

Article

Racializing Pacific Islanders: Jewish Facial Features, Popular Anthropology, and the German Colonization of the Palau Islands, 1873–1925

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Abstract: In 1862, the German naturalist Carl Semper traveled through the Palau Islands, a Spanish colony in the Southwestern Pacific. He published an account of his travels in 1873 and claimed that the people of Palau possessed Jewish facial features. Although his book was rejected by professional anthropologists in Imperial Germany, popular anthropologists widely circulated his observation that Palauans shared physical characteristics with Jewish people. This article demonstrates that the racialization of Pacific Islanders, specifically those inhabiting the Palau Islands, was rooted in antisemitic notions about Jewish people as a race built on stereotypes about particular traits. This topic has been thus far overlooked by scholars of German colonialism, German anthropology, and German discourses on the Pacific Islands, particularly the Palau Islands.

Keywords: Carl Semper; Palau Islands; Jewish facial features; Imperial Germany; popular anthropology; German racial science; antisemitism; Adolf Heilborn; German colonialism; Nazi Germany

1. Introduction

In 1862, the German naturalist Carl Semper arrived in the Palau Islands, a colony nominally in the possession of Spain in the southwest Pacific Ocean, north of New Guinea and east of the Philippines. He had come to study local flora and fauna as well as to recover from a bout of dysentery he had contracted while traveling in the Philippines. When the ship conveying him to Palau required emergency repairs, Semper was forced to remain in the islands longer than he had anticipated. More than a decade later in 1873, he published an account of his trip that described his interactions with the Palauans in intimate detail. Recalling his first encounter with the local inhabitants, the German naturalist wrote that he observed “a small man with pronounced Jewish facial features [*jüdischen Gesichtszügen*]” (Semper 1873, pp. 33–34).

Semper’s peculiar remark derived from his attempt to situate the ethnic background of the peoples of Palau. Identifying other physical characteristics, specifically their darker skin color and hair, he compared them to “all Polynesian Negro tribes [*Negerstämmen*]” and noted that their “facial features” were akin to “the Papuan type” (*ibid.*, p. 33). Semper referred to the earlier work of Salomon Müller, another German naturalist, on the Papuans of New Guinea in the colony of the Dutch East Indies, stating that he located an illustration depicting a man “who could very well have been the brother of that man” he had observed in Palau (Müller 1839–1844; Semper 1873, p. 34). He then claimed that travelers who had seen Papuans or other “Negro races [*Negerrassen*] in the Pacific Ocean” universally described these people as having “distinctively Jewish physiognomies [*jüdische Physiognomien*]” (Semper 1873, p. 34). Semper later reiterated his argument in an appendix to the book.

This article argues that the German naturalist’s racialization of Palauans based on imagined Jewish physical traits became the standard view among popular anthropologists in Imperial Germany. Several scholars readily took up Semper’s theory prior to and during the period of German imperialism in the islands. Although not all scholars shared the



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German naturalist's view, they nonetheless failed to refute it in their own work. Ideas about Jewish people as a race therefore significantly informed the means by which the racialization of colonized people unfolded in Imperial Germany. These perspectives offer an extension of as well as an important variation on the work of Sander Gilman, which examines the intersections between images of Jewish and African people in nineteenth-century European science (Gilman 1991, p. 171).

This approach to German colonial science also adds a new dimension to Susanne Zantop's study of fantasies in precolonial Germany (Zantop 1997). First, it illustrates the importance of racial others, namely non-Jewish people's ideas about Jewish people, at home for making sense of others abroad. Also, it shows how this particular fantasy, initially set in motion by Semper and then reiterated by scholars after him, operated in the context of the Palau Islands before and during the arrival of German imperialism there. Finally, it demonstrates that some level of fantasizing about Jewish racial characteristics was already present prior to Semper's travels in the Pacific, which then increased as he sought to discover other people's racialized ancestries. Stereotypes about Jewish people's physical attributes—an important fantasy in the history of Germany, to be sure—thus informed ideas about other races, in this case ones that eventually came under German colonial rule.

