

Intra-European Racism in Nineteenth-Century Anthropology

Gustav Jahoda

History and Anthropology, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2009

Nowadays the term “racism” is usually applied in the context of relationships between Europeans and non-European “others”. During the nineteenth century scientific ideas about innate human differences were also applied extensively to various European populations. This was partly due to a category confusion whereby nations came to be regarded as biologically distinct. The origins of “scientific” racism were connected with the use of race as an explanation of history, and with the rise of physiognomy and phrenology. The development of “craniology” was paralleled and reinforced by ideological writings about “Nordic” racial superiority. In times of conflict such as the Franco-Prussian war, absurd racial theories emerged and social Darwinist anthropologists connected race and class. Such ideas persisted well into the twentieth century and reached their apogee in Nazism.

Keywords: Craniology; France; Germany; Nationalism; Race

The French Revolution is usually seen as marking the beginnings of modern nationalism, which spread throughout the nineteenth century and became a powerful force; and the ideas of “the nation” or “the national spirit” took on a quasi-mystical tinge (cf. Hayes 1960). The same period saw the rise of anthropology as a scientific discipline, and its practitioners were not immune to the appeal of national sentiment and national pride. At the same time there was a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a nation, which is hardly surprising since there is still no consensus on this issue.¹ During the nineteenth century this was generally identified in terms of race² or “blood” and language. For some, like the linguistic anthropologist, Chavée (1862: 7), language and race were inseparably linked:

By *race*, I understand a primitive variety of the human species. By *language*, I understand the primordial syllabic structures in which each race has spontaneously embodied the

Gustav Jahoda, Department of Psychology, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1QE, Scotland, UK. Email: g.jahoda@strath.ac.uk

products of its particular intellectual organisation. Thus each language is nothing other than a natural complement of the anatomical, physiological and psychological features specialized in each race. [Emphases in original]

Similarly the terms “race” and “nation” often were, and sometimes still are (more or less seriously), used as though they were synonyms.³ Confusions between nation, race, and language were common during the nineteenth century and beyond. For most of the period anthropologists struggled to find objective means of identifying races, mainly through skull shapes and other anatomical features. Their theories and evaluations of alleged European races⁴ were influenced by other contemporary approaches such as phrenology, by historical and ideological writings, and by political events.

The Early Background

For a long time diverse human races were identified by such features as pigmentation, hair and facial form, stature, or other external signs (e.g. the works of François Bernier, 1620–1688; Linnaeus, 1707–1778). While such characteristics continued to be employed, a new criterion was introduced by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), professor at Göttingen and founder of “craniology”. He had a large collection of skulls which he grouped in terms of what he called the *norma verticalis*, i.e. the shape of the skull as seen from above. However, he did not make use of this for his classification of races, of which he listed five: Caucasians (his term for Europeans⁵), excluding Lapps and Finns. The latter came to figure prominently in later discussions. The others were Mongolians, Ethiopians, Americans and Malaysians (Blumenbach 1795/1865: 303–304).

Another pioneer was Peter Camper (1722–1789), who had the chair of anatomy at Amsterdam. He was interested in art and, noting that Negroes were usually painted with the faces of Europeans, attributed this to the incorrect representation of what he called the “facial angle” or degree of “prognathism”. This broadly refers to the extent to which the jaw juts out; and the more it does, the greater was said to be the resemblance to apes. The fact that he found Negroes to be most prognathic was later used by others (though not by Camper himself) to describe blacks as “ape-like”.

The early classifications of races almost invariably treated Europeans as a homogeneous group, but this began to change soon after the turn of the century. Several influences converged to bring this about. One was the elaboration of systematic physiognomy by Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), followed by Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869) who sought to put it on a more scientific basis. While originally concerned only with faces, he later expanded the scope to deal with the whole skull.

Carus regarded humans as being divided into races of unequal endowment determined by different cranial formations. He put forward a quaint typology of Daylight (whites), Nocturnal (blacks) and Twilight (intermediate shades) races. This can be illustrated from his *Atlas of craniology* (Carus 1844) made up of pictures of crania accompanied by comments. About a Kaffir skull, one of the “night peoples”, he said that “... the head gives the indication of predominantly low life function” (Heft I, Table VII). He did not mention how he classified the skull of a Greenlander but remarked

that it "... presents a more animal formation and above all the strength of the jaw region ... and the strongly developed rear part of the skull are enough to infer limited mental development and the well-known gluttony of the Greenlander"⁶ (Heft I, Table III). Moreover, it appears that not even all "Daylight" peoples are equal. This comes out in his observations on the skull of a modern Greek, which he compared with Atlas illustrations of a Kaffir skull (a "Night" person), a Malay (an eastern "Twilight" person), and what he called the "ordinary" skull of a "Daylight" person, which was that of Kant! Then he commented as follows on the skull of a modern Greek:

This lesser form of the Caucasian (or Daylight) skull [will allow interesting comparisons]. Generally, this head belongs to the rounder forms, which typify especially the southern tribe of the Daylight peoples; ... by contrast, more northerly tribes display a far longer form.

He added a psychological summary:

Modest development of the mind; absence of analytical or philosophical disposition; only weak unfolding of the *Gemütliche* [pleasantness?]; relatively stronger development of the will, yet without outstanding energy. (Heft II, Table V)

These kinds of judgements can also be found in phrenological writings, which probably constituted an even more important influence on anthropological thinking. Phrenology was founded by Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and also propagated by his follower Johann Caspar Spurzheim (1776–1832). Physiognomy's fundamental tenet of a causal relationship between innate bodily features and psychological attributes was shared by the phrenologists, but they took it much further. Phrenologists maintained that the form of the skull, its "bumps", constitute signs of the strength of the underlying organs in the brain (see Figure 1). They also extended their scope from individuals to nations and races.⁷

Race also became salient in a different manner: historians of the first half of the nineteenth century increasingly saw race, considered as an invariant, as a causal factor in history. It was often epitomized by a heroic figure such as *Germanicus*, the opponent of Roman power, who came to symbolize the qualities of the Teutonic race. In France Amédée Thierry wrote a *History of the Gauls* (1828/1863) that was very popular and went through many editions. In it he claimed to have found two distinct racial types among Gallic peoples, namely Gauls or Celts who were highly intelligent, and the Kymris who resembled the Germans. So in this highly successful work he identified within France two "historical races", populations differing both physically and psychologically.

