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# Headhunting and Colonialism

**Anthropology and the Circulation of Human  
Skulls in the Portuguese Empire, 1870–1930**

Ricardo Roque

*Research Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon*

palgrave  
macmillan



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*In memory of my grandparents  
Leonel Roque and Mário Afonso*

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# Illustrations and Maps

## Illustrations

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# Acknowledgements

This book has many origins. One of them may be set in Lisbon, in 1999, when wandering through the streets I witnessed several public demonstrations against the brutality of the militias and the Indonesian military, in the aftermath of the referendum for the independence of East Timor. My curiosity on this occasion inspired me to try to understand violence in Timor and its historical connections with the Portuguese presence. In addition, a remark by a former Portuguese colonial officer, a relative of the late governor Celestino da Silva, at an early stage of my research was also a key trigger for this project. He had read the manuscript reports of the 1895–96 campaigns, which he continues to keep carefully as part of family archives: ‘Look, *Doutor*’, he said to me, ‘The Portuguese were so few; the Timorese so many. How could “we” have remained in Timor so many years?’ The question, and the possibility of searching for an answer, ignited my historical and anthropological imagination.

The central mystery of this book—the question of the authenticity of the skulls at Coimbra University—first grabbed my attention as I encountered a lengthy paper of 1937. This put me on the track of this fascinating collection and the interlaced histories of scientific collecting and indigenous headhunting, in ways that I would not have predicted. The uncertainty of this collection’s provenance and the mystery that it fed on ethnological discussion in the 1930s–40s became my own historical enigma and forms the storyline of this book. In 2003, the themes of the possession and repatriation of historical human remains in British museums took centre stage in public debate. If I had not been in the United Kingdom in this period, my perception of the wider implications of skull collecting for world history, and of the contemporary significance of historicizing the colonial past of human remains collections, would not have come into being.

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Lisbon, September 2009

# Abbreviations

ADBUC	Arquivo do Departamento de Botânica da Universidade de Coimbra (Archives of the Department of Botany of the University of Coimbra)
AGC	Agência Geral das Colónias
AHM	Arquivo Histórico de Macau (Macao Historical Archives)
AHMil	Arquivo Histórico Militar (Military Historical Archives)
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Overseas Historical Archives)
AMAUC	Arquivo do Museu Antropológico da Universidade de Coimbra (Archives of the Anthropological Museum of the University of Coimbra)
AUC	Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra (University of Coimbra Archives)
<i>BAGC</i>	<i>Boletim da Agência Geral das Colónias</i>
<i>BGC</i>	<i>Boletim Geral das Colónias</i>
BPAR	Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Regional de Ponta Delgada (Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archives)
<i>BPMT</i>	<i>Boletim da Província de Macau e Timor</i>
<i>B\$GL</i>	<i>Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa</i>
CMS/CMLC	Câmara Municipal de Sintra/Casa-Museu Leal da Câmara
GMT	Governor of Macao and Timor
<i>JAIGBI</i>	<i>Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
MSNMU	Ministro e Secretário dos Negócios da Marinha e Ultramar (Portuguese Minister and Secretary of the Navy and Overseas Affairs)
<i>TSPAE</i>	<i>Trabalhos da Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia</i>
SPAE	Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia

# Glossary

Throughout this book, when possible I have adapted the terminology of the Tetum language used in the colonial period to current spelling, according to Luís Costa, *Dicionário de Tétum-Português* (Lisbon: Colibri, 2001). The original colonial terms were respected in quotations. It is to *Tetum-praça* that I refer when mentioning Tetum words and concepts. *Tetum-praça* was the *lingua franca* of the territory during the colonial period, constituting a form of Tetum influenced by the Portuguese language. All passages originally in Portuguese and French have been translated into English by the author.

*Aclála*: Timorese war cry.

*Arraial* (pl. *arraiais*): irregular armies composed of Timorese warriors and supplied by the Timorese kingdoms to the colonial government.

*Asua'in*: title bestowed on brave warriors and headhunters.

*Bando* (pl. *bandos*): instructions communicated by the governor to the kingdoms.

*Barlake*: traditional Timorese marriage contracts.

*Batuque*: Timorese drum-playing.

*Dató* (pl. *datós*): Timorese aristocrat or noble.

*Estilo* (pl. *estilos*): lawful traditional norms and customs.

*Finta*: annual tribute paid by the Timorese kingdoms to the Portuguese government in Dili.

*Liurai* (pl. *liurais*): Tetum term signifying 'lord of the land' or 'territorial lord'.

*Lorosa'e*: songs chanted on occasion of decapitation of enemies; *lorosa'e* could also designate the rites of reception of severed heads.

*Lulik*: Tetum term expressing interdiction, danger, and sacredness.

*Morador* (pl. *moradores*): special companies of indigenous irregulars established by the Portuguese in the eighteenth century.

*Nai lulik* or *rai lulik*: sacred or ritual lord.

*Pomali*: Timorese cult places or sacred sites.

*Principal* (pl. *principais*): members of the Timorese aristocracy or royalty.

*Régulo* (pl. *régulos*): etymologically 'little kings', it was the expression used by the Portuguese during the colonial period to generally designate indigenous rulers or chiefs in the Portuguese colonies.

*Serapinan* (or *serapinão*): the gift presented to the governors by the Timorese kings on occasion of vassalage rites.

*Suangue*: witch, or dangerous quasi-spiritual entity.

*Tabedais*: Timorese ceremonial dances.