

SOME INTERESTING ANATOMICAL EXHIBITS*

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ABSTRACT

I procured two skeletons, one of ivory and other of wood, which were rare and extremely interesting works of art. At present they are kept in the museum of the department of Anatomy, Andhra Medical College, Vizagapatam. These were purchased by me for Rs. 75/- during the month of April -1926. The ivory skeleton is 5ft 6-1/2 inches in height and weighs 23 lbs. The skeletons were ordered to be made by the then illustrious King Serfoji. He had for his English tutor, the Danish missionary Schwartz. The period of these skeletons is estimated somewhere between 1805-1811 A.D.

I have at present in my possession two skeletons one of ivory and the other of wood, which have now been temporarily housed in the museum of the department of anatomy, Medical College, Vizagapatam. I hereby wish to express my sincere thanks to the Principal, Lt. Col. F. J. Anderson, M. C., M. B., F. R. C. S., who has been pleased to accord me permission to have them there. I can find no place more suitable than the Anatomy Museum as they are anatomy specimens and as an opportunity is afforded thereby to the visitors of the College of seeing these rare and extremely interesting works of art. Vizagapatam is famous for its beautiful ivory, sandalwood and tortoise-shell works of art. I sent the skeletons to a local workman for being overhauled and polished up. He expressed his intense admiration and appreciation of the exquisite craftsmanship. It is an exceedingly difficult task to shape ivory and wood to resemble human bones. Some means of softening and moulding ivory was known perhaps to the ancients only, as evidenced by the colossal statues of ivory of the Zeus of Olympia and Athena of Parthenon. But this work is one of simple carving. It is only those who are acquainted with the irregular and complicated contour of the bones of the human skull that can realise the superb nature and excellence of the work of art. The prevailing opinion of the local workmen is that, even if a fabulous sum is offered, it is well nigh impossible to execute specimens of similar

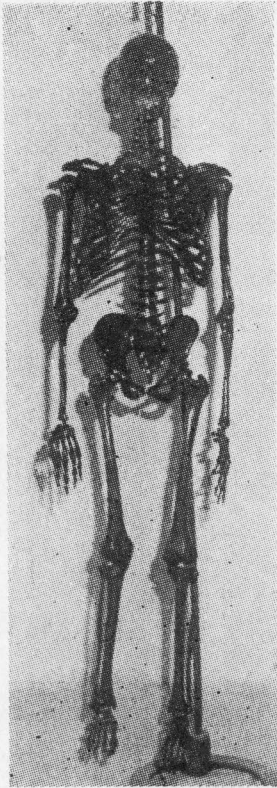
* Reprinted from the 'Antiseptic' Vol. 29, January, 1932.

** (Then) Prof. of Anatomy, Medical College, Vizagapatam.

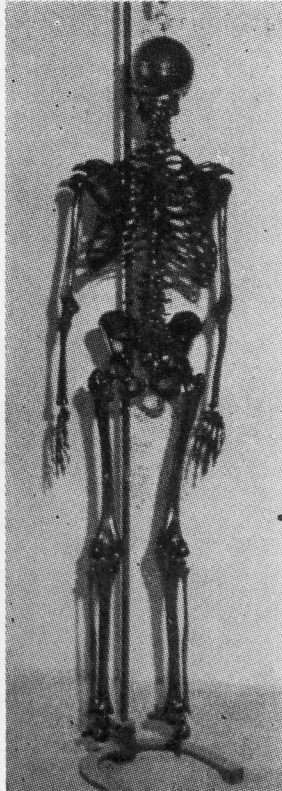
kind as there are no skilled workmen at the present day. The material again is very expensive. The long bones femur, tibia, fibula, humerus, radius and ulna are all single pieces and whole tusks would have had to be used for fashioning these bones and there should have been such a waste of material in the course of their preparation. The ivory skeleton is 5 ft. 6½ inches in height and weighs 23 lbs.

Under strange and lucky circumstances did I come by these skeletons. I am sure they would have been seen exhibited in the spacious hall adjoining the famous Saraswathi Mahal Library of the Tanjore palace, which is well-known in South India for its wealth of incunabula and rare and valuable palm-leaf manuscripts in various languages, by millions of visitors to the historic city of Tanjore. As a young boy, I have seen these skeletons myself but never knew then that they were made of materials other than bones and even well remember that the guide used to point them out with awe and reverence as the sacred remains of the distant cousins of the last Mahratta King, Ananta Sivaji. In fact they may be said to have formed a part of the valuable annexæ to the library comprising models and specimens, obviously intended for instructional purposes. I am given to understand that the skeletons were made to order by the illustrious King Serfoji who was not only a brilliant scholar himself but a munificent patron of learning and fine arts. He had for his English tutor, the Danish missionary Schwartz whose memory has been perpetuated by the Chapel located in the picturesque miniature Shivaganga tank fortress at Tanjore, to the east of the Shivaganga tank which is looked upon as a spa by the residents of Tanjore. It was during the reign of the King that considerable additions are said to have been made to the library at the suggestions of his exotic tutor. It would appear that the sovereign evinced a keen interest in the study of the subject of human anatomy and an articulated human bony skeleton was duly installed in the library. The presence of a bony skeleton – the remains of the human body within the precincts of the habitation of the royal household is said to have been deemed sacrilegious and strongly objected to by the queens and other conservative and orthodox relatives. Thereupon the King out of deference and regard to the sentiments and feelings of his kith and kin is said to have placed an order for two skeletons made of materials which were unobjectionable. These specimens were executed by the skilled artists of Tanjore who flourished under the royal benefactors during the early part of the nineteenth century. From information that was furnished by the oldest descendants of the palace and from documents extant in the