The Beginnings of Craniology: Edwards and Retzius

This notion of "historical races" as subdivisions of people of the same light colour was taken up by William Frederic Edwards (1777–1842). He was English, born in Jamaica, and went to Paris where he studied and became a physician in 1815. He undertook research in physiology and ethnology and had a distinguished career, becoming member of the both the Academy of Medicine and that of the Moral and Political

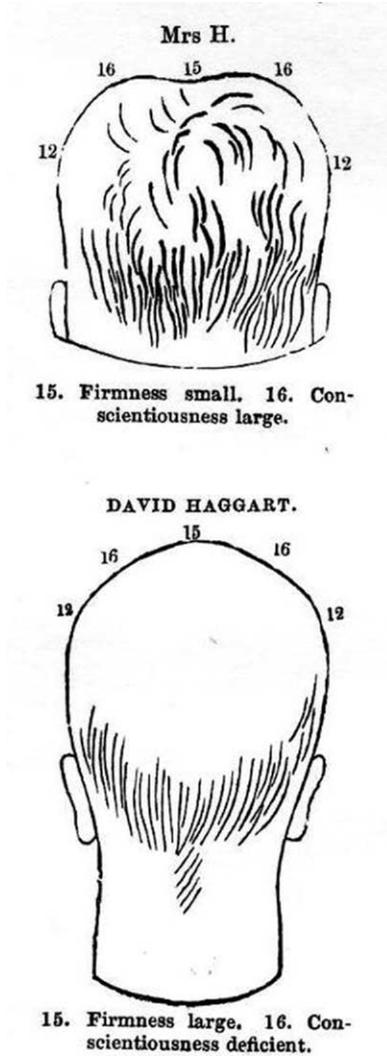


Figure 1. Phrenological signs of “conscientiousness”.

sciences. In 1829 he published a groundbreaking work inspired by Thierry entitled *On the Physiological Characters of Human Race, Considered in their Relationships to History* (Edwards 1829) in which he contended that skull form rather than skin pigmentation is the essential criterion of race. He applied this to the populations of various regions of France and arrived at a basic distinction of people who are tall with long heads vs others who are shorter and have round heads. This dichotomy foreshadowed what was later to become a widely held dogma of the “Nordics” compared with lesser breeds. Edwards further put forward the view that physical variations would be found to be associated with mental ones.

Following Edwards the Swedish scientist Anders Retzius (1796–1860), who studied cranial shapes of ancient and contemporary skulls, reported in 1840 to the Swedish Academy that he had found differences in this respect between Swedes and Finns; the former had supposedly been invaders from Asia, and the latter indigenous. Two years later he published a more detailed account of a wide range of “races” across the world (Retzius 1842/1846). He introduced the now famous dichotomy of dolichocephalic [long-headed] vs brachycephalic [broadheaded]—henceforth abbreviated to “dolicho” and “brachy”. Retzius also invented the “cephalic index” [CI], i.e. the ratio of the breadth of the skull to its length, expressed as a percentage, which was used to categorize skulls. Thus equipped, Retzius proceeded to study a wide range of races.

At that period, and well into the latter part of the nineteenth century, there was little understanding of the need for adequate samples. This may be illustrated in relation to Retzius’s treatment of the “Slave race”. He had available one Czech, one Polish and two Russian skulls. One of the Russian ones he had obtained from the collection of the then deceased Dr Spurzheim, showing his link with phrenology. Measurements were taken to the nearest millimetre, e.g. the width of a cranium was recorded as 151mm—a quite specious precision considering the uneven shape of a skull. Retzius was of course aware that his sample was very small, but he reassured the reader that he had been able to confirm it by looking at living Slavs. Thus he paid a visit to a Czech professor in Bohemia, and obtained his permission to examine his head. The report went on as follows:

Presl [the professor] having seen the confirmation of my data ... “I possess a Czech cranium”, he replied, “I give it to you as a present”. His form perfectly confirmed my opinion ... (1842/1846: 149)

Retzius claimed that that brachys are what he called “Turanians”, a term designating speakers of a group of (non-Aryan) Asian languages. They were said to be of a different (non-Aryan) origin as compared with Aryan dolichos. This is reflected in his division of European nations, of which the first six in each skull category are shown in Table 1.

The dolichos on the left are what came to be known as “Nordics”, while the brachys on the right are rather an odd mixture. In a posthumous publication Retzius (1864: 33) declared that brachys are inferior to dolichos.

For many years he remained exceedingly vague about the dividing line between his dichotomous categories. Subsequently the intermediate category of “mesocephaly”

Table 1

| Dolichos | Brachys |
|------------|-----------------------|
| Swedes | Avares [Eastern Huns] |
| Norwegians | Hungarians |
| Danes | Turks |
| Germans | Laplanders |
| Dutch | Finns |
| English | Slavs |

Note: From Retzius (1842/1846: 137).

[meso] was introduced. This failed to resolve the problem because one was of course dealing with a continuum and there was no agreement on where the boundaries should be drawn. The cut-off points used by different investigators varied in a manner that suited their theories so that a given value of the index, especially within the border region, could be treated as dolicho by one investigator and meso by another. Moreover CI values, like the measurements on which they were based, were commonly stated to two decimal points, again conveying a spurious impression of precision. None of these shortcomings of “craniometry” were adequately recognized at the time, and a “craniology” came to be established which claimed rigorous scientific status, because it was ostensibly based on observation and measurement.

Craniometry and its Vicissitudes

A prominent follower of Retzius was the Bavarian medical man and anthropologist Franz Pruner (1808–1882), a colourful character who spent much of his life in Egypt. In 1839 he became personal physician to the Viceroy and was awarded the title of Pruner-Bey, by which he became subsequently known. He was an active member of the Anthropological Society of Paris where he took part in significant controversies to be discussed later. Pruner adopted Retzius’s theory that some Scandinavians were descended from Asian invaders, and greatly extended it. Here his early attempt to classify the races of the world will be outlined to illustrate the then prevailing approach. He obtained skulls from every continent (though it emerged afterwards that a number of these had been wrongly identified) totalling some 350. The number of skulls from each race ranged from a single one to 35, with a mode of 4. Some of them were ancient skulls obtained from archaeological digs, and the gender was noted only for a minority. On each of these skulls Pruner performed no fewer than 34 measurements, totalling nearly 12,000! No wonder he commented that “it required courage to accomplish a task which, initially, seemed to surpass my strength” (Pruner 1865: 417).

