

Hunter-gatherer Rizal

The future will do justice to his aspirations and his work!

Oskar Böttger

A scientific tribute

In 1898, a report was published in the *Abhandlungen des Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden* (Transactions of the Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum in Dresden) under the heading “*Rhacophorus rizali*. A new tree frog from Mindanao”, a report by Oskar Böttger (1844–1910), head of the herpetological department of the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt am Main. In the preface to his description of the new species, Böttger thanked the museum in Dresden for sending in several “Philippine reptiles” and announced the name of the discoverer of the exotic tree frog:

At the suggestion of A. B. Meyer, this beautiful frog should be named in honour of Dr. José Rizal. This writer of Tagalog descent, who was successful in the fields of linguistic research, history, geography and literature, who was also a notable sculptor, and who developed a recognised activity as a doctor, especially as an ophthalmologist, collected for years in the fields of zoology and ethnography for the Dresden Museum during his political imprisonment in Mindanao. As is well known, he was shot by the

Spaniards under martial law on 30 December 1896 as one of the intellectual instigators of the revolution that still prevails in the Philippines. The future will do justice to his aspirations and his work!¹

This remarkable short homage raises all kinds of questions, for example, what Rizal had to do with the museum in Dresden and with beautiful frogs in Mindanao, questions which the following essay will try to answer. However, the fact that a German academic is paying the highest tribute to the achievements of a Filipino deserves a brief consideration in the introductory section of my essay.

It is well-known that the Bohemian scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt was particularly active in promoting Rizal's reputation among German scholars, not to mention the food for thought that Rizal owed to him, who condemned with good reason and sharp words the racism and colonialist abuse of religious doctrines that were rampant at the time. Blumentritt's recommendations had introduced the young Asian to the great figures of science, who had created an important platform for interdisciplinary and research-political activities with the founding of the *German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory* in Berlin. In 1887, Rizal became a member of this society, a rec-

1 "Der schöne Frosch soll auf Vorschlag A. B. Meyers zu Ehren Dr. José Rizals genannt werden. Dieser auf den Gebieten der Sprachforschung, Geschichte, Geographie und schönen Litteratur erfolgreiche Schriftsteller tagalischer Abstammung, der auch als Bildhauer nicht unbeachtet geblieben ist, und der als Arzt, speziell als Ophthalmologe, eine anerkannte Thätigkeit entfaltet hat, sammelte während seiner politischen Gefangenschaft auf Mindanao Jahre hindurch auf den Gebieten der Zoologie und Ethnographie für das Dresdner Museum. Er wurde bekanntlich als einer der intellektuellen Anstifter der jetzt noch auf den Philippinen herrschenden Revolution am 30. December 1896 von den Spaniern standrechtlich erschossen. Die Zukunft wird seinen Bestrebungen und seinem Wirken gerecht werden!" Oskar Böttger: *Rhacophorus rizali*. Ein neuer Baumfrosch von Mindanao, nebst Fundortnotizen von den Philippinen überhaupt. Abhandlungen und Berichte des Königlichen Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden, Bd. 7, Nr. 1. Berlin: Friedländer 1898. – All translations in this essay are the property of the author unless otherwise noted.

ognition that made his name known in the German scientific community and beyond, and opened doors to other scientific institutions. It is therefore no exaggeration to see Rizal as a central mediating figure in the exchange between the cultural studies interests of the Filipino elites that emerged at the end of the 19th century and the established German cultural studies scholars doing research in the Philippines.

For young Filipino intellectuals committed to reform and active in Europe, German scholarship became a weapon in the struggle against the arbitrary rule of the Spanish colonial regime in their homeland.² This is also reflected in Böttger's passage that Rizal was shot by the Spanish as an "intellectual instigator" of the revolution. That Böttger understands this as an insinuation by the Spaniards, and thus does justice to Rizal's non-violent resistance, is at least hinted at in the last sentence of his homage, which I have chosen as the motto for my review of Rizal's collaboration with German cultural and natural scientists.