It is no surprise that when certain scientific studies of Jewish people began to be taken up in Germany, in fact, after the work of Semper, it turned out, that much information would be presumed as self-evident. In a section of Richard Andree's 1881 popular scientific work, *On the Ethnography of the Jews*, for example, he remarked that, "We all know the 'Jewish type', we immediately differentiate the Jew by the face, the entire disposition, the alignment of the head, the gesticulation or even when he opens his mouth and starts talking and even one of the most assimilated, if the expression is permitted, is still recognizable by some feature of his tribe [*seines Stammes*]" (Andree 1881, p. 37). The author's point is that Germans already knew how to recognize Jewish people by analyzing their physical characteristics and so his ethnographic study apparently merely affirmed what had already been underway in Germany, if not elsewhere. Semper might as well have said exactly what Andree had articulated, since it assumed that readers would know exactly which Jewish facial features and physiognomies he was referring to.

Looking at this aspect of Semper's work presents a perspective that has been completely overlooked by scholars writing about him. Eberhard Hempel's study of the naturalist's contributions to German anthropology through his travels in both Palau and the Philippines ultimately concludes that he was an "outsider" (Hempel 1996, p. 246). Yet, looking at Semper's travel account and others' appropriations of it reveals that his impact reached beyond the arena of professional anthropology and into publications by popular ethnographers, whose work likely influenced the general public in Imperial Germany more directly. Gabriele Dürbeck's study of German literature on the Pacific Islands includes an extensive analysis of the naturalist's book on Palau, but it too, like Hempel's work, misses the connection between the construction of race via reference to Jewish traits, this despite her emphasis on the formation of stereotypes about Pacific Islanders (Dürbeck 2007, pp. 133–58).

Dürbeck's book also examines Arthur Baessler's 1895 *Pictures of the South Pacific*, a photographic collection of Pacific Island peoples (Dürbeck 2007, pp. 110–33). Although published more than twenty years after Semper's account, it made the exact same claim about the supposed presence of Jewish physical features among Pacific Islanders. Baessler did not include Palau in his book, but nonetheless wrote of Papuans in New Guinea, at this point under German imperial rule, that several displayed "a prominent Jewish type" without specifying what these traits included (Baessler 1895, p. 91). In later discussing the inhabitants of Tonga, he asserted that both men and women exhibited "a strong Jewish type" (*ibid.*, p. 302). Like her analysis of Semper's book, this detail does not appear in Dürbeck's discussion of Baessler.

The persistence of the claim about Palauans first deployed by Semper demonstrates the on-going appeal of this particular colonial fantasy as well as the willingness of others to

uncritically adopt it in their own work. By seeing Palauan and other Pacific Island people as possessing particular physical traits of Jewish people, it made the promise of an overseas empire more translatable to German audiences as an experience not so different from the social relations which took place in the homeland. If Jewish people could be assimilated, even if unevenly and, from the vantage of Germans like Andree, incompletely, then so could colonial subjects in the Pacific Islands, albeit for labor projects inside the colonies themselves. The fact that they were separate races did not necessarily mean that they could not become a meaningful and productive part of Germany society.

Although not directly part of the political antisemitic movement in Imperial Germany, the account by Semper and the others' works which adopted his ideas about race followed a similar trajectory, increasing in scale. Political antisemitism and racial stereotypes about Jewish people in popular scientific writing ran parallel in contributing to German social mentalities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even if a person did not espouse active or overt hatred or fear toward Jewish people, he or she still might carry particular notions about them, keeping the minority group apart as an "other" within the wider society. While this situation did not necessarily lead in a straight line from Imperial Germany to the National Socialist era, it does show a heretofore unexplored area of the racial scientific origin to viewing Jewish people that was shared with people first colonized by Spain, then later Germany (and Japan and the United States, it turned out).