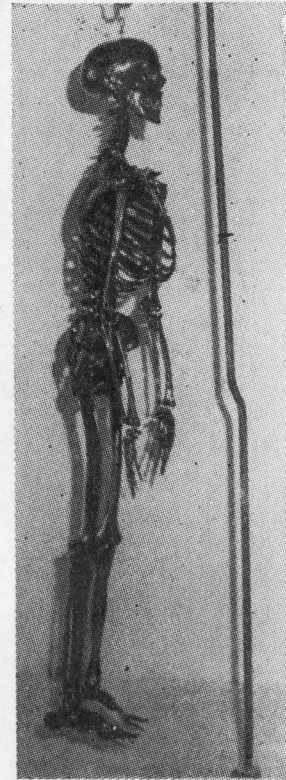
SANDAL WOOD SKELETON



Anterior

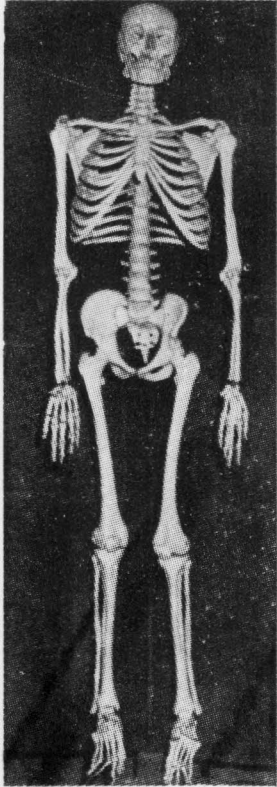


Posterior

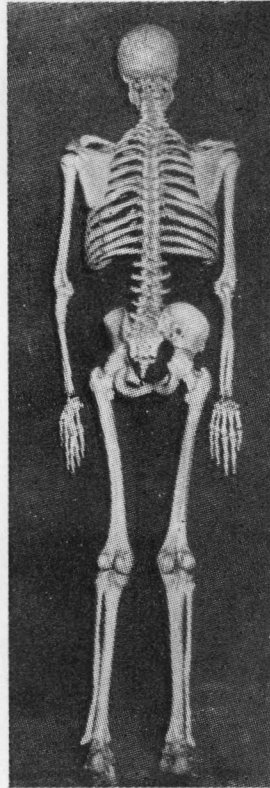


Lateral

IVC RY SKELETON



Anterior



Posterior



Lateral

Courtesy: Principal, Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam.

library, it is estimated that they should have been prepared some time between 1805 and 1810 A. D. The skeletons may be said therefore to be about a century and a quarter old.

The erstwhile descendants of the once magnificent, puissant and valiant Mahratta kings were reduced to such a sorry plight that the art treasures, antique curios and expensive pieces of furniture came unfortunately under the hammer at the instance of the exacting creditors and many costly articles were sold away at just nominal prices. The two skeletons with the rosewood almirah for holding them were bought by a friend of mine who had an eye to business for about Rs 75/-. He went in for them with a view to profit by the sale of ivory that could be had by dismantling the skeleton. He congratulated himself in having struck a veritable bargain and took the precious articles home but his wife and children got such a fright that he had to get them removed soon after to some other place in the neighbourhood. He wanted to effect a sale of them as quickly as possible. The local High schools were too poor to buy them for even the cost price for which he was prepared to part with them. I chanced to meet the gentleman who mentioned to me the details of his purchase. Interested as I was in anatomical specimens (I was then lecturer in Anatomy in the Tanjore Medical School), I expressed my wish to go in for them. I paid the amount straight away and had them removed to my house during April 1926. Since then they have been with me.

Ivory sculpture and decorative arts have ever held an honoured place in all ages for the adornment of the royal palaces. Ivory has been used for making things too numerous to mention and but too well known to all. The Kensington Museum has a very large and varied collection of Indian ivory carving believed to be a little older than the seventeenth century but this, I should consider, is indeed a unique use ivory has been put to. I think that these are certainly rare specimens of art. I should like to exhibit them in fine arts exhibitions here and abroad where connoisseurs of art can have an opportunity of seeing these excellent specimens of Indian craftsmanship and it is my ambition to make a gift of them some day to centrally situated museum of anatomy in India.

सारांश

कुछ रीचक शरीर रचना सम्बन्धि प्रदर्श

आर. के. राव

मैंने दो अस्थिपंजर, एक हाथी दांत का और दूसरा लकड़ी का था, को प्राप्त किया जो कि दुर्लभ एवं अतिरोचक कलाकार्य के थे। इस समय उन्हें शरीर रचना विभाग, आंध्रा मेडिकल कालेज, विशाखापत्तनम के संग्रहालय में रखा गया है। मैंने उन्हें अप्रैल १९२६ में ७५ रु. में खरीदा था। हाथी दांत के अस्थिपंजर की ऊंचाई ५ फीट ६.५ इंच और वजन २३ पौण्ड है। इन अस्थि पंजरों को उस समय के प्रख्यात राजा सरफोजी के आदेश द्वारा बनाया गया था। उन्हें उनके अंग्रेजी ट्यूटर जो कि डॉनिश मिशिनरी स्वार्टज के थे, के लिए यह बनाया था। इन अस्थि पंजरों का समय लगभग १८०५ से १८१० ईसवी सन के बीच आंका जाता है।