
GERMAN FOUNDATION LAUNCHES PROBE INTO ORIGIN OF AFRICAN SKULLS

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A German cultural foundation on Thursday launched a two year study to determine the origin of about 1,000 skulls brought to Germany from its former East African colonies.

The skulls come from a collection gathered in the early 20th Century by German doctor and anthropologist Felix von Luschan, who used them to study human development.

The collection of skulls was handed over to the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in 2011 after the medical history museum at Berlin's Charite hospital was unable to maintain them.

They are part of a larger collection von Luschan had obtained in the late 19th and early 20th century from various corners of the globe.

A team of German and international researchers plan to study the skulls and few remaining documents to determine their providence. It is believed that most come from former German colonies of Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.

Skulls may be returned

Over the past several years the cultural foundation, which runs several museums, libraries and archives in Berlin, has cleaned and reassembled the badly damaged skulls.

Among other things, researchers hope to learn weather the skulls were exhumed from graves, taken from dead bodies or were from victims of executions. The foundation says that so far there is little indication the skulls were from executed individuals. Many are believed to have come from graveyards.

If the origin of the skulls can be determined, they may be sent back to their country of origin.

Germany has already repatriated some skulls to its former colony Namibia, where colonial soldiers bloodily put down an indigenous uprising. Tens of thousands died.

cw/msh (AFP, AP, dpa)