, think that it is time to check for a more appropriate conservation. There are three duties to the past, a duty of truthfulness, a duty to respect, and a duty of recognition. Analyses, under the authority of the Mozarteum, requiring a substantial amount of bone and teeth for DNA comparison have failed to find biologically related persons to Mozart (Stadlbauer et al. 2007). The keeper, not only pulls the wool over our eyes, he deceives us in order to prevent scientists from discovering more about Mozart. DNA analysis must not be an end in itself, rather than a means of identification, other techniques of investigations might yield similar information.

Comparisons are the way to make a positive identification since identity is the state of being the same. Many have speculated about Mozart's skull and death. Anyway, the DNA of the pulp of the analyzed premolar has confirmed that the skull had belonged to a man, the wear on the teeth determines an age between 25 and 40 years, and the history (e.g. use of tooth-pick) coordinate with Mozart, the skull's features - in particular the feminine touch given by thin eyebrows, a forward projection of the cheek bones located close to the temples and the egg-shaped forehead - matches perfectly with the portraits of Mozart.
Science, also widely referred to as Science Magazine, is one of the world's top scientific journals.

Not all were convinced - at the Mozarteum

Herbert Ullrich, a forensic pathologist who has studied the skeletons of famous Germans and Austrians, said he was convinced the Mozart skull was of someone other than Mozart.

“I examined a cast of the skull in 1999,” Ullrich said. “All the characteristics of the skull suggested it belonged to a woman.” - yet

“Our results definitively refute that the skull is female,” said Parsons - expert at the Institute for Forensic Medicine, Innsbruck, Austria. “The skull is of a male. It was the powder located in the center of the tooth that the genetic material was gathered from. army-helps-dna-scientists-unravel-mozart-mystery/

Perhaps the best case for the skull being Mozart’s is the fact that the skull shows that it took a hard hit about a year before its owner died. This would be consistent with the headaches that Mozart described in his last year of life and would provide some additional explanation of his early death.


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