A visit to Dresden and the impact

During his four-year exile near Dapitan on Mindanao, Rizal not only kept in touch with Ferdinand Blumentritt, he also corresponded with other European scholars and scientists who spoke German, including the entomologists Napoleon M. Kheil (1849–1923) and Karl Maria Heller (1864–1945), the naturalist and cultural researcher Wilhelm Joest (1852–1897) and the museum director Adolf Bernhard Meyer (1840–1911). However, it was not just an exchange of geographical, linguistic or ethnographic issues, for which one only needs a sheet of paper, a pen, some ink, an envelope, postage and a messenger service. Rather, well-packaged small and large containers, the contents of which were described in accompanying letters, were soon sent to and fro on the long intercontinental journeys, in the manner of a barter transaction.

2 Nathaniel Parker Weston: *Specters of Germany. Colonial Rivalry & Scholarship in the Philippine Reform Movement & Revolution*. Quezon City 2021. Thanks to Joanna Pfaff for this book.

Of particular interest is the exchange with Adolf Bernhard Meyer, the director of the *Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum* in Dresden, which had evolved from a royal “Kunst- und Naturalienkammer” (Art and Natural History Chamber). Rizal, having been recommended by Blumentritt, visited Meyer when he travelled from Heidelberg to Berlin.³ Meyer had received the guest personally and wanted to show him the collections of the Dresden museum. Rizal wrote about his visit to the museum in a letter to Blumentritt (4 November 1886): “The museum seemed very important to me, unfortunately I was not allowed to stay longer to slowly study everything.” (*Das Museum schien mir sehr wichtig, leider dass ich nicht länger bleiben durfte, um langsam Alles studieren zu dürfen.*)⁴ When Rizal was working on the draft for an *Association Internationale des Philippinistes* in Paris in 1889, he corresponded with Meyer in order to win him and, with his help, other members of prestige for his ambitious scientific-political project. Meyer himself was full of praise for Rizal’s “phenomenal intellectual gifts” (*phänomenale Geistesgaben*).⁵

Rizal’s letters to Meyer from 1889 to 1890, of which six have survived,⁶ deal with lexical or etymological and other language problems, drugs (hashish), geographical designations in the travelogues of the Maghrebian Ibn Battuta (1304–1369),⁷ the search for old and new books, the history of the Filipinas, and not least the lack of common sense on the part of the Spanish colonialists.⁸

3 On the friendship between Blumentritt and A. B. Meyer see Johann Stockinger (Hg.): *Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen Teil 3: Ferdinand Blumentritts Korrespondenz mit A. B. Meyer*. Wien 2023

4 *Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt*. Manila 1961, 20

5 Cf. Blumentritt’s letter of 2 January 1890 to Rizal. In: *Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt*, 590

6 Nos. 54, 57–60, 62, published in: *Escritos de José Rizal. Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas*. Manila 1961.

7 Rizal refers to *Voyages d’Ibn Batoutah*, tr. par C. Defrémery et B. R. Sanguinetti, 4 vols. Paris 1853–1879.

8 In letter no. 59 of 1 December 1889, Rizal sends Meyer a list of the books acquired by Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) in the Philippines with a

After a break of several years Rizal again contacted A. B. Meyer from his exile in Dapitan. Eleven letters from June 1893 to May 1895 have been preserved.⁹ As these show, Rizal now turned his attention to the study and collection of more or less unknown species of the endemic fauna of Mindanao. In a letter dated 8 June 1893, he offered to buy ‘birds, reptiles, etc.’ specimens he wanted to send to Europe via the chemist Alexander Schadenberg (1852–1896), who lived in Manila. Curiously, in order not to pay too much for the planned purchases, he asked Meyer for a current price list. Rizal was by no means a poor exile, for he had been the winner of a large sum of money in the *Reales Loterías Españolas de Filipinas*.

Insects native to Mindanao (beetles, butterflies, etc.), vertebrates and skulls (birds, lizards, snakes, etc.) and the shells of marine molluscs (snails, clams) were considered for trade. To study the latter, Rizal even immersed himself in conchology in order to be able to organise his collections according to the international zoological nomenclature.¹⁰ An assistant to Meyer, Dr. K. M. Heller,¹¹ instructed Rizal on the basics of preservation and packaging and encouraged him to intensify his hunt for rare species with the help of the locals. On the occasion of a new parcel from Dapitan, he wrote to Rizal:

I will describe and photograph the new beetle [...]. The species is very rich in varieties, which in part are very difficult to recognise, I thought for practical reasons I should not have to dispense with giving it its name, without choosing a name, which also determines the variety [...]. I have no doubt that your next shipment will bring something new again and I will then have the opportunity to fulfil my promise. If you were to get the

request to send them to him or Pardo de Tavera; among them are several Tagalog textbooks, but also a copy of the *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609) by the Spanish colonial official Antonio de Morga.