Pruner had no concerns about representativeness: assuming a high degree of homogeneity he took the validity of his method for granted, as did many others at that time. Again no account was taken of the fact that a skull is not a geometrical object but has different planes and bumps, so that modes of measurement were necessarily idiosyncratic and not readily comparable. Over almost two decades anthropologists debated *how* skulls should be measured, and especially *what kinds* and *how many* measurements should be taken. The various proposals put forward led to an increasingly complex technology designed to permit increasingly detailed measurements of various parts of the skull; Paul Broca (1824–1880), the great anatomist and anthropologist, alone constructed more than a dozen of these (see Figure 2).⁸

Another crucial problem concerned the position of the skull when measuring; in other words, how the horizontal, which formed the basis of measurements, should be determined. Most workers took as the horizontal a line from the bottom of the eye socket to the top of the ear hole. However one anthropologist, Herman Schaafhausen, took a different view. He was a social Darwinist, i.e. someone who wanted to use Darwinian theory to demonstrate on evolutionary grounds the existence of profound

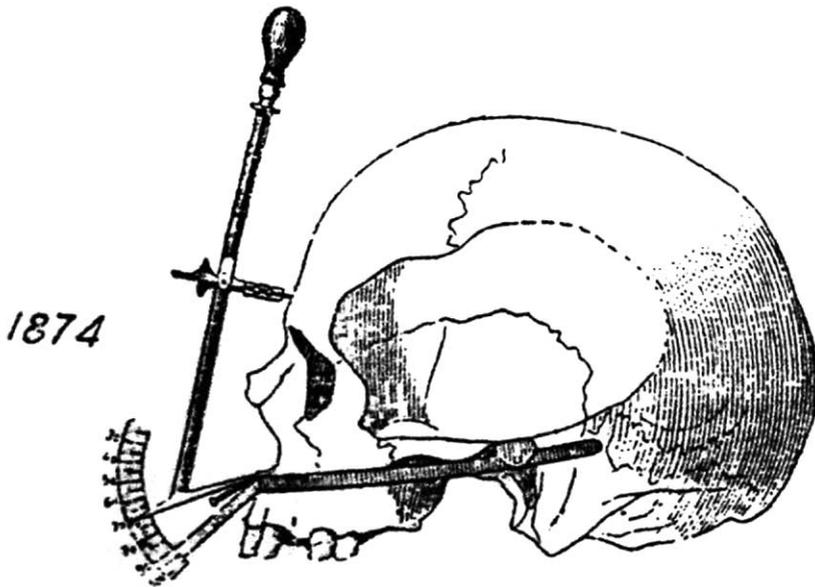


Figure 2. Broca's facial goniometer.

racial differences. So he proposed that in order to establish the horizontal the skull should be oriented in a position corresponding to the skull, as it were, looking straight ahead. This had a consequence that needs elucidation. It may be recalled that it was Camper who had introduced the notion of prognathism, namely the extent to which the jaw juts forward; and that subsequent racialists, though not Camper himself, held that the degree of prognathism in a race indicated the extent of their ape-likeness. Now the required orientation for “looking straight ahead” allowed a considerable degree of subjective judgement; and anthropologists were therefore able to vary the extent of prognathism in line with their prejudices about the race to which the skull belonged. For instance, it resolved their dilemma about Negroes, many of whom are dolichos like Nordics. Eventually, in 1883, German anthropologists reached the so-called “Frankfurt agreement” on standardization in which the Schaaffhausen approach, while not altogether rejected, was relegated to a secondary role. The agreement was largely due to the influence of Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), eminent pathologist and anthropologist who in 1869 founded the German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Pre-history. He said that the agreed method could now be used with every head, dead or alive, implying that craniometry had come of age. While consistent comparative results could thereby be obtained within Germany that did not apply internationally.⁹

Quaternary Races and European Origins

Until the second half of the nineteenth century anthropologists had been concerned with the skulls of historical races. Then remains of prehistoric human fossils were

discovered, first those of Neanderthals in 1856 and then in 1868 of Cro-Magnons, which meant that the prevailing chronology had to be radically revised. The discovery of the fossils gave rise to extensive and often fantastic speculations about the significance of their skull shapes. Pruner put forward the hypothesis that during the Quaternary period in Europe an indigenous population coexisted with elephants and reindeer. These people were supposed to have been small and brachys, and to have been later invaded by superior tall and dolicho Aryans. Armand de Quatrefages (1810–1892), naturalist and ethnologist, inspired by Pruner, proposed that the fossil skulls resembled those of contemporary “primitives” such as American natives by their prognatism. He further suggested that these brachys, short in stature and with dark hair, were the ancestors of some inferior modern European races, notably the Finns. This view was effectively demolished by Broca, who showed that Pruner’s argument was based on vague labels and questionable analogies. Pruner, he contended, was subordinating facts to the requirements of his theory. Moreover Broca, against the prevailing trend, believed that brachys had bigger brains than dolichos and were therefore more able. However he himself, like all participants in the debates, took it for granted that races were natural categories¹⁰ and varied in their capacities for cultural progress.

These heated debates, such as that at the 1867 Paris “Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology”, were ostensibly over rival scientific theories. However, in the tone of the debates one can discern underlying nationalist animosities. This is hardly surprising in view of prevailing (non-empirical) racist ideologies which postulated an intra-European hierarchy of races and were well known to the craniologists. Hence it is necessary to outline them at this stage.

Ideologies of Race

In the present context the discussion will be confined to claims about the characteristics of what were regarded as distinct European races. Such claims were based mainly on historical grounds, as had been the case with Thierry. The first significant figure was the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox (1793–1862). He had been dismissed from his Edinburgh university post as a result of a body-snatching scandal and earned his living by lecturing on race. These lectures, delivered over a period of years, were published under the title *The Races of Men* (1850). Its rather disjointed and rambling style was probably the result of this origin. Knox calls it “A fragment” in the sub-title, because it fails to encompass the whole of human history.