German colonial science, in the case of Semper's study, created before Germany obtained colonies, though nonetheless produced in a colony, is important for understanding the sources of ideas about race, a category including people both within Germany and without. Semper was trained as a zoologist at the University of Würzburg, where he earned his doctorate in 1856, specializing in comparative morphology, the study of animal forms (Schuberg 1895, p. iv). Lynn K. Nyhart analyzes the prominent role of animal morphology in German universities in the nineteenth century but does not address the ways that it may have operated within colonial contexts and contributed to ideas about race, as the example of Semper points out (Nyhart 1995). Although it seems an unlikely place for early scientific notions about races inside and outside of Europe, this article shows that colonial zoology created a significant foundation for racializing human beings.

In analyzing a series of instances of racializing people at home and abroad, this article first examines Semper's book for the ways it uses physical traits of Jewish people to describe the racial origins of the people of Palau. It then looks at the reception of his work and his remarks about the alleged shared traits between Palauan and Jewish people. Finally, it investigates how other scholars integrated his ideas about race into their own work prior to and after the German colonization of the Palau Islands. Semper's impact on popular anthropology was not that of an outsider, but rather as an insider, whose apparently authoritative observations of the people of Palau persisted before, during, and after the years of German colonial rule. This article does not delve into actual biological connections between Jewish and Palauan people, which might be best researched using studies of DNA. Rather, the present discussion seeks to understand how in Germany the development of ideas about different races from opposite sides of the globe intersected and operated in both national and colonial contexts.

2. "Jewish" Physical Characteristics in *Die Palau-Inseln* (1873)

Although trained as a zoologist, Semper was instrumental in the 1870 founding of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*. He corresponded with Rudolf Virchow, its first president, about the organization of the Society, acting as one of the original five signers of its governing statutes (Andree 1976, vol. 2, pp. 450–57; Semper 1870, p. 6). Semper also served as the first General Secretary and editor of the Society's correspondence newspaper, where he published works on Palauans, one of which later appeared in the appendix to his travel account (Semper 1871a, 1871b). Neither of these items dealt with the facial features of the people of Palau, however, so he appears to

have added the observations alleging Jewish physical characteristics among these Pacific Islanders between the publication of the articles and the travel account.

Early German anthropologists, including Virchow, sought the origins of the black inhabitants of the Philippines and New Guinea in the early 1870s. Dubbed the “Negrito Question” after the Spanish name for the black people of the Philippines with shorter statures, German anthropologists utilized skulls and other physical remains to determine a connection between sub-Saharan Africans and the so-called “Negritos”, who actually consisted of numerous different cultural and linguistic groups in the islands of Southeast Asia and Oceania (Zimmerman 2001, p. 301, n. 54). Although the question was not definitively resolved, it demonstrated that physical traits were the key to comprehending links between peoples as far as these German scholars believed at this point. Semper’s descriptions of Palauan people and imagined connection to Jewish people was rooted in the same method. He had no skulls or human remains to work with, only living specimens from whom he derived his observations.

Semper’s discussion of race, Palauans, and Jewish traits in the appendix to his book rendered his thinking about these factors an important frame as bookends describing his first encounter and his subsequent reflections as a scientist. As any good scholar might, he cited the work of others, in this case studies of Papuans by the British travelers George Windsor Earl and Alfred Russel Wallace. Yet, neither writer explicitly stated that the Papuans—recognized as the black-skinned inhabitants—of New Guinea had Jewish physical traits.¹ Earl nonetheless wrote of the Papuans with a startling idea of race that they “have a decided negro character”, which included (italics in original) “broad noses, thick and prominent lips, receding foreheads and chins, and that turbid colour of what should be the *white* of the eye, which is apt to give the countenance a sinister impression” (Earl 1853, p. 3).

