

# Skull of Mozart: the owners since January 1891

in English-language papers by PUECH Pierre-François

## OWNER OF MOZART'S SKULL

### REASONS PROE, HYRTL OF VIENNA HAS FOR HIS FAITH.

DOUBT THAT HAS BEEN CAST ON THE  
CLAIM—THE PROFESSOR'S WILL—  
WHAT THE PHRENOLOGISTS HAVE TO  
SAY ABOUT THE SKULL.

Prof. Hyrtl, the famous anatomist of Vienna, who recently celebrated his eightieth birthday, announced on that occasion, in conversation with several friends, that he had bequeathed in his will the skull of Mozart, which has been in his possession for several years, to the "Mozarteum" at Salzburg. It has been known for a long time in Vienna, says the correspondent of the *London Standard*, "that Prof. Hyrtl had received from his brother, the late engraver, a skull which was believed to be that of the great composer. But is it really the skull of Mozart? Phrenologists who have examined it have doubted it, owing to the absence of all peculiarities which, according to present theories, should mark the existence of 'musical genius.' But these savants were equally astonished when the remains of Beethoven were exhumed to observe that the skull of that great master did not answer the expectations of the phrenological theorists; it was, in fact, rather a small skull, and might have been supposed to belong to a man of restricted intellect rather than to a genius like the great master.

"Similar results were arrived at in measuring the skulls of Haydn and Schubert, and in this way those who were skeptical as to the genuineness or Prof. Hyrtl's treasure were silenced. The local historians stated that Mozart's widow, who long survived him, did not know the exact spot in the St. Marxer Cemetery where her husband was interred; how, therefore, could any one else, at a later period, know the locality? It was, moreover, supposed that the skull was severed from the rest of the skeleton. There was, for a time, even a doubt whether Mozart was interred in St. Marx, south of Vienna, or elsewhere, but an entry in the register of the parish of St. Stephen's settled this point. This entry, dated Dec. 6, 1791, says: 'Died the previous day the Honorable Herr Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Imperial and Royal Conductor

and Court Composer, in the house called "Kleines Kaiserhaus," No. 970 Rauhensteingasse, aged sixty-six; cause of death, high malaria fever; buried in cemetery of St. Marx; third-class burial, for which paid eight florins fifty-six kreuzers, and for the carriage three florins.' In the University Library there was found an article in the *Vaterlandische Blätter*, written in 1808, in which a contemporary of Mozart wrote: 'His widow was, immediately after he breathed his last, taken seriously ill, and could not attend the funeral or occupy herself with the arrangements for it.'

"Baron Gottfried van Swieten, son of the celebrated Gerhard van Swieten, undertook the management, and, as he wanted to economize in the interest of the widow, who was quite destitute, he arranged for the interment in a common grave, and not even the luxury of a stone or tablet showing which common grave it was did he give him, so that the widow reproached him afterward with not knowing where to go to pray for her husband. 'The grave digger pretends to know by the date of the burial that the common grave which incloses Mozart's remains must be either in the third or in the fourth row, counted from the cross, and that these common graves are turned over periodically. The next digging up taking place eight years hence, (1816,) it would be very fortunate if by some special sign at least the skull of the great composer could be discovered and preserved.' This grave digger of St. Marx said in 1845, to a still living army officer, that Mozart's grave was situated on the left side from the entrance, in the sixth row from the cross, and that it was the eighth in the common shaft—a determination of the place more distinct than any former one.

"Prof. Hyrtl has some additional reasons for believing that he really possesses the skull of Mozart, and his account, romantic as it would seem, is apparently convincing. According to this, a mass was being celebrated in one of the churches of the suburb Landstrasse, when a gardener's son, upon whom the music had made a great impression, became more interested in it on being told that it was composed by a boy of his own age, a certain Mozart. This gardener's son was afterward appointed grave digger at St. Marx, and when on a stormy December day a third-class hearse halted before the churchyard door with a single coffin, destined for a common grave, and he found on a piece of paper handed to him the name Mozart, he remembered the composer of that name, whose mass he had heard in his youth, and he thought of the possibility of the dead man being the same. The common grave then in use was nearly full, only one more place being left; the coffin was therefore placed in it as the uppermost, and the grave digger noted that circumstance in a calendar, with the intention of informing himself later whether the Mozart in the grave was identical with the composer.

"Ten years passed and this grave was redug.

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 calendar, 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. One evening, being overtaken 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 Hyrtls 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 a right to possess a skull, which ought to rest in consecrated earth, and threatening both the engraver and the grave digger with serious consequences for keeping the skull without giving information to the authorities. Herr Hyrtl, the engraver, thereupon reclaimed the skull from his brother, the professor, under the plea 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 Mozarteum at Salzburg, when it comes into possession of the relic, will regard the skull as among its greatest treasures. It is curious to remember that the skull of Haydn was also severed 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 left earshell of Beethoven is said to be now in the possession of an Englishman. The relics 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**

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## MOZART'S SKULL.