9 Nos. 109, 111, 112, 118, 121–124, 127, 129, 130, 133

10 Notas sobre Conchología e Ichtiología. In: Escritos de José Rizal: Escritos Varios II. Manila 1961, 341–345

11 Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Borromaeus_Maria_Josef_Heller

natives to collect, there would undoubtedly be many new varieties there, for in 13 beetles to find a novelty is an extraordinarily favourable result. If you succeeded in collecting a few hundred beetles, the result would be very remunerative for science.¹²



Copy from an article by K. M. Heller, published in *Notes from the Leyden Museum* XIX (1897), 191–193. The picture of the specimen, a member of the *Scarabaeidae* family, is a later addition

12 “Describir y fotografiar el nuevo escarabajo, pero como se me llegó en el sexto ... y la especie es muy rica en variedades, que en parte son muy difíciles de reconocer, creí por motivos prácticos no tener que prescindir de darle su nombre, sin elegir un nombre, que también determine la variedad, a saber: *Atonia ochroplagiata*. No tengo la menor duda de que su próximo envío algo nuevo otra vez traera y tendría entonces la ocasión de cumplir mi promesa. Si Vd. lograse que los nativos coleccionasen, allí habría sin duda alguna, muchas variedades nuevas, pues en 13 escaraba-

What Heller promised, the combination of the newly discovered beetle's provenance with Rizal's name, only became reality in 1897. And there were – also posthumously announced – several other species that would immortalize Rizal's name in the realm of zoological knowledge: a flying lizard (*Draco rizali*), the tree frog (*Rachophorus rizali*), and another beetle (*Spathomeles rizali*).

Dead nature in exchange for “Geist”

One of the triggers for Rizal's hitherto unknown passion for hunting and collecting (he even bought a hunting rifle) was the increasing demand from European scientists who, through Meyer, asked him in his forced exile for help in their search for previously undiscovered species in this part of the world. Also, unlike before, in his rural exile Rizal had more direct contact with the flora and fauna of his surroundings, so that the new observations and experiences awakened in him his peculiar thirst for discovery: “In the field of natural sciences, my country can offer treasures yet undiscovered; there are many species yet unknown in zoology and botany, judging by the discoveries that are being made”.¹³

On 10 April 1894, he wrote to Meyer, referring to a shipment of goods sent via Manila with the help of Alexander Schadenberg:

Do not worry about what it [the specimens he sent] is worth. This and what I will send later will not be enough to pay for the collection of books you have sent me. I send you dead nature and you send me your spirit, the

jos encontrar una novedad es un resultado extraordinariamente favorable. Si Vd. lograra coleccionar algunos cientos de escarabajos, el resultado seria muy remunerativo para la ciencia.” Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas 1961, 332

13 “En el ramo de las Ciencias Naturales mi pais le puede brindar tesoros no descubiertos aún; hay muchas especies no conocidas aún en la Zoolo-gía y en la Botánica á juzgar por los descubrimientos que se van haciendo.” Letter of 15 January 1895 to Blumentritt. The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence, Vol. II. Manila 1992, 496

- 2 109-110 Aeschylus
 4 113-116 Sophokles
 2 164-165 Ossians Gedichte
 1 50 Turgenjew (Iwan) Väter und Söhne.
 1 64 " " Rauch
 3 1-3 V Serie Bismarck als Redner.
 1 7 Turgenjew (Iwan) Neuland
 1 8 Kravjensky (I. I.) der Dichter und die Welt.

2 42 6 Las obras completas de Gogol (aleman)

1 9 Wladimir Korolenko.

1 10 Danilewsky.

19 Si con estos pedidos le quedo en deber, sirvase V. indicarme cuánto. Preferiria que todas las obras estuviesen encuadernadas. Si hubiese alguna otra obra de algun escritor ruso que yo no conozca, estimaria mucho el que V. me la enviase.

