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HOW DID KANT'S DEATH
MASK END UP IN TARTU?
A SURPRISING FINDING
AT THE ARCHIVE
OF ART MUSEUM
OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF TARTU*

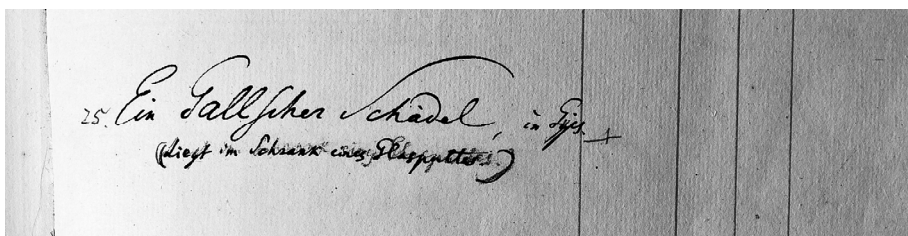
This article tells the story of how Kant's death mask ended up in the Museum of Classical Antiquities of the University of Tartu.

Key words: Kant Studies, Kant's death mask, University of Tartu.

The first 2008 issue of *Kantovsky sbornik*¹ featured my article "On the fate of Kant collection at the University of Tartu". This and my other publications on the topic focused on the discovery of Kant's death mask at the University of Tartu in the early 80s of the already last century. This amazing discovery posed the question as to how Kant's death mask ended up at the university.

At the time, one could only guess. As the employees of the Museum of Classical Antiquities of the University of Tartu (today, the Museum of Arts) – which was first to house the death mask of the great philosopher and where it was returned to after it had been found in the anatomicum – told me at the time, the museum inventory, where the mask had to be listed, was missing. One cannot exclude that it could have been moved during the WWI evacuation of the university to Voronezh, where a part of the art collection of the University of Tartu is still kept. I have contacted my Voronezh colleagues on more than one occasion asking them to locate the mentioned inventory. However, it has never been found. One could only suppose that Kant's mask was brought for Professor Jäsche who hallowed everything relating to his teacher. This hypothesis has not been substantiated by any documents. One could do anything with the unlisted mask sandwiched between other anatomic and physiological exhibits on a shelf in the anatomicum. If it had vanished, no one would have noticed it. Only when the mask left the anatomicum, and it was established whose post-mortem image it captures, the mask was insured for 1m roubles.

So as if to corroborate the overly optimistic, in my opinion, saying that “all secrets will come out”, 30 years after Kant’s mask had become one of the treasures of the University of Tartu, the veil of mystery lifted. The Museum employees found out not only that Kant’s death mask was indeed listed, but also that it was listed by Karl Morgenstern – the director of the university library and arts museum, which was housed in his flat, and the keeper of a part of Kant’s archive, which was handed to him by his friend Jäsche! The document was an unrecognised resident of the University’s Museum of Arts; it was an inventory of busts (mostly copies of ancient sculptures) kept in the Museum. It was revealed that Morgenstern had registered the bust-like death mask of the great philosopher (see fig.) in this book. It was also mentioned that the mask was received after the collection of the German physician Franz Joseph Gall had been sold out and appeared in the University Museum in 1825–1832.



The record made by Karl Morgenstern in the inventory about Kant’s death mask from Gall’s collection purchased in 1825–1832:

25. Ein Gallischer Schädel, in Gyps (liegt im Schrank eines Glas...[unreadable])

Discovered by Janika Anderson, an employee of the Museum of Arts of the University of Tartu

The physician and anatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) studied the localisation of mental functions in the brain and developed a method of identifying intellectual and moral abilities of a person on the basis of the outer appearance of the skull, which was called “phrenology”. Although phrenology was very popular in the first half of the 19th century, the development of neurophysiology demonstrated the inconsistency of Gall’s theory. However, his interests explain why he assembled a vast collection of death masks and skulls, which also included, according to Kant’s testamentary executioner, E. A. Ch. Wasianski [3, S. 304], the philosopher’s death mask. When the collection was being sold out, Derpt University, among whose employees were such admirers of Kant as Jäsche and Morgenstern, purchased the death mask².

As to the mask itself, we can be certain about the name of the artist who cast it. It was Prof Andreas Johann Friedrich Knorre (1763–1841) of the Königsberg School of Arts [5, S. 334]. K.H. Clasen’s book [2] stresses that the mould made by Prof. Knorre was used to cast three bust-like masks. One of them ended up at the Berlin Museum of Anatomy, the other was owned by the Prussian Society of Antiquities (that copy was damaged and later restored), the third one was housed

² I express my heartfelt gratitude to the director of the Museum of Arts of Tartu University, Inge Kukk, for the valuable information as to how Kant’s death mask appeared at Tartu University and where it was registered.

by the state archive in Königsberg [2, S. 27]. As we can see, the author of the book did not know about the fourth copy of the mask, which was an item of Gall's collection and later purchased by the University of Tartu. However, not many knew about it.

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