A rather gruesome story respecting the skull of Mozart, or what was believed to have been his skull, is told by the Vienna correspondent of the "Standard." It will be remembered that the late Professor Hyrtl, of the Vienna University, used to keep in his study a skull which he firmly believed to be Mozart's, having inherited it, in 1868, from his brother Jacob, an engraver. Herr Jacob Hyrtl received it from the son of the gravedigger of the St. Marx Cemetery, who, in 1801, when a common grave was re-opened, recognised the shell in which he buried Mozart in 1791, took out the skull of the great composer, kept it, and bequeathed it as a relic, to his son. These details were communicated in 1875 by Professor Hyrtl to the "Fremdenblatt," and it is this paper which to-day reports the disappearance of the skull. It was believed to be in the Mozart House in Salzburg, to which Professor Hyrtl bequeathed it in his will, but it is not there. The Professor's executor, Herr Shoffel, the Deputy, replying to a question asked by the Burgomaster of Salzburg, has stated that he knows nothing of the skull. The "Fremdenblatt" expresses doubt whether the relic will ever reach the Salzburg Mozarteum. — Westminster Budget."

## MOZART'S SKULL.

Was Stolen from the Grave and Long Kept in Secret.

An extraordinary story was recently circulated to the effect that Mozart's skull had been stolen from a museum in Vienna, but the skull itself has now been found, and its history, which is an astounding one, has been traced and authenticated.

Mozart's skull, declares the St. Louis Republic, was never in the Mozart museum at Vienna, from which it was alleged to have been stolen. It has now been placed in the Hyrtl orphan asylum at Moedling, in Austria.

[The Montgomery Tribune](#)

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West Gippsland Gazette (Warragul, Vic.: 1898 - 1930) , Tuesday  
13 August 1901, page 5 National Library of Australia  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article68704738>

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.

## MOZART'S SKULL.

1901, Oct. 19. The following appeared in *The Standard* of October 11th, 1901, from its Vienna correspondent :—

“The skull of Mozart, which, since the death of Prof. Hyrtl, who kept it in his house, has been transferred from one place to another, has now found its final home in the Museum at Salzburg. The relic was handed over on Sunday last, with all the solemnity befitting the occasion. An attempt was made some time ago to substitute another skull as that of Mozart's for the one preserved by Prof. Hyrtl, but the fraud was discovered; upon which, in some mysterious way, the spurious skull disappeared and the genuine one was restored to its place. Every care will be taken at the Salzburg Museum of what is the only known portion that is left of the great composer's remains. The place of his grave is forgotten, and even for the authenticity of the skull there is only the evidence of a gravedigger, an engraver, and the late Prof. Hyrtl.”

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Notes\\_by\\_the\\_Way.djvu/228](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Notes_by_the_Way.djvu/228)

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.



Reconstruction du visage par PF Puech Anthropologue Français

## Skullduggery

Just in time for the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death, a group of French researchers claims to have positively identified the skull of the great composer. The commonly held view has been that Mozart's body was lost in a communal grave, but a skull suspected to be his

has been reposing in Salzburg's Mozarteum since 1901. Now anthropologist Pierre-François Puech and colleagues at the University of Provence have concluded that the relic is genuine.

As described in the March/April issue of *Archeology* magazine, the team conducted a thorough study of the artifact, including a reconstruction of the head in clay. The resulting model, say the researchers, conforms to historical information and matches contemporary portraits of the composer. For

example, the skull, when superimposed on the portraits, fits in all proportions and in details of the facial features. Furthermore, the wear on the teeth indicates the skull was that of a person who died between 25 and 40—Mozart died at 35. And marks on some of the teeth may have been made by toothpicks, which, the authors say, Mozart was known to have used frequently.

One big surprise from the study is that the composer may not have died from rheumatic fever as was believed, but from chronic bleeding between brain and skull. The researchers identified a fracture on the left temple (the result, they say, of a fall), which may have caused the headaches, weakness, and fainting spells Mozart suffered from.

Mozarteum officials remain unconvinced by Puech's study. They say that an assessment by their anthropologists and forensic scientists will be published in the near future.

Portrait of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



Deilmann Archives

19 JULY 1991

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/](http://www.army.mil/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.**

PUECH Pierre-François, PUECH Bernard and TICHY Gottfried. 1989. Identification of the cranium of W.A. Mozart, *Forensic Science International* 41(1-2):101-110

[HTTPS://WWW.RESEARCHGATE.NET/PUBLICATION/20484940 IDENTIFICATION OF THE CRANIUM OF W.A. MOZART](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/20484940)