Sin más por ahora, muchos recuerdos y lagracias anticipadas de su at. s.

Ernst

Geist, on the book pages. From now on I will send you what I can; you will appreciate it and send me in scientific and literary works what you think it is worth. When I have more freedom, I will look for skulls of the Monteses. [...] Do you want ethnological collections?¹⁴

The cargo mentioned by Rizal included both very small and very large specimens: among other things the skeletons of a seahorse, a boa and a shark (French: *requin*). The books to which he referred as 'spiritual goods', he had ordered in 1893 as 'payment' for the expenses he had incurred in various shipments. The titles of the books he wanted to read, he took from a catalogue published by the Wilhelm Spemann Verlag in Stuttgart.

Rizal's choice is somewhat surprising, since in addition to Greek classics (Aeschylus, Sophocles) and four nineteenth-century Russian authors (Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Gogol, Vladimir Korolenko, Nikolai Danilevsky) – all in German translation – he also ordered James Macpherson's Gaelic Songs of Ossian,¹⁵ Bismarck's speeches and a book by the Polish-German bestselling author Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887). Apparently, Rizal was in the process of constructing a library of world literature in German.

However, he was not only interested in expanding his fiction and political library. To ensure that the consignments of naturalia that Rizal wanted to send to Europe reached his distant business partners in good condition, he was forced to get to grips with the professional techniques of conservation, preparation and packaging. On 14 March 1895, he wrote to Meyer again, this time to thank him for the relevant technical literature that the cooperative director of the Museum had

14 "No se ocupe Vd., en lo que esto vale; esto y lo que en viaré después no serán suficientes para pagar la colección de libros que Vd. me ha enviado. Yo le remito la muerta naturaleza y Vd. en cambio me envía su espíritu, el *Geist* en las páginas de los libros. En adelante le enviaré lo que pueda, Vd. lo apreciará y me remitirá en obras científicas y literarias lo que Vd. crea que vale. Como tenga más libertad le buscaré cráneos de monteses. [...] ¿Desea Vd. colecciones etnológicas?" Escritos de José Rizal. Correspondencia Epistolar IV: Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas. Manila 1961, 310 f.

15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Macpherson

sent him. In his letter of thanks, he abbreviated the titles of the books as follows 'Naturaliensammler' and 'Präparieren und Ausstopfen'. According to my research, these abbreviations refer to the following textbooks:

- Johann Max Hinterwaldner: *Wegweiser für Naturaliensammler. Eine Anleitung zum Sammeln und Conservieren von Thieren, Pflanzen und Mineralien jeder Art, sowie zur rationellen Anlage und Pflege von Terrarien, Aquarien, Volièren etc.* Wien: A. Pichler's Witwe und Sohn, 1889 (*A guide for natural history collectors. An instruction to collecting and preserving animals, plants and minerals of all kinds, as well as to the rational organisation and care of terrariums, aquariums, aviaries, etc.*)
- Leopold Martin: *Taxidermie, oder die Lehre vom Konservieren, Präparieren und Naturalien sammeln, Ausstopfen und Aufstellen der Thiere.* Weimar: Bernhard Friedrich Voigt, 1869/1870 (*Taxidermy, or the science of preserving, preparing and collecting natural specimens, stuffing and mounting animals*)

Among the animal specimens sent by Rizal to Meyer's address was the carcass of a tree dweller from the Tarsiidae family preserved in spiritus (English: *tarsier*; German: *Koboldmaki*; Cebuano: *mawumag*). The specimen from Mindanao bears the subspecies name *Carlito syrichta carbonarius*. In his publication *Säugethiere vom Celebes- und Philippinen-Archipel* (Mammals from the Celebes and Philippine archipelagos) Meyer mentioned the sender's name (p. 9)¹⁶ and had an illustration added to the description, an enlargement of which is now on display on one of the facades of the *Philippine National Museum of Natural History* in Manila.