In something of a more neutral vein, Wallace described the New Guinean as one whose “face is somewhat elongated, the forehead flattish, the brows very prominent, the nose is large, rather arched and high, the base thick, the nostrils broad, with the aperture hidden, owing to the tip of the nose being elongated; the mouth is large, the lips thick and protuberant” (Wallace 1869, vol. 2, pp. 445–46). He concluded that the “face thus has an altogether more European aspect than in the Malay, owing to the large nose; and the peculiar form of this organ, with the more prominent brows and the character of the hair on the head, face, and body enable us at a glance to distinguish the two races” (ibid., vol. 2, p. 446). So, it is clear that Semper himself took the step in claiming that Papuans “often have featured Jewish (European) physiognomies”, referring specifically to Jewish Europeans rather than Jewish people from other continents, and “seemingly Jewish noses” (Semper 1873, p. 362).² He then argued that “these Jewish facial features” (ibid., p. 363) are found in the book by Salomon Müller and cited two illustrations from it (see Figure 1). With these observations, he sought to strengthen his argument that the people of Palau were descended from Papuans. As Tudor Parfitt shows, even though the German naturalist did not cite them, numerous travelers had pointed out both the presence of Jewish people in the Pacific as well as people with their physical features from the initial days of European contact (Parfitt 2004, pp. 50–52).

As with his readings of the British authors’ works, Semper here looked at the illustrations and came to his own conclusion independently. Müller made no mention of particular Jewish characteristics and instead wrote of the illustration on plate 7 depicting several Papuans that the “facial features themselves are very different from each other, which emerges from the portraits” (Müller 1839–1844, p. 44). He had earlier remarked of their noses that they were “of normal size but fairly wide and flat” (ibid.). Semper had only known Müller’s study prior to his visit to Palau and then used Earl and Wallace to confirm his observations, he explained further in the appendix to his book. He even quoted from notes he had taken while in the islands that the people there looked like “certain Jewish-looking [*jüdische aussehende*] inhabitants of New Guinea” (Semper 1873, p. 363).

