**PHOTOGRAPHS OF ABORIGINES OF NORTH-EAST AUSTRALIA:
A COLLECTION OF EARLY QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL
PHOTOGRAPHS, MADE BY AMALIE DIETRICH FOR THE
MUSEUM GODEFFROY**

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The German naturalist-collector Amalie Dietrich (1821-1891) worked in Queensland from 1863 to 1872, assembling for the Museum Godeffroy of Hamburg large collections of botanical, zoological, ethnographic and anthropological specimens. Her work has remained relatively unknown in Australia, however, since the collections were shipped to Germany and most of the relevant literature is in German.¹

One small but interesting part of her ethnographic collections is a set of very early photographs of Queensland Aborigines. The first reference to these photographs appeared in February 1874, in the *Museum Godeffroy Catalog V*, where an advertisement for 'Duplicates from the Ethnographic Collection' offered a complete set of 150 photographs, including 'Copies of photographs of Aborigines of North-East Australia (Colon. Queensland)', obtainable in either *carte-de-visite* or cabinet format.

Details of the subject matter and provenance of the Museum Godeffroy photographs were not available until the subsequent publication in 1880 of the *Verzeichniss der Photographien des Museum Godeffroy welche Australien und die Südsee betreffen*² (Inventory of photographs of the Museum Godeffroy in respect of Australia and the Pacific), in which each photograph was listed and the subject matter described individually. The Australian (i.e. Queensland) group was quite small, comprising only nineteen photographs, fifteen from Brisbane and four from Rockhampton (see Table 1). This rare publication is apparently a preprint, issued under separate cover, of the relevant section of the book *Die ethnographisch-anthropologische Abtheilung des Museum Godeffroy in Hamburg*, which appeared in the following year and gave a complete list and description of every item in these collections.³

The firm of J.C. Godeffroy & Sohn was declared bankrupt in December 1879 and Johann Cesar VI Godeffroy died in 1883. Negotiations were entered into with the heirs in an attempt to retain the Museum Godeffroy collections in Hamburg. The question of cost, as well as associated stipulations, led to difficulties and delays, the Museum Godeffroy building was about to be demolished, and talks foundered, until in 1885 the Leipzig Museum für Völkerkunde purchased the whole ethnographic collection from its owner, Dr Wilhelm Godeffroy of Berlin, for the sum of 95 000 marks.⁴

The initial research into Amalie Dietrich's Australian collections was carried out under the Science Humanities Scholarship of the National Museum of Victoria.

¹ Sumner, MS.

² Museum Godeffroy, 1880:3-4, 'Australien. Colonie:Queensland'. The only known copy of this *Verzeichniss* is held by the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg.

<i>Museum Godeffroy Number</i>	<i>Leipzig MVK Number</i>	<i>Present location</i>	<i>Description *</i>	<i>Provenance</i>
41	217	JOL	Four Aborigines in upright position, one kneeling, a woman lying; showing body-painting with black colour, the men armed with spear, wooden sword and boomerang.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
42	219	JMG, 5	Aborigine, throwing a boomerang, scar decoration on his back.	—
43	208	L; JOL	Three men and a woman with a child in her arms, the latter kneeling, the first three standing upright; armed with spear, boomerang and stone axe.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
44	204	L	Two females, a girl and a woman, standing upright; with pubic covers made of strings; the girl with scar decoration on her stomach.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
45	206	JMG, 2	Woman, kneeling, with a piglet in her arms.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
46	214	JMG, 6	Man, standing, upper torso; hair worn in the shape of a tall bun, made by binding with a string; scar decoration on his chest.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
47	205	?	Woman, almost identical picture to No. 45, taken from the side.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
48	218	similar in JOL	Two men, standing; one armed with shield and wooden sword, the other with a spear; both with pubic cloths.	Brisbane,
49	220	JMG, 3	Man with club and shield, the club at body level; the shield held raised.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
50	216	?	Almost identical with No. 49, except the man takes a somewhat different position, holding the shield against his lower body and the club above his head.	Brisbane Moreton Bay
51	215	JMG, 4	Man with scar decoration on his chest and shoulders, in a sitting position, characteristic picture.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
52	207	JMG, 1; JOL	Two women in sitting position, upper torso; one with a head band, both with scar decoration on the breast.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
53	211	?	Group of five women and two men, the former in crouching position.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
54	210	JOL	Group of three women and four men in camp; two of the men standing, all others crouching.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
55	209	L	Group of four women and five men, the latter with sticks and axes, standing; led by a white man, the women crouching.	Brisbane, Moreton Bay
189	212	L	Old man, upper torso. Scar decoration on his shoulders.	Rockhampton
190	202	L	Woman, scar decoration on her breast, upper torso.	Rockhampton
192	212	L	Young man, upper torso.	Rockhampton
193	203	L	A girl and two women, three-quarter picture.	Rockhampton

* My translation from Schmeltz, in Schmeltz and Krause 1881.