16 Also Schadenberg sent a tarsier specimen to Meyer. In Meyer's description from 1895, Rizal's name is not mentioned. However, the text distinguishes between a stuffed Tarsius carcass and one preserved in spirit from Mindanao. This makes it clear that the latter was preserved and shipped by Rizal. Cf. *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Königlichen Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden*, Bd 5, Nr. 1



Adolf Bernhard Meyer: Säugethiere vom Celebes- und Philippinen-Archipel 1-2. Königl. Zoologisches und Anthropologisch-Ethnographisches Museum zu Dresden. Berlin: R. Friedländer & Sohn, 1896-9, plate IV

The graveyards of physical anthropology

Rizal's commitment to scientific collecting and the related activities he developed in rural exile may have flattered his intellectual agility, but it also cast a shadow over his new passion. Because, it seems, he was trying to compete with those European exponents of physical anthropology who were not reticent to use measuring sticks and craniometers to go to the body of the natives in the colonies. In two different letters to Meyer, he asks for the delivery of the instrument called a "craniometer", which is essential for measuring skulls. In one case (letter dated April 10, 1894) he promises to look for skulls of the mountain dwellers (Monteses); in another case (letter dated July 31, 1894) he promises "une bonne rémission de têtes pour l'Anthropologie" (a good remission of heads for Anthropology) and then claims like a positivistic anthropologist: "An interesting study of the Mindanaw races may prove useful."¹⁷ But in an earlier letter (14 March 1894) Rizal had written in German: "Leave also the craniometric instruments aside; I don't think they will let me go after the Subanos". (*Lassen Sie auch die kraniometrischen Instrumente beiseite; ich glaube sie lassen mich nach den Subanos nicht.*) His fear, or hope, at the time was that he might be transferred to another part of the archipelago. In any case, the correspondence with A. B. Meyer that has survived

17 "J'attends toujours ma liberté pour séjourner quelques semaines parmi les subanos, monteses et moros de cette ile. Je suis convaincu qu'il y a encore beaucoup à étudier. Comptez avec une bonne rémission de têtes pour l'Anthropologie. Si vous croyez que je peux encore recevoir un petit étui d'instruments de craniométrie pour mes oiseaux, poisson etc. je le préférerais certainement. Une intéressante étude sur les races de Mindanaw pourra être d'utilité." Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas, [p. 318b]. – Subanos and Monteses (today called Bukidnon people) are peoples in Mindanao with different ethnic orientations. "Moros", however, is not an ethnic label but refers to various groups of Muslim faith in and out Mindanao, so craniometric studies would be pure nonsense in this case. – I quote Rizal's letters to Meyer from the copies of the facsimiles in: https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/nby_eayer/id/7390

is just as confusing as the situation of exile in which Rizal found himself.¹⁸

Since the eighteenth century, cranial measurements have been part of the standard repertoire of anthropological research methods. The positivist bias of drawing conclusions about the psyche and intelligence from external appearance or measurable anatomy gained momentum in the 19th century, primarily through its connection with biological race-theories. In this connection, the dimensions and volume of skulls – whether of living or dead people – were treated as facts with the help of which radical racists sought to prove the existence of natural inequality characteristics and, at the same time, the cognitive superiority of European-Atlantic brains.

Today, such pseudo-scientific methods are suspected of stigmatisation and dehumanisation and are rightly criticized as an expression of “group-focused misanthropism”.¹⁹ However, the stacks of many ethnological museums in Europe still contain enough remnants of the anthropometric furore to embarrass the administrators of such scientific graveyards with the unpleasant questions of how, from where, and to what purpose. Since the Enlightenment, the growing demand for bones among anthropologists had given rise to a macabre business model of collecting, buying, and trading. Moreover, anything that was not based on mutual, trust-based agreements and transported via traceable trade routes had a dark, not to say criminal, background. Grave desecrations and robberies are well documented, and the perpetrators were often respected members of the scientific community.

Rizal’s penfriend and trading partner, Adolf Bernhard Meyer, was one of the obdurate adventurers among scholars who did not shy away from the violent opening of graves and subsequent bone snatching. In 1878, when he was already director of the Dresden Museum, he had a small book privately printed entitled *Ueber die Negritos oder Aëtas*

18 Cf. chapter 7 “Verbannung und Tod” (*Banishment and Death*) in my book *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod*, 2025; especially page 161 f.

