

# DIE SKELETTE UNTER DEM RIA FELSDACH AUF DER INSEL MALAITA, SALOMONEN

DAI Standort Kommission für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen, Anthropologie

Laufzeit seit 2015

Disziplinen Anthropologie, Anthropometrie, Paläopathologie

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## METADATEN



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Fokus Auswertung

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Partner Solomon Islands National Museum, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Solomon Islands, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Beta Analytic

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## ÜBERBLICK

Melanesia, and especially the Solomon Islands, are known for their broad variety of traditions related to ancestor veneration, but also for the practice of cannibalism which was reportedly observed still in the beginning of the 20th century. Ancestor veneration manifests in different burial customs and consequent treatment of the skeleton, mainly the skull. It is visible in the secret skull houses, built in special places in the woods, containing the skulls of ancestors, and in the beautiful carved boats, decorated with mother of pearl, holding skulls, or in other forms of worship. The places where ancestors were buried are not accessible to everyone, especially foreigners. Therefore, widespread anthropological research in the regions of the Solomon Islands is not possible.

In 2011 Johannes Moser (DAI, KAAK) discovered the site of the Ria Rockshelter (see Insel Malaita, Salomonen, on this website). It was thought to be a resting place, but later turned out to be a burial ground. As the place was, in the opinion of the local population, very unusual for a burial site, it was initially thought that the skeletons were remains of those subject to dishonorable disposal. It was even thought that they were victims of cannibalism because several parts of the skeletons seemed to be missing.

Apart from shedding some light on single individuals, anthropological investigations can contribute to the investigation of how and when prehistoric people spread through the Pacific region. With the help of epigenetic traits on the skeletons, as well as genetic and isotopic research, more information to these unsolved old questions can be provided.

## RAUM & ZEIT

# FORSCHUNG

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Who were the people buried in Ria Rockshelter? Were these people related to each other? Were they locals? What was their health status? Are there any hints in the skeletons giving information about their occupation or their daily life activities? Are the burials really related to cannibalistic activities?

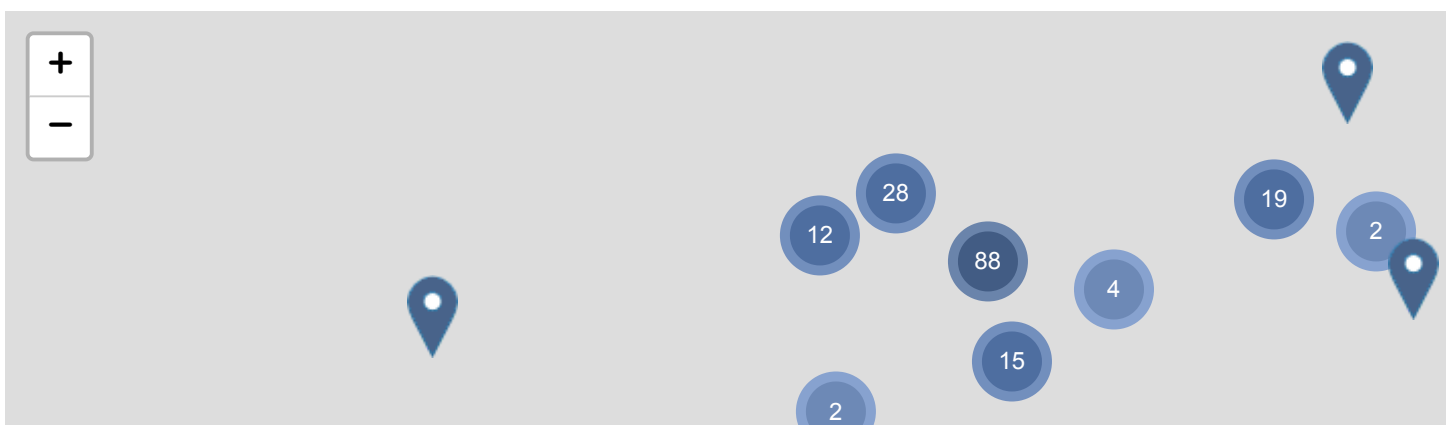
## METHODS

On first viewing, the Ria Rockshelter seemed to resemble a resting place but later turned out to hold at least three burials beneath a pebble pavement. Next to the wall was buried an adult in a supine and extended position. Bones of an infant were scattered alongside and under the adult bones. An older infant was placed parallel to the adult but in the opposite direction, also in a supine and extended position. The skeletons of the adult and older infant were radiocarbon dated to around 500 BP.



# KULTURERHALT

# VERNETZUNG



# ERGEBNISSE

## Results

Sex and age estimation using standard anthropological methods suggested the adult was a female of 25–30 years of age. The commingled bones of the young infant belonged to a 4-5 year old child whereas the older infant had an age of 11-13 years. Epigenetic traits of the teeth suggest a possible familial relationship between the female and the older child. The teeth of the adult showed irregular attrition, numerous chippings of the tooth enamel and a high level of calculus. In future research, samples of the calculus will provide information about the diet of these people. The irregular attrition may be evidence for habitual work-related activities using the teeth. Maybe the woman was braiding baskets and used her teeth as a third hand, as the people still do nowadays. The chipping of the enamel is connected to biting hard substances, e.g., cracking nuts. Food processing in daily life requires such actions.

The burials turned out to be regular, the position of the skeletons being more or less the same as people are buried nowadays. The apparently missing parts of the skeletons, that had been used to suggest possible cannibalism, had simply shifted out of anatomical position and could be recovered. Additionally, no other signs of cannibalism, such as cut marks in particular areas of the skeleton, intentional breakage of the long bones, or the impact of heat, could be detected, excluding the possibility of cannibalism of the skeletons.

Further research on the pathological findings that reveal clear signs of the hard life the three individuals lived, will be presented in the near future.

## Contributors

Solomon Islands National Museum (Director Tony Heorake, Chief Archaeologist Lawrence Kiko),  
Ministry of Culture and Tourism Solomon Islands (Director of Culture Dennis Marita),

Radiocarbon dating: AMS-Labor Erlangen, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany; Beta Analytic, Miami, Florida, USA)



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## PARTNER & FÖRDERER

### PARTNER

*Solomon Islands National Museum*

*Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Solomon Islands*

*Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg*

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