

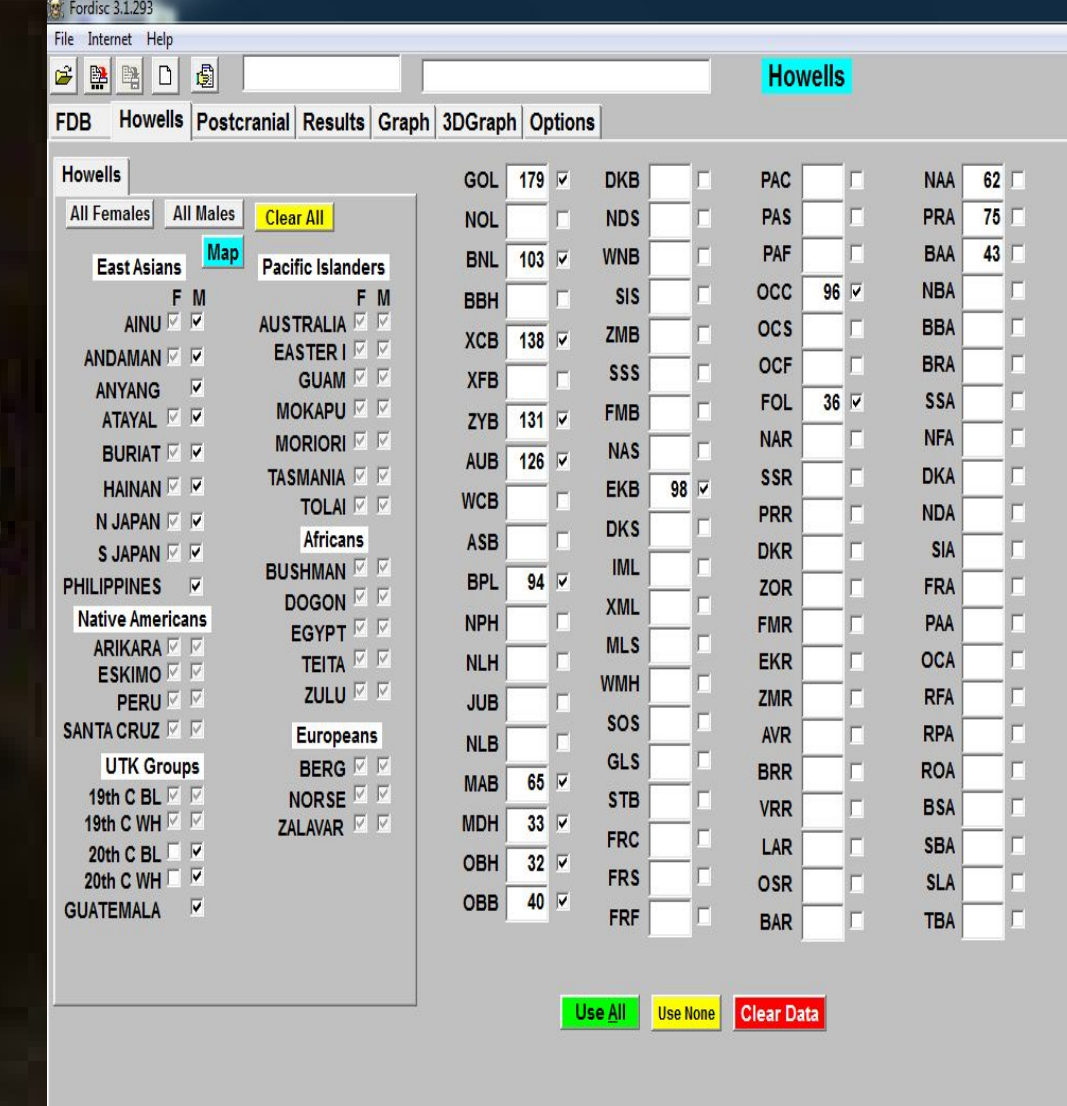
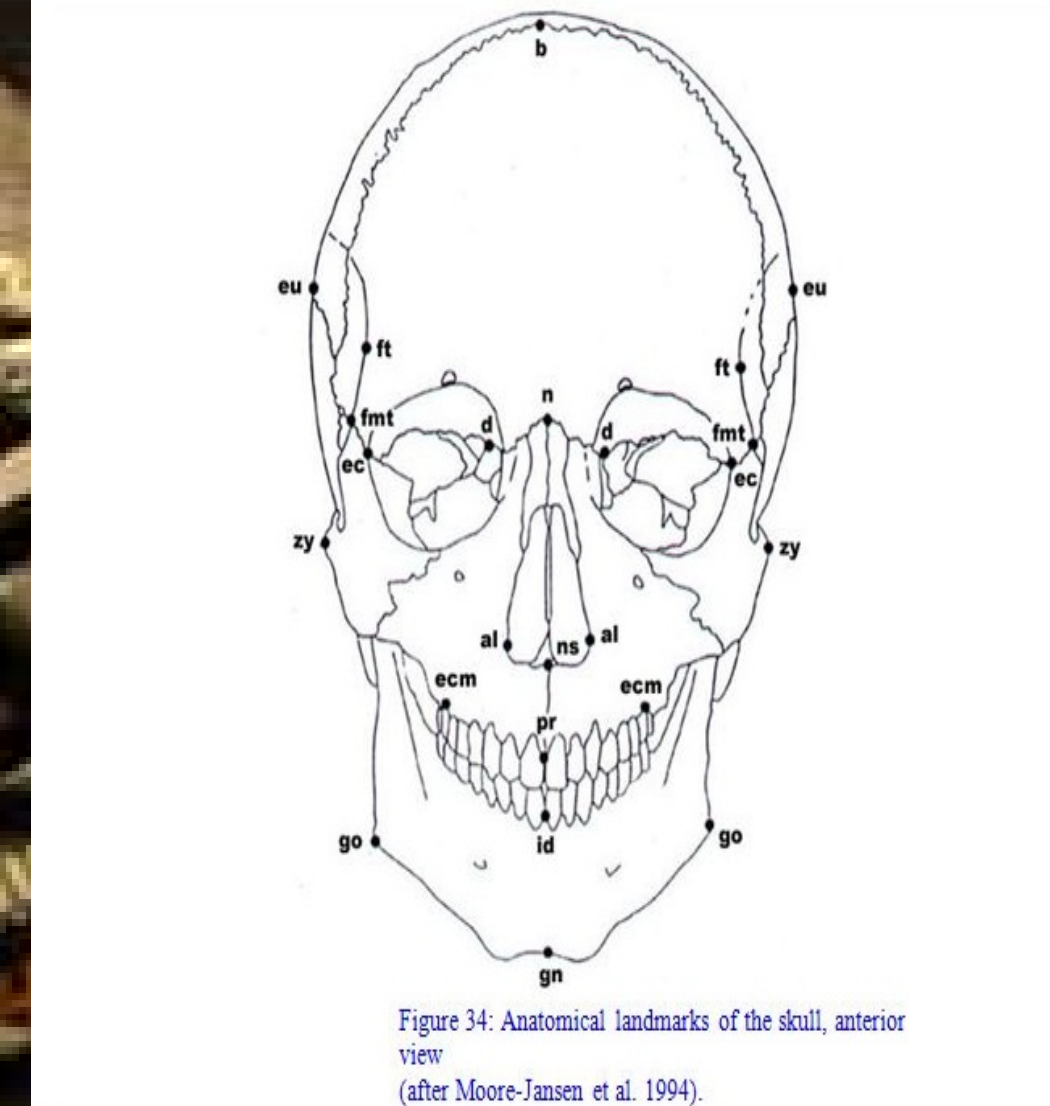
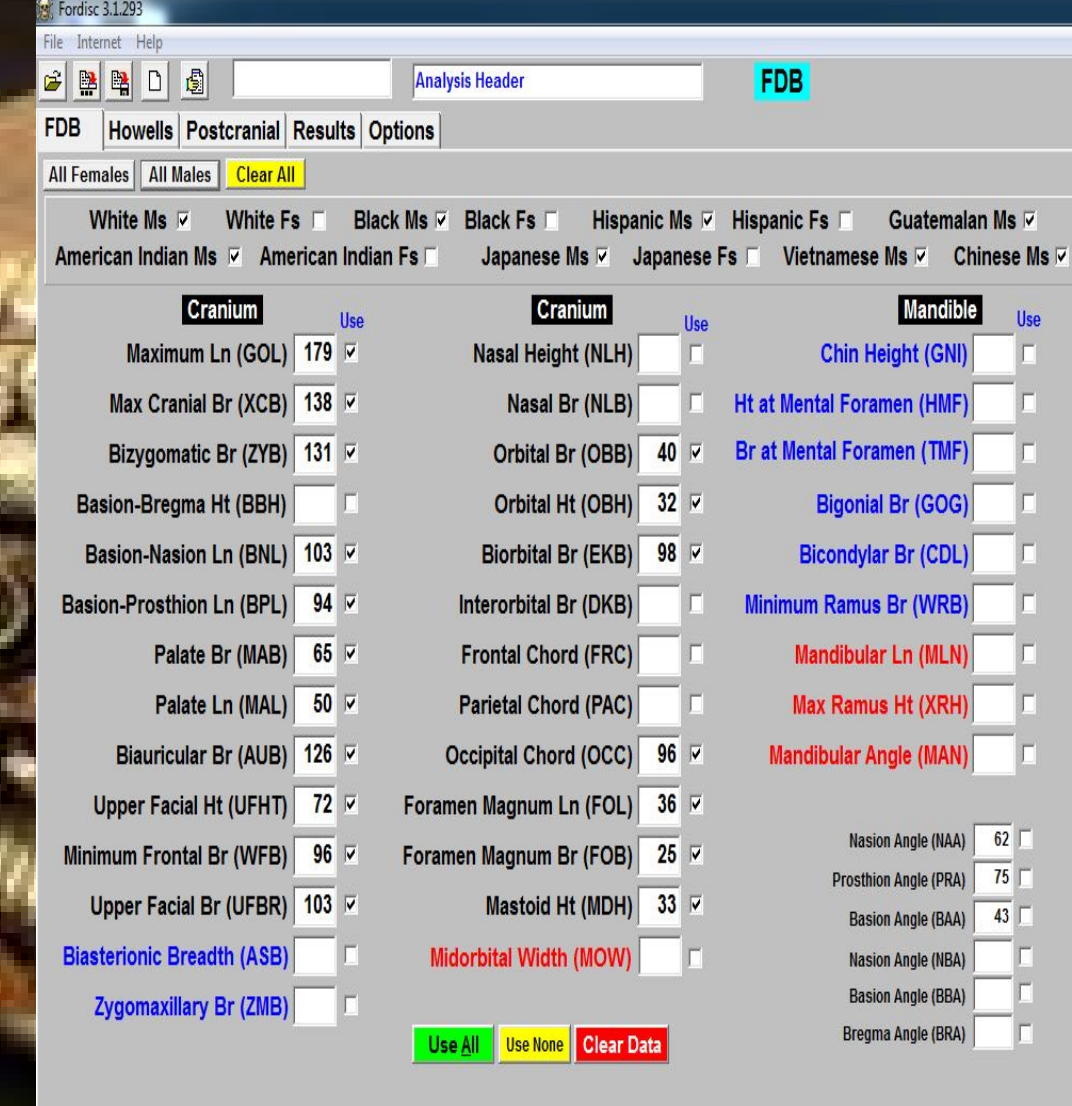
Unlocking the Mystery: Hearing the Whispers of the Mystic Tantric Skull.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the biological features and cultural framework of a human skull identified as a Tibetan Tantric skull. Biological analysis, assessment of age, sex and ancestry, was combined with a cultural study of the ornamentation to research the possible origin of this particular skull, which was seized by local law enforcement several years ago and has now been made available to Dr. Dawn Mulhern and her students for study.