19 On the concept of “gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit” (*group-focused enmity/misanthropism*) see Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper, Andreas Hövermann: *Die Abwertung der Anderen. Eine europäische Zustandsbeschreibung zu Intoleranz, Vorurteilen und Diskriminierung*. Berlin 2011

der Philippinen (On the Negritos or Aëtas of the Philippines). His intention was, he wrote in the preface, to distribute the booklet among the Germans and those who understood German in the Philippines, so that the willing among them could assist him by collecting “skulls and skeletons, ethnographic objects, dictionaries, sentences and coherent speech in the various Negrito dialects” and sending them to him. In Meyer’s eyes, the hunter-gatherer societies of the Negritos and Aetas, whom he, a follower of Darwin, regarded as living fossils, were in danger of extinction, which is why he was in a hurry to gather as much information as possible about these dark-skinned, small-bodied mountain peoples. Outside help, even from laymen, was welcome and obviously did not contradict Meyer’s ethically unconcerned understanding of science in other respects. In his private publication of 1878, he openly describes how he proceeded on his forays through the Negritos’ graves:

As I was not constantly surrounded by so many Negritos here and therefore less observed, and as I sent these savages away a few days before my departure, I succeeded, with the help of the Christian Tagals who lived in the hut where I had set up my quarters, in locating a number of Negrito graves and robbing them of their contents at night and armed, although not entirely without risk to my life. Let it not be thought that I touched without hesitation the most sacred thing that these poor savages might possess, knowing that I would hurt them as much if they realised the robbery as it would hurt us to see the bones of our relatives dug up by strangers, packed in sacks and dragged away. I therefore endeavoured to work as secretly and carefully as possible, which was also necessary for my own safety, so as not to expose myself to their revenge, and to always restore the graves to such a state that the robbery could not easily be outwardly betrayed. But I could not make up my mind to refrain from this robbery altogether.²⁰

20 “Da ich hier nicht von so vielen Negritos beständig umgeben und daher weniger beobachtet war, auch einige Tage vor meiner Abreise diese Wilden fortschickte, so gelang es mir mit Hülfe der christlichen Tagalen, welche die Hütte, bei der ich mein Quartier aufgeschlagen hatte, bewohnten, eine Reihe von Negrito-Gräbern ausfindig zu machen und sie nächtlicherweile und be-

Meyer's confession may sound like a shameful admission of a morally reprehensible act. In truth, however, it shows all too clearly that nothing was sacred to the narrow-minded scientist's mind when it came to outdoing the competition of French travellers to the Philippines and anthropologists in the competition for data and tangible materials.²¹ However, he probably despised the Tagals who had helped him in his raid as much as he despised the Negritos, noting that they regarded those "not as human beings at all, but – with great injustice – as a kind of ape" (*gar nicht als Menschen, sondern – mit großem Unrechte – als eine Art Affen*).²² Perhaps Meyer's assessment of the racist devaluation of Negritos as a "great injustice" is nevertheless an indication that he was able to recognize something human in the other, even if he was dark-skinned. Evolutionary theory suggests this, since it holds that the living fossil is less animalistic than an early phase of anthropogenesis.

It is not my intention in this case to draw a clear conclusion. Rather, I wonder if Rizal was aware of Meyer's boasts about his grave robberies in the Philippines. In a letter dated 31 July 1894, he thanks Meyer for his "magnifique ouvrage sur les Négritos". It remains unclear, however, which of Meyer's publications on the Negritos he is referring to. In any case, there is no entry for A. B. Meyer's booklet in Esteban de Ocampo's *Rizal as a Bibliophile* (1960), even if this offers no conclusive evidence.

waffnet, wenn auch nicht ganz ohne Gefahr meines Lebens, ihres Inhaltes zu berauben. Man möge nicht glauben, dass ich ohne Schwanken das Heiligste, was diese armen Wilden vielleicht besitzen, antastete, da ich wusste, dass ich sie ebenso empfindlich verletzte, wenn sie den Raub bemerkten, wie es uns verletzen würde, die Gebeine unserer Anverwandten von Fremden ausgegraben, in Säcke gepackt und fortgeschleppt zu sehen. Ich suchte daher so heimlich und vorsichtig als möglich zu Werke zu gehen, was auch meiner eigenen Sicherheit wegen, um mich ihrer Rache nicht auszusetzen, geboten war, und die Gräber stets wieder in einen solchen Zustand zu bringen, dass äusserlich der Raub sich nicht leicht verrathen konnte. Allein von diesem Raube ganz abzustehen, konnte ich mich nicht entschliessen [...]" A. B. Meyer 1878, 21