Although he dwelt a great deal on history, he did not try to explain history through race as Thierry had done, but rather used it as an argument to bolster his account of the characteristics of different races.

Knox believed racial antagonism to be innate, which he thought prevented the survival of mixed races:

By intermarriage a new product arises, which cannot stand its ground; 1st, By reason of the innate dislike of race to race, preventing a renewal of such intermarriages; 2nd, Because the descendants will of necessity fall back upon the stronger race, and [nearly] all traces of the weaker race must in time be obliterated. (1850: 89/90).

Many races across the world are surveyed, but most attention is given to European ones. Knox's classification includes the Saxons or Scandinavians, Celts, Slavonians, and what he called Sarmatians, a term denoting the Russ[ians]. His—often rather inconsistent—characterizations of some of these will be summarized. Declaring himself a Saxon, he praised the love of liberty of this race. At one point he was complimentary about the Celts, but later comes the following passage:

I appeal to the Saxon men of all countries to whether I am right or not in my estimate of the Celtic character. Furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; a hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits; restless, treacherous, uncertain: look at Ireland. (Knox 1850: 26)

An equally negative account is given of the *Sarmatians* [Russians and other races in the Russian empire], whom he described as dishonest, not creative, but good imitators—in a word “living automatic machines”.

There is a chapter in which he discussed the Germans or Teutons, a term he regarded as meaningless since it lumps together a diversity of races under an umbrella term. In Central Germany, he maintained, there is a darker race that is differently shaped, of unknown origin. It is they, together with the pure Slavonians, who have created German literature, science, and art. He did not have any great regard for the Prussians: “No native Pruss [*sic*] has ever been found fit for anything” (Knox 1850: 347).

Knox was writing only a few years after Retzius had published the first results of his studies of the shapes of skulls. Knox had come across that work, but mentioned it only briefly. As he had anticipated, Knox's book received a critical reception in Britain initially, since race doctrines found little support there at the time. That changed, however, and in 1860 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Ethnological Society of London. It is striking that Knox did not eulogize the “Nordics”, as was done in continental Europe and, in particular, by De Gobineau. Furthermore, while Knox held that mixed races were not sustainable, De Gobineau's main thesis was concerned with the consequences of race mixture.

Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), scion of an aristocratic family, became a highly successful diplomat who travelled widely on various missions. In 1856 he was appointed minister to Persia, which he came to love, and he wrote an account of its history and religion. It will be evident that De Gobineau was a highly gifted man and an excellent observer, with considerable sympathy for the peoples he met. Yet although he was clearly not a racist in his personal life, that label could be applied to the doctrine he espoused in his “Essay on the inequality of races” (1855/1967). The seeming inconsistency is resolved when his motive for writing the “Essay” is appreciated. Like many of his aristocratic contemporaries, De Gobineau feared the movement towards mass democracy which threatened to undermine the status and power of his class. The “Essay” constituted an attempt to understand and explain the political changes that were occurring; which he also came to regard as inevitable.

De Gobineau's primary concern was the relationship between civilization and race. According to him, humans are divided into three main races, namely white, yellow and

black; and among the whites the best are Aryan Nordics. Each of these has its own particular characteristics. However, he had no illusion that there were any “pure” races—in fact the mixture of “blood” was his major explanatory principle.

De Gobineau surveyed historical trends over millennia, offering sweeping generalizations. Here is an example:

A series of feminized or feminine races occupy the largest part of the globe; this observation applies particularly to Europe. With the exception of the Teutonic family and a part of the Slavs, one finds in our part of the world only groups feebly equipped with practical sense. ... In places where the Germanic element has never penetrated, there is no civilization of our kind. (De Gobineau 1855/1967: 112)

He paid some attention to the then emerging vogue for the measurement of skulls, but displayed some scepticism; and in any case the topic occupied a tiny fraction of the voluminous “Essay”.

De Gobineau argued that Aryans constitute the most noble stock, characterized by virility, leadership, common sense and intelligence. The yellow races, according to him, have stability and fertility—whatever that may mean, and the blacks are sensuous and imaginative, but none of these races can by themselves produce a worthwhile civilization, which requires an admixture of other blood. For instance, the whites need some infusion of black blood to make them more imaginative and artistic; however, too thick an infusion of this kind is apt to stunt the whites’ intellect.

Race mixture and its effects constitute a dominant theme throughout, and towards the end De Gobineau was moved to exclaim “So mixture, mixture everywhere, mixture always ...” (1855/1967: 867). While race mixture was necessary for the rise of civilization, excessive mixture leads to decadence and “the white species, considered abstractly, has henceforth disappeared from the face of the world” (1855/1967: 870) owing to excessive dilution of the stock. Generally, since mixture is increasing apace, the result must be a degeneration of humanity as a whole. De Gobineau’s broad message was therefore a pessimistic one.¹¹

The last of the writers considered here, Chamberlain, was a passionate advocate of a pure Nordic race. Humans, he said, were divided into distinct races not by God, as De Gobineau had believed, but by biology. Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), the son of a British admiral who married into Richard Wagner’s circle, spent all his later life in Germany. Erudite and with a persuasive style, his most famous work was “The foundations of the nineteenth century” (1899/1910). It made an enormous impact, not only with Kaiser Wilhelm II¹² (which was not unexpected), but was also well received by left-leaning liberals like Bernard Shaw.

The book could be described as a kind of philosophical history of the (mainly Western) world, viewed through the spectacles of race conceived as the prime mover. A section entitled “The importance of race” reveals the mystical aura attributed by Chamberlain to this notion:

Nothing is so convincing as the consciousness of the possession of Race. The man who belongs to a distinct, pure race, never loses the sense of it. ...

Race lifts a man above himself: it endows him with extraordinary—I might almost say supernatural—powers ... (1899: 269)¹³

Chamberlain compared human races to varieties of dogs, horses and plants advocating selective breeding which for him was a model for the production of a noble race “which becomes noble gradually, like fruit trees” (1899: 263). Crossings are necessary for a noble race to emerge, provided the racial types are not too different; and he gave the example of the English thoroughbred horse resulting from the mating of English mares and Arab stallions. However, the crossing has to take place once and then cease, lest the noble race degenerates.