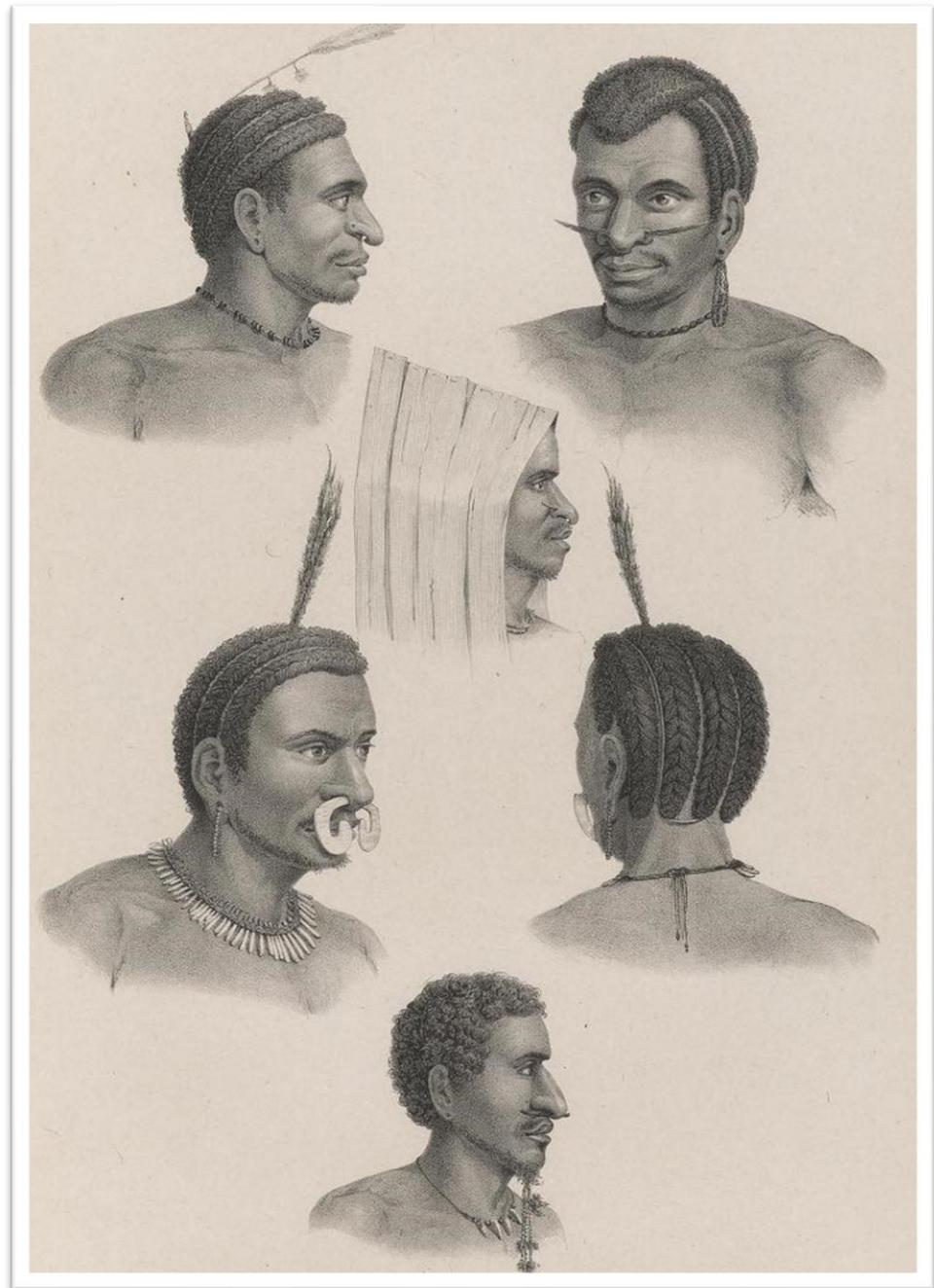


Figure 1. “Inhabitants of the village of Oeta” (Müller 1839–1844, plate 7).

As a scholar of animal forms, his focus on, if not fixation with, physical characteristics was understandable to a certain extent. Why he seemed obsessed with establishing Palauans as comparable to Jewish people via Papuans of New Guinea is less clear, however. The connections between the two groups of Melanesian/Polynesian people seems like it could have taken place without any reference to the so-called Jewish type, unless the introduction of this third element provided an anchor of a sort. Yet, it revealed less about either the Palauans or the Papuans and implied that Jewish people were akin to these Pacific Island peoples via facial features, presumably their noses, in particular, but possibly through hair and skin color, lips and eyes, foreheads, and so forth. Semper did not specify, but still insisted on this way of representing the inhabitants of Palau, among whom he lived for several months. Whether or not it was his intention, he succeeded in deploying

a stereotype involving Jewish people using the scientific nomenclature of his day that underscored their perceived position as outsiders, foreigners, “others”.

At the same time, the connection between Palauan and Jewish characteristics familiarized readers of the German naturalist’s travel account with a Pacific Island people who would have otherwise been imagined as more distant. Throughout the book, Semper projected himself in familial and sympathetic terms in relation to the inhabitants of Palau and therefore aloof from the colonial powers that were deeply affecting their lives. He was soon embroiled in local politics that pit different Palauan groups against one another, a division cultivated in part by the intervention of a British Captain, Andrew Cheyne. The account combined discussion of the geology, botany, zoology, ethnology, and politics of Palau in the context of contemporary Spanish and British imperialism in the Pacific. Semper’s self-presentation as a friend and ultimately a family member to the Palauans not only provided a central trope in his book, it also portrayed the author as civil, diplomatic, and knowledgeable in direct contrast to British scheming in and Spanish neglect of Palau. Conceiving of the peoples of Palau as akin to Jewish people enhanced the German naturalist’s fantasy of the family, the basis upon which his claims to possessing powerful firsthand knowledge about them rested.