This Tantric skull is most likely to be a tourist curiosity marketed in Kathmandu, Nepal. Morphological skeletal analysis determines the skull to be from an adult Asian male. Fordisc 3.1, a software program that generates discriminant function analyses of skull comparisons was inconclusive on determination of ancestry in the Forensic data bank as well as Howell's archaeological database. Potential origins of the skull are varied with locations including Nepal, Tibet, and South East Asia.



Discussion & Conclusion

This skull is most consistent with other human skulls that have been carved and adorned with semi-precious metals and gemstones that are marketed to tourists as curiosities in markets of Kathmandu, Nepal, markets of Tibet as well as large urban Chinese Cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai. This skull was determined to have the biological profile of an adult Asian male with a mismatched jaw of a sub-adult. Potential explanations for the origin of this skull include Tibetan sky burials, the bone trade of India, informed consent and purchase from relatives or grave robbing. "Some may be stolen from Christian or Muslim cemeteries and graves may be robbed in India and Nepal" (Informant. Personal interview. 21 Feb. 2013). Actual construction and market locations can only be speculated to be in or near Kathmandu, Nepal. Other possibilities of manufacture and market may include Tibet or urban centers such as Guangzhou and Shanghai, China. Therefore, the origins of procurement and manufacture of the skull are inconclusive. We have only begun Unlocking the Mystery: Hearing the Whispers of the Mystic Tantric Skull.

Introduction

Tantric skulls are often associated with a ritual cup or bowl, known as a "Kapala." The translation of Kapala in Sanskrit is "skull." Kapalas are cups or bowls fashioned from human skulls and were used in both Hindu and Buddhist Tantra. Most frequently, in Tibet these Kapala cups and bowls were carved or extravagantly ornamented with precious jewels and metals. Initially this skull was identified as a Kapala. Traditionally Kapalas are made from the upper portion of the skull. Reference of a full skull Kapala was not found. This oddity, an adorned full human skull was a mystery.

This in-depth case study will be utilized as supporting documentation for future Fort Lewis students learning about this Tantric skull. The case study analysis and assessment includes biological data (age, sex, and biological ancestry), iconography, iconology, workmanship, age of construction, associated evidence, possible association to cult activity, perspective in domestic dwelling of seizure, and greater cultural context.