The noble races were of course the Aryans and Teutons: “Physically and mentally the Aryans are pre-eminent among all peoples; for that reason they are by right ... the lords of the world” (1899: 542). Similarly he stated “That the Teuton is ... perhaps the greatest power in the history of mankind, no one will wish to deny, but in order to arrive at a correct appreciation of the present time, it behoves us to settle once and for all who could and who could not be regarded as Teuton” (1899: 577). Unfortunately that turned out to be rather a tricky issue, as it was for any writer who wanted to pin down a “race”. This did not prevent him from proposing that that unless there had been much crossing with “races from the south or with degenerate Celto-Germanic or Slavo-Germanic races”, the Germanic peoples “are long-skulled and fair (or dark)” (1899: 528). In other words, there is no clear way of physically identifying Teutons; but “loyalty is the finest touchstone for distinguishing between genuine and false Germanicism; for it is not by the roots but by the fruit that we distinguish the species” (1899: 548).

Chamberlain was dismayed by the established fact that in many parts of Germany of his time short dark-haired and round-headed people predominated: “... we have among us men who are half, a quarter, or perhaps a sixth Germanic, etc., and in consequence we have a mass of ideas and ways of thinking which are Germanic to the extent of a half, a fourth, a sixth, etc., or on the other hand are directly anti-Germanic” (1899: 529).

The direct transition from physical to mental should be noted here, jumps which Chamberlain made constantly. For instance he referred to “those physically strong but mentally inferior and Anti-Germanic races, which were never quite destroyed but withdrew into the mountains, [and are now] reviving and increasing ...” (1899: 573). He described how in certain places one finds long-headed people (“of Germanic nature”) close to others who are un-Germanic: “In the mountains of Northern Italy one finds them [i.e. tall Germanic ones] also, alternating with the small, round-skulled un-Aryan *homo alpinus*” (1899: 525). It should be mentioned that prominent among the un-Germanic races were the Jews, and he believed that antagonism towards them was instinctive.¹⁴

While Chamberlain made use of craniological categories, he was critical of the scientists who sought to identify races by measuring skulls. He said that they were all at sea and doing things the wrong way around: “we must ascertain precisely what groups actually exist as individualised, morally and intellectually distinguishable races, and

then see whether there are any anatomical characteristics which aid us in classification” (1899: 533). The circularity in this argument is obvious.

Generally, as one moves from Knox via De Gobineau to Chamberlain, the increasing role of underlying political determinants of their views become apparent.

As will be shown next, such factors were not confined to ideologically coloured speculations, but also affected supposedly tough-minded anthropological scientists.

Anthropology and the Franco–Prussian war of 1870–1871

When the Prussian army approached Paris, shells fell on the Museum of Paris with which the prominent French anthropologist Armand de Quatrefages (1810–1892) was associated. Understandably this episode greatly upset him and aroused his patriotic ire, and he described it at considerable length in two publications that differed only slightly (De Quatrefages 1871, 1872), the latter translated into English.

The major part of both texts was concerned to demonstrate that the Prussians are not real Germans.

At the outset he stated that he had always been opposed to the application of anthropology to politics, which nearly always leads to errors. However, the exploitation by Pan-Germanists of the idea of racial antagonism forced him to enter the fray:

[Germany] wants to reign over the Latin races, and, seeing in France the highest form of these races, has pounced on our *patrie* with the openly declared intention of reducing us to irremediable impotence. Called to this crusade by Prussia, she [i.e. Germany] has subordinated herself to this power (De Quatrefages 1871: 647)

There follows a lengthy historical account of the origins of European races, largely based on the extravagant notions of Pruner who saw continuities between populations of the Quarternary period and the present. The upshot of this lengthy and speculative discussion was the Prussians, unlike other true Germans are not Aryans but descended from Finno-Slavs. This, he said, is confirmed by direct observation of the Pomeranian regiments that marched through Paris and he asked the rhetorical question: “Do they have any relation with the Aryan type?”

De Quatrefages also provided an account of the alleged psychological characteristics of Finns and Slavs. As regards Finns, he began rather patronizingly with a list of positive traits: “... hardworking enough, moderately industrious; patient but obstinate ...”, etc. But after that he went on:

Unhappily all the good in this picture is marred by a quality which seems to be thoroughly national. The Fin [*sic*] never pardons a real or supposed offence, avenging it at the first opportunity, and is not fastidious in his choice of means. Thus is explained the frequency of assassination in Finland among the peasants. (De Quatrefages 1872: 60/61)

Elsewhere, referring to the destruction of a library in Strasburg by the Prussia, he suggested that they had taken the opportunity of destroying precious collections and continued: “Nowhere is the vindictiveness of the Finns more evident than in the dark rancour of the jealous hate of the semi-barbarians towards a superior civilization” (De

Quatrefages 1871: 668). In another passage it is the Slavs who are equated with the Prussians in the context of the bombardment of the Museum: "Does one not recognise in this trait the Slav as he has been painted by the classical authors and Amédée Thierry?" (De Quatrefages 1871: 665). Towards the end of this disquisition he maintained that the true Germans would not have accepted Prussia as their overlord, if they had not been led astray by an "anthropological error".¹⁵

Needles to say, these anthropological insights were not well received in Germany and one riposte came from Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), a prominent ethnographer of immense erudition but a rebarbative writing style. He starts off with heavy sarcasm, deploring the fact that "our dear neighbours from across the Rhine" seem to have taken leave of their senses. While they used to be gifted and "have given us the best hairdressers, dancing masters and cooks" (Bastian 1872: 45) as well as having made some competent scientific contributions, they have now entered a dark night of the spirit. Having given vent to his spleen, Bastian then embarked upon a lengthy refutation of Quatrefage's thesis about the allegedly Finnish origin of the Prussians. His mainly historical arguments ranged widely across continents and back to pre-history, and were presented in his usual rambling manner.