Although living among the people about whom he wrote anticipated the approach to fieldwork that only became a norm in anthropology by the early twentieth century, Semper’s undisguised affinity toward the Palauans also strengthened his claim to knowing them (Kuklick 2011). While adoption functioned to enhance status in Palau, the author framed this action more in domestic than ethnological terms (Barnett 1979; Force and Force 1972). When a local leader and his wife placed Semper under their protection, the leader’s wife called him “son” and he in turn referred to her as “my mother” (Semper 1873, p. 67). The German naturalist described his relationship with other local nobles in familial terms too. After meeting a Palauan named Arakalulk, in whom he recognized a “more open character” and “intelligent eyes”, the German naturalist attempted to employ him as a “servant” (ibid., p. 49). Later, Semper realized his high-ranking status and Arakalulk and another Palauan, Asmaladra, became his “brothers” (ibid., p. 79).

The German naturalist used references to Jewish traits to understand Palauans in a more familiar manner by making parallels between racialized “others” at home to those abroad. Semper’s colonial fantasy helped readers of his account and later scholars conceive of the Palau Islands as similar to Imperial Germany itself, where Jewish people were part of the nation. Thus, integrating Jewish-like people from far-away islands into the German Empire was not in fact so distant a notion after all.

3. Reviews of *Die Palau-Inseln*

As it turned out, Semper’s account was not viewed universally as the most important work on Palau in Germany at the time it first appeared. The Polish-born German-Hungarian traveler Johann Stanislaus Kubary arrived in the islands as a collector for the Godeffroy Museum of Hamburg in 1871 and, like Semper, published a sketch of his time there in 1873 (Wuerch and Anthony 1994, p. 63; Kubary 1873). His study said nothing of Jewish physical characteristics among the Palauans and generally omitted discussion of race altogether, concentrating more on cultural practices. When the *Archiv für Anthropologie*, a journal of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, reviewed Semper’s and Kubary’s works in 1873 and 1874, respectively, it favored the latter over the former. The first noted the importance of Semper’s book for including “ethnographic conditions”, but contested its assertion that Palauans were “a mixture of the Polynesian and Melanesian races”, arguing that this interpretation illustrated “significant inconsistency” (Meinicke 1873, p. 50). The review of Kubary’s study was a mere single sentence but explained that it “includes highly interesting information about the inhabitants of Palau which frequently broaden and elaborate Semper’s” (Meinicke 1874, p. 54).

The German naturalist’s book also received a mixed review in the leading geography journal in Imperial Germany. It described Semper’s narrative form as reminiscent of

“novellas and novels” of times past, but that it contained “tireless verbosity”. The reviewer noted that “a factual or scientific classification is missing entirely” and that “we have to leave to literary critics the decision as to whether the author has managed such an artistic handling of the undeniably difficult form”. It concluded by recommending the book to ethnographers nonetheless, since it was “designed to give an ethnographic portrait” (*Literatur* 1873, p. 197). While these reviews identified limitations in Semper’s account of Palau, they were silent about his specific claims surrounding Jewish physical characteristics among the islands’ inhabitants, which might appear to be a kind of tacit acceptance, since they did not reject the idea.

Other reviews were not silent about this aspect of the book, however, and in fact redeployed it in multiple ways. A popular scientific daily newspaper described Semper’s account in detail and, like the naturalist upon his initial arrival in Palau, began with an extensive discussion of race. The review identified the value of the work based on the fact that it “illustrates the life of the primitive peoples [*Naturvölker*], their activities, and their childlike mental instincts” (*Ergebnisse* 1873, p. 226). It explained that the Palauans are, “according to Semper’s assertion, unmistakably of the Papua type”, and at the same time it recounted the naturalist’s encounter with “a small man with pronounced Jewish facial features” (*ibid.*). The review likewise repeated the claim that “the same observation is made by all travelers” who have seen Papuans in New Guinea or “other Negro races in the Pacific Ocean” (*ibid.*). Among Pacific Islanders, it continued, “such pronounced Jewish physiognomies all without exception stand out” (*ibid.*).