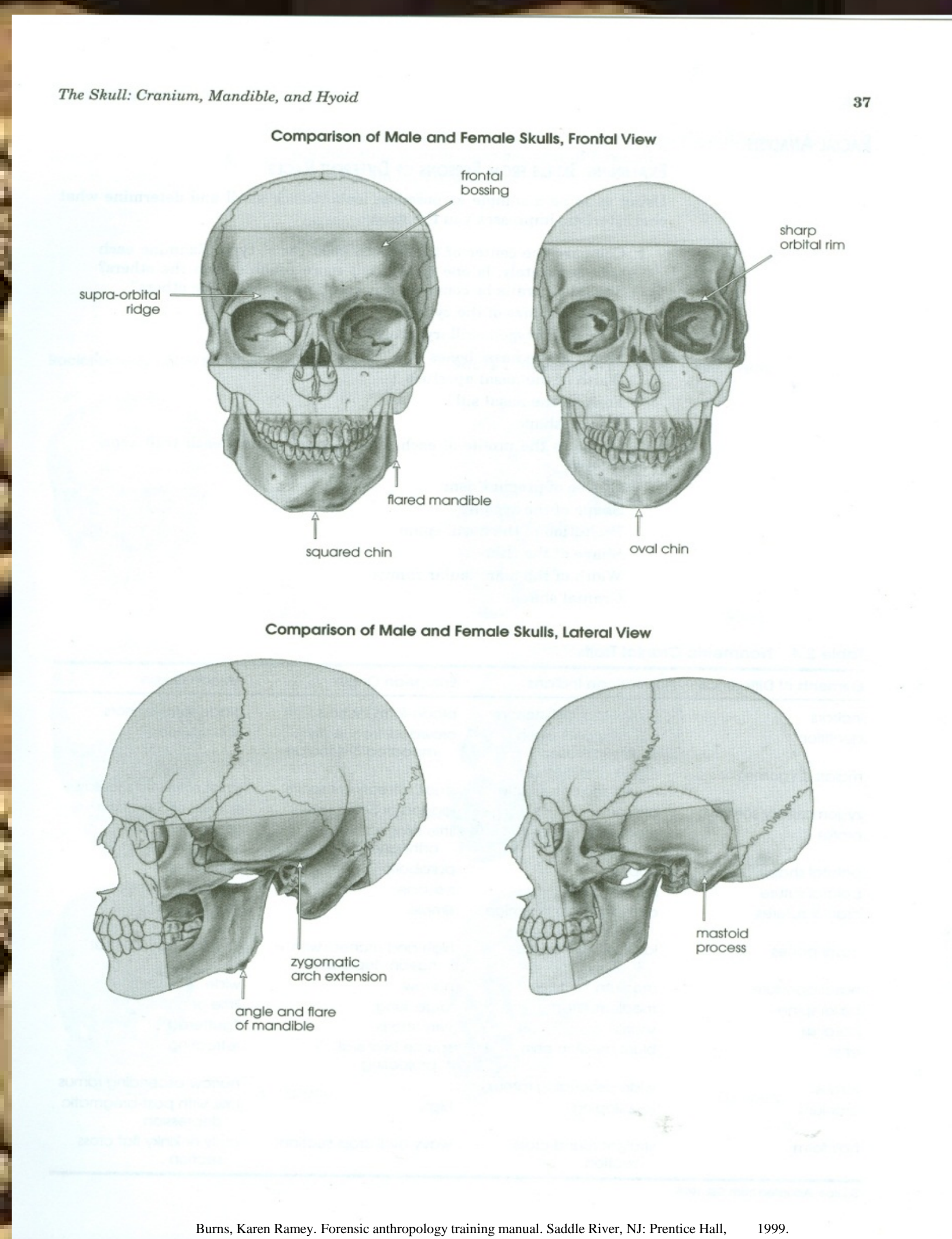
Results

Cultural analysis of this Tantric skull and others like it were determined to have no traditional ritual significance. Several scholars and sources such as Dr. Andrea Loseries and Edward Meyer confirmed and supported this argument. "On the first glance I can tell that this skull has nothing to do with Tibetan and Indian Tantric traditions. I suspect a fabrication for the Tourist trade. It could also come from the S.E. Asia" (Loseries, Dr. Andrea. "Re: Tantric Skull research project." Message to Gabriel P. Doelger. 12 Feb. 2013. E-mail.). "These are a modern collectable---inspired by the hippies of the 1960s-70s who visited Katmandu. This type can occasionally still be found in markets in Tibet, Nepal, and even large urban Chinese Cities such as s Guangzhou and Shanghai" (Meyer, Edward. "FW: Tibetan Skull Bowl." Message to Gabriel P. Doelger. 20 Feb. 2013. E-mail.). Skull procurement was inconclusive. An informant who claimed "In the last 20 years nearly 2000 of them (Tantric skulls) have passed through my hands" stated "Where they actually came from is anybody's guess" (Informant. Personal Interview. 21 Feb. 2013).

Skeletal analysis demonstrated that the MNI (minimum number of individuals) present was 2. Based on morphological analysis, the skull was determined to be from an adult Asian male, but the mandible belonged to a sub-adult age 15+ 30 months. FORDISC results classified the current case closest to Caucasian male of the 20th century, but with a low posterior probability, it did not classify strongly with this group. One potential issue is that key craniometric measurements were not possible due to the ornamentation. Also, it is possible that the closest population is not represented in the Forensic Data Bank and therefore a correct classification cannot be made.

Materials and Methods

Initial research was conducted on the internet in order to identify similar skulls as well as contacts who might have information regarding their origin. Morphological and metric analyses of the skull were conducted in order to generate a biological profile including age, sex and ancestry. Assessment of age and sex follow Standards (1994). Standard craniometric measurements were taken with the assistance of Dr. Dawn Mulhern. Unfortunately key craniometric measurements were distorted or unattainable due to adornment of the skull. These data were entered into the FORDISC 3.1 software program, which generated discriminant function analyses comparing this skull to males of different ancestry from the Forensic Data Bank as well as Howell's archaeological database.



Bone	Elements of Difference	Male	Female
frontal	supraorbital ridge	prominent	absent
frontal	frontal bossing	double boss	single central boss
temporal	mastoid process	large	small
temporal	zygomatic process length	extends to the external auditory meatus and beyond	ends before the external auditory meatus
occipital	nuchal ridges	strong muscle attachment	slight muscle attachment
mandible	ramus	wide and sharply angled	narrow and less angled
chin	chin shape	square	rounded or pointed



References

- Buikstra, Jane E., and Douglas H. Ubelaker. "Standards for data collection from human skeletal remains." (1994).
- Informant. Personal Interview. 21 Feb. 2013.
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Acknowledgements

Main photo courtesy Dr. Dawn Mulhern, Layout courtesy of Gabriel Doelger. Background image courtesy Tiger-Tiger.com.