A more effective critic was Virchow, who published a restrained and dignified reply to the numerous French vituperations directed at Germans at that time (Virchow, 1871). In it he did not mention De Quatrefages, with whom he dealt separately in a piece entitled "On the method of scientific anthropology" (Virchow 1872a). After discussing the shortcomings of Pruner's reckless theorizing (on which De Quatrefages had based himself) he observed: "First one turns the Prussians into Finns, and then one heaps on the Finns a wide selection of the worst qualities, without a single serious attempt to provide any evidence" (Virchow 1872a: 304). Generally, the crucial objection raised by Virchow was that De Quatrefages had not undertaken any empirical investigations and since Virchow's account of what constitutes anthropological method was typical of the period, it is of sufficient interest to cite him:

Until now one was used in anthropology to treat among physical markers of race the craniological ones as the most important; this is because the head and especially the skull, as the bearer of the brain, constitutes the noblest part of the body But one has to measure skulls and the numbers found have to be compared with the numbers furnished by other skulls. Hence I have collected Finnish and Esthonian skulls, measured and compared them. (Virchow 1872a: 306)

In order to confound Quatrefages, he did in fact publish his studies in a French scientific journal (Virchow 1872b). The article abounds with numbers relating to measures of cranial indices and cranial capacities. These form the bases for arguments about brachycephaly and dolichocephaly. In conclusion he contrasted these hard data with Quatrefage's "psychological dreams and historical dates".

Before leaving Virchow it should be said that his outlook was a liberal one and unlike so many of his contemporaries he eschewed statement of racial inferiority or superiority. However, he did emphatically believe in race and led a commission whose original purpose had been to carry out a survey of skull forms in the whole of Germany in order to ascertain the proportions of dolichocephalics and brachycephalics. It was to be

conducted by school teachers with their classes. Subsequently it was decided that the measurement of skulls was too technical a task to be undertaken by untrained personnel, and so features that correlated with skull types were chosen instead. There were colours of eyes, hair and skin, so that the dichotomy of blond vs brunette types was substituted for that of skull shapes. It was an enormous undertaking, with hundreds of thousands of forms being distributed across the country. (For details of the procedures, cf. Zimmerman 2001, chap. 6.) The results indicated that a majority were of a mixed physical character, but among the “pure” ones two-thirds were of the blond and only one-third of the brunet type. On this basis Virchow claimed that the blond was the dominant type in Germany, and that the existence of distinct racial types had been scientifically demonstrated.

The Rise of Anthroposociology

During the late 1880s a new movement began that curiously combined the tenets of craniology with social Darwinism. French anthropology had been slow to accept Darwin’s epoch-making ideas, preferring Lamarckian doctrine which they labelled “transformism”. This started to change from the 1870s and one anthropologist who enthusiastically embraced a version of evolutionary theory was Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854–1836), who taught anthropology at the University of Montpellier (see Figure 3). Directly inspired by De Gobineau’s notion that race determines all historical and socio-cultural phenomena, he interpreted Darwinian theory as confirming De Gobineau’s thesis and explaining the fundamental inequality of races. Needless to say, that was not the view held by Darwin himself, who had written “It may be doubted whether any characteristic can be named which is distinctive of a race and is constant” (Darwin 1871/1901: 269).

De Lapouge, adopting the old nomenclature of Linnaeus, proposed that there are two major races in Europe and a minor one which has characteristics of both. The major ones are *Homo Europaeus* and *Homo Alpinus*, dolicho and brachy respectively (For contemporary representations see Figure 4).

The former, as usual, is the typical Nordic; mean male height 1.7 m, CI: 70–74; they were said to be enterprising, ambitious, energetic and courageous; figures for the latter were 1.60–1.65 m and 84–85 (De Lapouge 1896). Their mental disposition was described as being more or less the opposite of that of dolichos, and a brachy is “the perfect slave” De Lapouge 1899: 227). Like De Gobineau he was pessimistic, anticipating the relative decline of the dolichos. He also predicted that in future there would be conflicts between peoples resulting from minor differences in their cephalic indices.

According to De Lapouge the drift towards brachycephaly results from social selection, which becomes progressively more important than natural selection. He elaborated a set of anthroposociological “laws”, which generally seem rather trivial. For instance, in a mixed population dolichos have greater wealth; brachys prefer higher altitudes—already implicit in the term *Homo Alpinus*. A more substantive one postulates that higher concentrations of dolichos are found in cities.

L'ARYEN

SON ROLE SOCIAL

COURS LIBRE DE SCIENCE POLITIQUE
PROFESSÉ A L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTPELLIER
(1889-1890)

PAR

G. VACHER DE LAPOUGE

Audax Iapeti genus!

HOMAGE, *Od.* 1, 3, 27.



PARIS

ANCIENNE LIBRAIRIE THORIN ET FILS

ALBERT FONTEMOING, ÉDITEUR

Libraire des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
du Collège de France, de l'École Normale Supérieure
et de la Société des Études Historiques.

4, RUE LE COFF, 4

1899

Figure 3. Title page of *l'Aryen* (de Lapouge 1899).

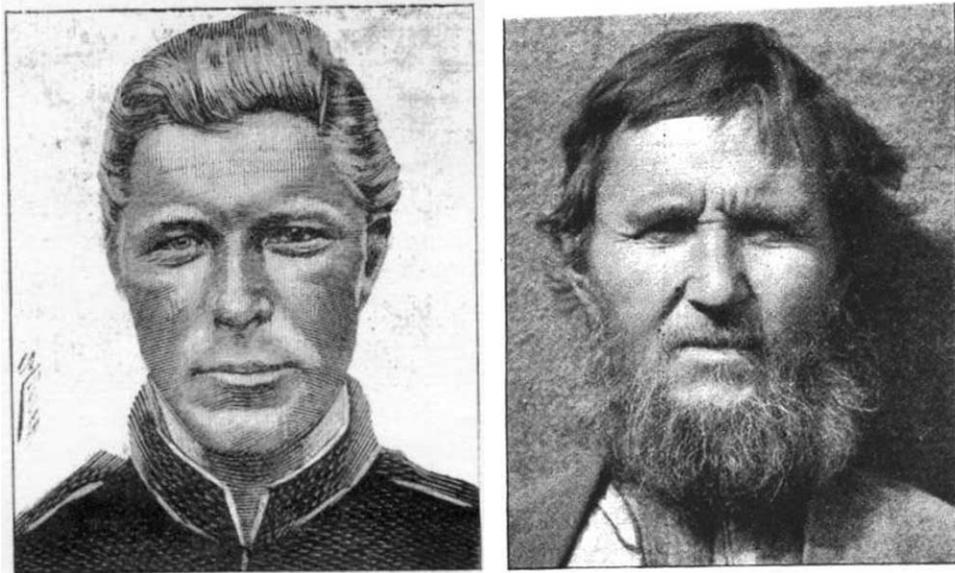


Figure 4. Norwegian dolicho (left) and Russian brachy (right).