The review then recounted several pertinent aspects of Palauan culture, including social class structure, gender relations, and hospitality customs, for example. Following Semper’s first appendix (*Nachtrag*), it described the population decline in the islands, which was attributed to increasing contact with Europeans. Next, the review returned to the topic of race, focusing on physical characteristics of the Palauans, particularly skin color and hair. It did not reiterate the claims about Jewish physical features, but perhaps it did not need to, once the seed had been planted, first by Semper and second in the initial paragraph of the review. Would such an assertion be quickly forgotten or was it sufficient to state only once? It was not stated just once, however.

Another extended review of the travel account appeared in a magazine of culture and commentary that repeated Semper’s argument about apparent Jewish characteristics among the people of Palau. It offered detailed description of the naturalist’s book, celebrating it as the product of a “German scholar” (*deutscher Gelehrter*), which was therefore trustworthy compared to previous knowledge of the islands (*Die Palau-Inseln* 1873, p. 27). Repetition of the notion of a connection to Jewish physical features enhanced the fantastic aspect of the account. Noting Palauans’ dark “body color” (*Körperfarben*) and hair qualities, it once again remarked that these were “found among all Polynesian Negro tribes” (*ibid.*). In their “facial features”, they exhibited characteristics “unmistakably pronounced of the Papuan type” and the review again recounted the meeting with “a small man with pronounced Jewish facial features”, traits similar to the “Papuans of New Guinea or among the other Negro races in the Pacific Ocean finding individuals with such pronounced Jewish physiognomies” (*ibid.*). The all-important frame racializing Palauans through recourse to Pacific Islanders and Jewish people then gave way to an exposition of their culture, including clothing, political structures, social classes, and gender relations. Despite the lukewarm reception of Semper’s travel account among professional anthropologists and geographers, it was being recognized as an important work in more popular circles, which emphasized his discussion of Palauans’ race, using descriptions of physical characteristics that he alleged were akin to those of Jewish people.

As if in response to the evaluation deferring judgment on the naturalist’s book to literary critics, another review of the work appeared in a weekly literary magazine. Part of a wider discussion of several works of “new travel literature”, the reviewer categorized Semper’s account as a “novel” (*Roman*) before soon addressing the racial makeup of the Palauans as “a mixed people of Papua and Polynesian” ancestries (*Rückert* 1873, p. 707).

Although viewed as a “novel” and work of “literature”, the book’s observations on race were taken to be factual rather than fictional. Noting the “racial characteristics” (*Rassenmerkmale*) of the Palauans by their hair and “Jewish facial type” (*jüdischen Gesichtstypus*) (ibid.), the reviewer repeated the point made by Semper and other reviewers once again. The review then described the political and gender relations of the Pacific Island people as laid out in the naturalist’s book. It is remarkable that the comparison to Jewish people resurfaced in the review which was only half a page in length. It was an apparently striking, if not appealing, detail to several writers in early Imperial Germany.

When a global economic depression struck the nation in 1873, the journalist Otto Glagau published a series of articles the following December attacking Jewish people, blaming them for the crash. In 1876, he republished the articles in book form and described Jews as “race”, though without identifying specific physical characteristics (Glagau 1876). There is no evidence that Glagau read or used any part of Semper’s book, but both authors racialized Jewish people at nearly the same moment. Whether for political or scientific purposes, the idea of Jewish people as a separate racial group was gaining increasing traction in Imperial Germany over the course of the 1870s. As Andrew Zimmerman has shown about Semper’s colleague Rudolf Virchow, a study of schoolchildren he conducted in the 1870s classified Germans and Jews as separate races, even though the anthropologist was not a proponent of antisemitism (Zimmerman 1999).