21 See D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Heidelberg ²2025, 253 ff.

22 Ibid. 23

It may sound bizarre, but there was another Meyer with the first name Hans, who gave Rizal a book in which he describes his own grave robbery among the Igorot in the Philippines. Hans Meyer belonged to the Meyer family, which became known as the publishers of 'Meyers Konversations-Lexikon'. He was a far travelling globetrotter, who published in 1885 his experiences in a report entitled *Eine Weltreise: Plaudereien aus einer zweijährigen Erdumsegelung* (A trip around the world: Chats from a two-year circumnavigation of the globe).²³ Rizal met Hans Meyer when he was in Leipzig on his way from Heidelberg to Berlin. It is highly likely that the Igorot skulls H. Meyer got hold of ended up in Rudolf Virchow's laboratory in Berlin.

Works and days in Talisay

Rizal knew that the German anthropologists he had met in person, including Rudolf Virchow, were carrying out skull and body measurements on dead and living people on a large scale. In this way they wanted to confirm to what extent supposedly innate characteristics could be deduced from the data they perceived and measured externally. Did Rizal, who – without becoming doctrinaire – sympathised with progress through science, take part in skull measurements or carry them out on his own initiative?

On May 9, 1894, he did not yet have any craniometric tools at his disposal. On this day, he wrote to Blumentritt from his exile residence in Talisay:

With this letter I beg your friend Herr [Napoleon M.] Kheil, whom I greet affectionately. I am sending the butterflies to my friend in Dresden, who will arrange for them to be forwarded to you: this is what I have begged him to do. They are all butterflies collected in my garden by my seven boys during the month of April and the beginning of May. I will try to make other, better collections than this one, as I am learning. Here I have had

23 H. Meyer reports on his grave robbery on pages 269 ff. of his 'Plaudereien'.



R. Virchow with craniometer and skulls (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudolf_Virchow,_1891,_by_Hanns_Fechner.jpg)

three Subanos living in one of my houses for two months. One was operated because of a tumour weighing two and a half kilos. He retired cured, like Abelard of the Middle Ages. I was able to study their customs. They are a peaceful, hard-working and very quiet people. I have not been able to take craniometric measurements because I have no instruments. How are you doing over there? Here we have the southwest (monsoon) and the waters again. Gott möge uns beistehen [...] The stream near the house has become a torrent; the sea on the beach is active night and day; and when the tide comes in it throws 15 metres from our dining room huge raging waves that only subside at the foot of my orange trees.²⁴

In this remarkable letter, Rizal talks, among other things, about the butterflies in his garden (*jardín*). In fact, he had begun early to “civilise” (his words) the fallow land he had acquired.²⁵ He had his nipa-roofed

24 “Por esto correo complazco a tu amigo Herr [Napoleon M.] Kheil a quién saludo afectuosamente. Envío las mariposas a mi amigo in Dresden quien se encargará de remitírselas: así se lo he suplicado. Son todas mariposas cogidas en mi jardín por mis siete chicos, durante el mes de abril y principios de mayo. Procuraré hacer otras colecciones mejores que esta pues voy a aprendiendo. Aquí he tenido tres Subanos viviendo en una de mis casitas durante dos meses. Uno fue operado de un tumor que pesaba siete libras y media. Se retiró curado. como Abelardo de la Edad Media. Yo he podido estudiar sus costumbres. Son gente dpacífica, trabajadora y muy callada. No he podido tomar medidas craneométricas por no tener instrumentos. Como van Uds. allí? Aquí tenemos otra vez el sudoeste (monzón) y las aguas. Gott möge uns beistehen. [...] El arroyo cerca de casa se ha convertido en torrente; el mar en la playa se fecunda noche y día; y cuando sube la marea nos arroja a 15 metros de nuestro comedor, enormes olas furibundas que van a morir al pie de mis aranjós.” Letter to Blumentritt dated 9 May 1894, published in: J. Stockinger: *Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen, Teil 2: Biografische Skizzen zu Ferdinand Blumentritt (1853–1913)*. Wien 2020, 401. The original letter is in the possession of Blumentritt’s descendants.