This is a theme explored at the same time in considerable detail by the German anthroposociologist Otto Ammon (1842–1916), who was particularly concerned with the relationship between race and social class. As the title of his main work (“The social order and its natural foundations”, 1896) indicates, he held that that the structure of society rests on a “natural” basis, by which he meant race. Like De Lapouge, he referred to De Gobineau as a forerunner. His racial typology distinguished in the usual way between tall dolichos with blue eyes, blond hair, and white skin, and short brachys with brown eyes, black hair and brown skin. He called the former Aryans or Germanics, but labels the latter “turanic” or mongoloid, following Pruner’s extravagant speculations. The psychological attributes associated with these races followed the then conventional lines.

Ammon’s theory is based on two fundamental postulates, the first being that there is a powerful association between race and social status. He sought to account for this in the following manner:

If in one social class long heads and in another short ones prevail, the reason must be sought in a process of selection. Individuals with particular mental dispositions unconsciously sort themselves through inclinations and skills into certain kinds of occupations; and these mental dispositions, which are racial properties, are linked with the external features of the races concerned; they are jointly selected and transmitted through inheritance. (Ammon 1896: 94)

His second main postulate was that country people tend to be brachys and city ones dolichos. Any dolichos in the countryside will tend to move to cities. In order to verify this he carried out a vast series of cephalic measurements of army recruits and school pupils ranging from those in more prestigious *Gymnasien* to the ones provided for the

lower orders. As far as the schools are concerned, he expected that in the former there would be more dolichos owing to their greater inherited intelligence and skills, as well as their greater ability to resist the temptation of city life. When these expectations were not fulfilled, as when the *Gymnasiasten* had darker pigmentations, he devised *ad hoc* explanations. In this case he speculated that higher education might require some qualities which brachys have to a higher degree.

As regards the numerous measurements, Ammon was inclined to shift the boundaries between dolichos and brachys in such a way as to support his claims.

For example, in the city of Milan the cephalic index (CI) was 83.8, while that of people in the adjoining countryside was 84.3; while in Freiburg people had a CI of 81.8 as contrasted with a rural one of 83.5. Quite apart from the small magnitude of the differences which render them almost certainly non-significant, a CI of 83+ was treated as indicating dolichocephaly in one place and brachycephaly in the other.

There are many inconsistencies and other problems in Ammon's work, and some of his arguments are simply bizarre, as a final example will show. Before that it should be mentioned that Ammon, like all those writers on race, was of course aware that a mixing of races took place, which they invariably deplored. Here is what he said on this topic:

Individuals of the lower class, produced by *Panmixie* [general random mixture] often have mental dispositions lacking in harmony; mostly this is already displayed in their external appearance, characterised by the fact that the parts of their bodies do not fit together. (Ammon 1896: 93)

In hindsight it is astonishing that the writings of De Lapouge and Ammon, while not without contemporary critics, were widely accepted as authoritative in many countries. In Britain the well-known and greatly respected anthropologist John Beddoe (1912: 185) could report that "at Cambridge the first-class men have proportionately longer as well as more capacious heads" and that "men of distinction are in large proportion natives of the more blond areas".

Into the Twentieth Century

During the first decades of the new century these ideas about European races persisted for a considerable period, even at the academic level. For instance, a professor of anatomy at the University of London (Parsons, 1919: 22) measured the CI of German prisoners of war. He found that "the north of Germany is more long-headed than the south and east, and that Silesia and Bavaria are particularly brachycephalic ...". An illuminating case is that of Hans Günther (1891–1968), who was to become *the* Nazi expert on race. Strongly influenced by De Lapouge with whom he had close links (cf. Hecht, 2000), Günther wrote a number of books eulogizing the Nordic ideal. The best known one, entitled *The Racial Elements of European History* was translated into English (Günther, 1927). In it, he commented that there was "remarkable agreement" among observers on the mental characteristics of the different European races (1927: 51, 59). During the 1920s he was given scientific awards in Scandinavia and under the Nazis

became professor at the University of Berlin. Even after the war he published books on eugenics. He still features on an American website dedicated to white supremacy.¹⁶

After the Second World War, the nineteenth-century notion of a hierarchy of European races became gradually discredited in academic circles, but one could still find occasional echoes of the old ideas. Thus Lynn (1971: 205) put forward the hypothesis that “one factor responsible for [differences in the level of anxiety] lies in the racial composition of the population”; he duly found Alpines to be more anxious than Nordics.

While it might be tempting to merely dismiss the intra-European race theories of nineteenth-century anthropology as unfortunate but unimportant aberrations that would be revealed as a mistake, at the time they had some political implications, especially when boundaries were disputed. For instance, in 1883 the Albanians objected to being asked to relinquish Epirus to Greece and circulated a memorandum which contained the following argument:

To understand why the Greeks and Albanians cannot live under the same regime, it is only necessary to consider the totally different structure of their skulls; the Greeks are brachycephalic, whereas the Albanians are dolichocephalic and lack almost completely the occipital protuberance. (Cited in Fouillee, 1898: iii)

The notion of an intra-European racial hierarchy strongly influenced the American immigration laws of the 1920s, and it came to the fore again in Nazi ideology and policy, for instance in relation to Slav populations. Hence it will be clear that the nineteenth-century racist doctrines resulted in a great deal of human misery.