Key: JOL — John Oxley Library, Brisbane

JMG — *Journal des Museum Godeffroy*, Heft X, Tafel 1

L — Leipzig, Museum für Völkerkunde

The photographic collection was included in the sale, as is verified by the entries in the Leipzig accession register,⁵ but only seven of the Australian photographs can now be located there, three from Brisbane and the four from Rockhampton. Another six of the Australian photographs, of Moreton Bay (Brisbane) Aborigines, were published in 1902 in the much-delayed issue of the *Journal des Museum Godeffroy* titled 'Australier' (Australians), Heft X.⁶ The fact that these six are missing from Leipzig suggest that they may have been lent to Rudolf Virchow for inclusion in that publication, and not returned. It is thus possible from these two sources to reproduce thirteen of the original nineteen Aboriginal photographs.

Although many of the Museum Godeffroy photographs of Pacific Islanders were made by other Godeffroy collectors, there is no suggestion that Amalie Dietrich took the Australian photographs herself. This is also borne out by the fact that the Museum Godeffroy did not hold the original negatives of these.⁷ Rather, they are studio portraits of a type readily available for purchase in the larger Australian cities and towns during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Aborigines covered with loincloths and arranged in artificial poses. The number of such photographs still existing indicates both the skill and ingenuity of some early photographers and the existence of a ready market for such items. The La Trobe Library (Melbourne) has an extensive and well documented collection of early Aboriginal photographs, with particular emphasis on Victoria.⁸ The popular King postcard series (Sydney) produced numerous Aboriginal portraits in the early decades of the present century.

With the photographs acquired in Queensland by Amalie Dietrich we are concerned, however, with a somewhat different case. Amalie Dietrich was in Brisbane from August 1863 to the close of 1865; if it can be assumed that she purchased the photographs during this period, then they number among the earliest Aboriginal photographs from that location.

The whole question of dating and locating early Aboriginal photographs is a difficult one, particularly in Queensland. With the copies of the Museum Godeffroy photographs now available, there are of course no original trademarks or photographers names to be found. An attempt was therefore made to find other prints of the same pictures in those institutions, such as museums and specialist libraries, which have collections of historical photographs. Unfortunately these holdings are usually classified under broad headings, such as 'Queensland Aborigines' or even 'Australian Aborigines', are often undated, and have no record of photographer.

The John Oxley Library in Brisbane holds a photograph album which contains two of the same photographs as those of the Museum Godeffroy.⁹ The first, corresponding to MG 43,

3 Schmeltz and Krause 1881, especially section II.I, 'Verzeichniss der Photographien': 503ff.

4 Sumner, MS, section III.1; Panning 1956:1-20, especially 14-15.

5 For some reason the Leipzig accession register enters the photographs of women before those of groups, followed by men only, so the sequence of accession numbers is quite different from that of the Museum Godeffroy. See Table 1.

6 Although this volume is ostensibly by Virchow, the anthropological text was written by Krause and the ethnographic text by Schmeltz, both being excerpts from their 1881 work (see n.3 above). See also Sumner MS, section II.4.b.

7 Schmeltz and Krause 1881:503n.

8 Some outstanding examples were recently published in Reilly and Carew 1983: Plates 45-52.

9 The Archer Album, API-1, John Oxley Library, Brisbane.

has been cropped to show only the upper bodies of the three men.¹⁰ Being somewhat clearer than the Leipzig copy, it reveals that the axe worn in the third man's belt is not of stone, as described by Schmeltz (see Table 1), but of metal, with a handmade shaft. The second, corresponding to MG 52, is also cropped to show only the heads of the two women, and is printed as a reverse image to the Museum Godeffroy copy, with the pipe-smoker on the left.¹¹

Two further photographs from this album are probably the missing photographs MG 41 and MG 54, since they match the descriptions of those photographs given in the table and show some of the same people and weapons.¹² These two are posed tableaux against a painted backcloth depicting the Brisbane River with luxuriant vegetation.

The album contains two more photographs, apparently from the same photographer's studio, but not held in the Museum Godeffroy collections. One is a group of six men standing with spears, one man kneeling, and six women or children sitting.¹³ The backdrop in this picture is the same as that on the other photographs proposed here as the missing MG 41 and MG 54. The other photograph shows three men standing, with boomerangs and a shield, and one man kneeling, with a boomerang.¹⁴

All the Aboriginal photographs in this album have been dated by the John Oxley Library as 'circa 1868', based on the presence later in the same album of views bearing 1868 in their caption. A further confirmation is the depiction on the backdrop of the first Brisbane bridge, a temporary wooden structure opened in June 1865, which collapsed in November 1867.