25 Letter to Blumentritt dated 15 February 1893: “Vivo con el Señor Gobernador, sin embargo de que la mayor parte del día la paso en mis terrenos, en una casita que me he mandado construir *sub tegmine manguferae*, en medio de arboles frutales (artocárpeas, theobromas, sansonías, etc.). Me dedico a desmontar mis terrenos para sembrar café y cacao, que se dan muy bien, a pesar de lo montuosos y pedregosos que son. Tendré probablemente unas hectáreas compradas a los diferentes dueños que las tenían abando-

bamboo house built, he wrote, “sub tegmine manguferae” (*under a mango canopy*) in the midst of fruit-bearing trees. The immediate surroundings were cleared, comfortable paths, steps and benches were laid out, and there was obviously no shortage of flowers, as evidenced by the abundance of butterflies. Everything served the purpose of refreshment and aesthetics, while the cash crops – Abacá, coffee, cocoa, etc. – grew outside the boundaries of Rizal’s garden.

And yet, the landlord in exile was not entirely satisfied, because from his words one can almost hear the self-proclaimed anthropologist’s regret that he had no measuring instruments and therefore could not act. Nevertheless, it was easy for him to slip into the role of ethnologist to observe the *costumbres* of the guests from the Subano tribe, who were at home on the Zamboanga Peninsula (Mindanao). The reason for their visit was apparently some kind of physical ailment of one of them. The nature of the “operation” mentioned in the letter is not concealed. The comparison with Abelard provides a clear answer: Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was a famous French theologian of high scholasticism who lived in forbidden love with a girl named Heloisa and was punished for this ‘sin’ by her relatives with castration.²⁶ It is quite possible that Rizal’s “operation” had to do with some weird *costumbres* of the Subanos he mentioned.

Rizal’s letter gives the reader a complex insight into his versatile activities and the circumstances he had to deal with. In a later letter addressed to his friend from Leitmeritz on December 19, 1894, he will describe the routines of his daily business. Here, however, he lists some of his special activities as a naturalist, a surgeon, and as a farmer who has to worry about his orange plantations. The life on his land

nadas; están situadas a orillas del mar, dentro de la bahía de Dapitan. [...] Me voy haciendo agricultor, porque aquí apenas, apenas me dedico a la medicina. Ya tengo parte de los bosques limpia: aunque es muy pedregosa, tiene, sin embargo, buenos puntos de vista, hermosas rocas acantiladas: estoy abriendo caminos para hacer un bosque civilizado, con sendas bien trazadas, con escaleras, bancos, etc.” Epistolario Rizalino IV, 111 f. On the contexts, see D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Heidelberg ²2025, 156 f.

26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Abelard

seems to unfold between anthropological ambitions and the turmoil of nature. But he neither forgets his penchant for scholarly allusions, nor his resistance to his Spanish prison guards by calling on God in German, thus circumventing the language ban imposed on him.

It is rather unlikely that Rizal later came into possession of the craniometric tools he was asking for; I have found no evidence that he was able to get his hands on such a tool. He would not have been able to do much of anything without instruction in its professional use, as his German correspondents were probably aware. Moreover, it was unlikely that the Spaniards would have allowed him to travel to the territories of the indigenous peoples whom he naively regarded as potential objects of research.

Rizal's excursion into animal and human sciences remained an episode in his short life. However, the lively exchange with European friends and researchers gave him the opportunity to get to know, name and shape the environment into which the banishment had thrown him. In his numerous letters he recorded his many activities during the years of exile (1892–1896): he worked as a doctor, a landscape-builder, a teacher, a farmer and as a reliable, self-educating partner for established scientists in Europe. Of course, his Spanish enemies kept an eye on him there, but they did not prevent him from moving relatively freely in the fields of activity listed here, making himself useful and gaining recognition at the same time.

It is all the more difficult to understand why he wanted to leave all this behind to take up the duties of a Spanish military doctor in Cuba. He knew very well what he was getting into: a colonialist bloody war against an independence movement.²⁷

27 John Lawrence Tone: *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898*. Chapel Hill 2006