Notes

- [1] For instance, the prominent historian Hobsbawm (1992: 5) wrote “... no satisfactory criterion can be discovered for deciding which of the many human collectivities should be labelled in this way”.
- [2] The term “race” will not usually be placed in inverted commas, since that would be an anachronism. This of course does not imply an acceptance of the old interpretation of this category.
- [3] As recently as 20 April 2001 the BBC ran a programme intended to persuade the audience that there is no such thing as a “British race”.
- [4] The coverage will not include anti-semitism, since its history has been extensively documented.
- [5] “Causasians” were so named because of what Blumenbach saw as the exceptional beauty of a female Georgian skull.
- [6] This assessment of Greenlanders was slow to change. As recently as 1939 a study by Carmichael described them as “primitives”.
- [7] Here are some examples (omitting non-European comparisons) taken from Combe (1850): “*Self-esteem*: larger in the English than in the French ... *Conscientiousness*: large in the Teutonic or Germanic, moderate in the Anglo-Saxon, small in the Celtic races ... *Number*: Small in the French ... *Causality*: larger in the English and German than in the French ...”.
- [8] The most elaborate of these was Torok’s *Universalkraniometer*, and he suggested that 5300 measurements be taken of each skull! (cf. Hoyme 1953).
- [9] For instance De Lapouge (of whom more anon) complained that German measurements were unfair to France (De Lapouge 1899).
- [10] He writes: “I am one of those who think that the great typical differences which separate human groups are primordial” (Broca 1871: vol. I: 248).

- [11] After Darwin's epoch-making *Origin of the Species* had appeared in 1859, De Gobineau accused Darwin of having stolen his ideas!
- [12] The *Kaiser* encouraged all German army officers to read it.
- [13] All page numbers refer to vol. I.
- [14] Chamberlain admitted that Jews do not always have physical characteristics from which they can be identified. Yet he had heard from various sources "that very small children, especially girls, have quite a marked instinct for race. It frequently happens that children who have no conception of what a 'Jew' means ... begin to cry as soon as a genuine Jew or Jewess comes near them!" (1899: 537).
- [15] Denigration was of course not confined to anthropologists. For example Hippolyte Taine, eminent scholar, condemned "the brutal and barbarian German animal". The First World War had a similar effect. British propaganda applied the race label of "Hun" to Germans. An extreme case is that of the French medical scientist Edgar Bérillon, who alleged in a series of scurrilous publications that Germans were physically and psychologically abnormal. For instance he wrote "For Germans of pure Germanic race nature has placed reason and the aim of all existence into the stomach" (Bérillon 1917: 37, and consequently their excrement is not only massive but exceedingly smelly).
- [16] Available at <http://www.stormfront.org>.

References

- Ammon, O. (1896), *Die Gesellschaftsordnung and ihre natürlichen Grundlagen*, Fischer, Jena.
- Bastian, A. (1872), "Quatrefages: La Race", *Prussienne. Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. 4, pp. 45–64.
- Beddoe, J. (1912), *The Anthropological History of Europe*, Gardner, Paisley.
- Bérillon, E. (1917), *La psychologie de la race allemande d'après ses caractères spécifiques*, Maloine, Paris.
- Blumenbach, J. F. (1795/1865), *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, trans. and ed. Thomas Bendyshe, The Anthropological Society, London.
- Broca, P. (1871–1888), *Mémoires d'anthropologie*, 5 vols, Reinwald, Paris.
- Carmichael, D. M. (1939/1940), "Some examples of constructive thinking amongst Greenlanders", *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 30, pp. 295–315.
- Carus, G. C. (1844), *Atlas der Cranioscopie*. Hanfstaengel, Dresden.
- Chamberlain, H. S. (1899/1910), *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, 2 vols, John Lane, London.
- Chavée, H. (1862), *Les langues et les races*, Chamerot, Paris.
- Combe, G. (1850), *Elements of phrenology*, 7th edn, MacLachlan & Stewart, Edinburgh.
- Darwin, C. (1871/1901), *The Descent of Man*, John Murray, London.
- De Gobineau, A. (1855/1967), *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Belfond, Paris.
- De Lapouge, V. (1896), *Les sélections sociales*, Thorin, Paris.
- De Lapouge, V. (1899), *L'Aryen: Son rôle social*, Thorin, Paris.
- De Quatrefages, A. (1871), "La race Prussienne", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 February, pp. 647–669.
- De Quatrefages, A. (1872), *The Prussian Race Ethnologically Considered; To which is Appended Some Account of the Bombardment of the Museum of Natural History, etc. by the Prussians in January 1872*, trans. Isabel Innes, London.
- Edwards, W. F. (1829), *Des caractères physiologiques des races humaines, considérés dans leur rapports avec l'histoire: lettre à M. Amédée Thierry*, Compère, Paris.
- Fouillée, A. (1898), *Psychologie du peuple français*, Alcan, Paris.
- Günther, H. F. K. (1927), *The Racial Elements of European History*, Methuen, London.
- Hayes, C. J. H. (1960), *Nationalism: A Religion*, Macmillan, New York.
- Hecht, J. M. (2000), "Vacher de Lapouge and the rise of Nazi science", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 61, pp. 285–304.

- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992), *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hoyme, L. E. (1953), "Physical anthropology and its instruments", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 9, pp. 409–430.
- Knox, R. (1850), *The Races of Man: A Fragment*, Renshaw, London.
- Lynn, R. (1971), "National and racial differences in anxiety", *Mankind Quarterly*, vol. 11, pp. 205–214.
- Parsons, F. G. (1919), "Anthropological observations on German prisoners of war", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 13, pp. 20–35.
- Pruner, F. (1865), "Résultats de craniometrie", *Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie, Séries I*, no. ii, pp. 417–432.
- Retzius, A. (1842/1846), "Mémoire sur les formes du crane des habitants du Nord" ["Treatise on the forms of the skull in Nordic peoples"], *Annales des Sciences Naturelles, Série 3, Zoologie*, vol. 6, pp. 133–172 [French translation].
- Retzius, A. (1864), *Ethnologische Schriften* [Ethnological writings], ed. G. Retzius, Norstedt, Stockholm.
- Thierry, A. (1828/1863), *Histoire des Gaulois*, new edn, Didier, Paris.
- Virchow, R. (1971), "Après la guerre", *Revue Scientifique de la France*, 26 August, pp. 195–203.
- Virchow, R. (1872a), "Über die Methode der wissenschaftlichen Anthropologie", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. 4, pp. 300–319.
- Virchow, R. (1872b), "Les cranes finnois et esthoniens comparés aux cranes des tombeaux du nord-est de l'Allemagne", *Revue Scientifique*, vol. III, pp. 313–318.
- Zimmerman, A. (2001), *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.