Another single photograph, filed under 'unidentified location' in the John Oxley Library collection, appears to be the work of the same photographer: one man is standing with a spear, a second man sitting cross-legged with upraised club and shield.¹⁵ The latter weapons seem to be the same as those in MG 49, and the photograph may represent a slightly different pose to that in the missing MG 48.

Finally, a related photograph from the same (unidentified location) source is a portrait of an Aboriginal woman in an unusual head-dress, apparently a cap made of feathers.¹⁶ The same woman appears in profile and wearing the head-dress, seated third from the left, in MG 55.

The earliest *Directory of Queensland*, published in 1868, listed seven photographers in Brisbane, none of whose work is held today in an identifiable personal collection.¹⁷ It is possible, however, that this set of Brisbane Aboriginal photographs, purchased by Amalie Dietrich for the Museum Godeffroy, may be attributed to the photographer J. Watson, who

¹⁰ John Oxley Library (JOL), negative number 18206.

¹¹ JOL, negative number 15111.

¹² JOL, negative numbers 18212 and 18208 respectively.

¹³ JOL, negative number 18209.

¹⁴ JOL, negative number 18210.

¹⁵ JOL, negative number 60139.

¹⁶ JOL, no negative number.

¹⁷ They were: C. Bevan, S. Duesbury (or Duesberg), D. Marquis, D.F. Metcalf, D. Metcalf (perhaps two studios of the same man?), J. Watson, and A. Weddell.

EARLY QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Rockhampton Aborigines circa 1867,
courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig

Brisbane District Aborigines *circa* 1868,
courtesy John Oxley Library, Brisbane

EARLY QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Brisbane District Aborigines circa 1868,
courtesy John Oxley Library, Brisbane

Aborigines of Brisbane, Moreton Bay (*Journal des Museum Godeffroy*, pt 10, plate 1), courtesy National Museum of Victoria

EARLY QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Aborigines of Brisbane, Moreton Bay, courtesy of Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig

Post card 1

Post card 2

Post cards in Diyari language from Rebecca Maltilina to Dorothea Ruediger

POSTCARDS

Post card 3

Post card 4

Post cards in Diyari language from Rebecca Maltina to Dorothea Ruediger

Post card 6

Post card 7

Post cards in Diyari language from Rebecca Maltalina to Dorothea Ruediger

EARLY QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

was operating in Brisbane from 1855.¹⁸

If the above identifications are accepted, there remain only three unlocated photographs from the Museum Godeffroy Australian set. Of these, numbers 47 and 50 are described as almost identical with numbers 45 and 49 respectively, so that only number 53, a group of five women and two men, is unaccounted for.

All the Brisbane photographs are posed studio portraits, adults of both sexes wearing cloths draped and tied around their lower bodies. The women's breasts are not covered, probably in order to show scar tissue patterns. Traditional weapons featured in several photographs include a boomerang (41, 42, 43), spears (41, 43, 46, 55), a small painted shield (49), and a club with a 'pineapple' head (49). Items of Aboriginal dress depicted include pubic aprons (44) and a feathered head-dress (55). Cicatrisation is shown in 42, 44, 46, 51, 52.

Items of European influence include a clay pipe (52), tomahawks (43, 55), a piglet (45), cloth head-bands (46, 49, 52, 55), a trooper's cap (55), and a metal bucket (54). An unidentified European possibly the photographer himself, appears in number 55.

The four photographs which Amalie Dietrich purchased in Rockhampton pose an even greater problem than those from Brisbane.¹⁹ Amalie's stay in Rockhampton was shorter and less productive than is commonly assumed, extending from early 1866 until early 1867. Only two photographers are listed for Rockhampton in the 1868 *Directory of Queensland*: John Ness and J.W. Wilde. It has not been possible to obtain any details regarding either of these men.

The four Rockhampton Aboriginal photographs are straightforward portraits of men and women facing the lens directly, with no artful postures. Lower bodies are covered with cloth, upper bodies are scarred, except for a young man with penetrating gaze who holds a spear (MG 192). In the final portrait of three females, two wear cloth headbands and the youngest has a clay pipe in her mouth.

It is hoped that the reproduction here of the Museum Godeffroy photographs will lead to further insights into the history of early photography, particularly of Aboriginal portraiture, since this small group of Amalie Dietrich photographs contains some of Queensland's first Aboriginal photographs and thereby constitutes an intriguing and valuable historical record.

¹⁸ It is widely believed that the veteran Queensland photographer Thomas Mathewson set up his Brisbane studio in 1864 (see J. Cato 1955:176-8), but this is now regarded as erroneous. R.J. Longhurst, John Oxley Library, pers. comm.

¹⁹ The omission of number 191 from the Museum Godeffroy register would seem to indicate that there were originally five Rockhampton photographs.

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