4. Known by the Nose

The “significant inconsistency”, as one reviewer described it, of Semper’s notion of race as it situated the people of Palau could have relegated his book to the proverbial dustbin of history. Yet, Kubary’s omission of any discussion of race in his study of Palauans left the question of these people’s ethnic ancestry open. There was obviously something attractive about the way Semper presented his information, partly through experience with the “small man with pronounced Jewish facial features” upon his initial arrival in the islands and partly through his citation of other scholars, even if they did not make the same observations involving alleged Jewish physical characteristics. Several reviewers immediately latched on to the detail, even as others did not, but they also did not reject it.

As soon as 1874, the geographer and anthropologist Oscar Peschel drew on Semper’s theory in his study of the human races. Beginning with a general discussion of peoples that looked at their physical, linguistic, and historical cultural development, the author then addressed various races in separate sections. Peschel synthesized the work of other scholars as well as his own and ended the book with two different tables of skull measurements of different people, which was becoming the predominant anthropological method for conceiving of differences and linkages between groups, as Andrew Zimmerman shows in his study of the discipline (Zimmerman 2001). The geographer used Semper’s book on Palau for his information about that group of Pacific Islanders.

In the section in which Peschel discussed Papuans, he expanded the claim about Jewish facial features deployed by the German naturalist. He described their skin color and lips before addressing their noses. “The broad nose”, Peschel wrote, “curves down”, which gave it “a Jewish slant [*jüdischen Anstrich*] that no observer has ever missed” (Peschel 1874, p. 359). He then listed several peoples from New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, including Palauans, to whom he applied this generalization. Citing Wallace, Müller, and Semper, Peschel failed to note that only the latter had made this observation, while the others had not. It appears that the author took the German naturalist’s information and then applied it universally, since he had cited the same sources as Semper.

The same claim also surfaced in the first part of Peschel’s book where he analyzed people’s physical traits generally. In the index to his study under the entry for “nose”, it directed readers to a single page, where the remark about Papuans again appeared (ibid., p. 567). These people had, Peschel argued, a nose akin to the “Jewish type” (ibid., p. 79). This section cited no sources, however. The book also discussed Jewish people at greater length than the Papuans and Palauans, but did not describe their physical features, except to

associate their noses with the peoples of New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. This omission suggests that readers would have an idea of Jewish people's physical characteristics and hence they need not be detailed. The topic only arose when it came to assembling portraits of Papuans and Palauans as a point of comparison. Semper's fantasy thus extended into Peschel's work on the various races of the world because it was an apparently appealing way of comprehending the Papuans of New Guineans and other Pacific Islanders using a more familiar group of "others" at home.

The study was a popular one if the existence of numerous editions testifies to this. It was reissued unrevised in 1875, 1876, and 1877, and an English translation appeared in 1876 (Peschel 1875, 1876a, 1876b, 1877). Peschel passed away in 1875, but the English version of his work circulated his ideas even more widely. In a similar way to the German editions, it noted that the "Papuan is recognizable by the Jewish type of his nose" (Peschel 1876b, p. 76). Likewise, in the discussion of specific groups, it stated of Papuans, including the people of Palau, that the "broad nose is hooked, giving the countenance the Jewish cast noticed by all observers" (ibid., p. 339). It also cited Semper's work.

As far as Germans' thinking about Papuans or Pacific Islanders, Peschel's book may not have had much impact. Yet, if one did seek to learn about these peoples, then the notion that they apparently shared physical characteristics with Jewish people would present itself. The possibility of being exposed to the idea increased as the four editions of Peschel's book circulated in Imperial Germany between 1874 and 1877. Whether or not it influenced readers cannot be definitively established. However, it does show that Semper's initial claim was believable enough that another scholar would appropriate it into his own work without pausing. This seems to reflect a readiness to do so and yet as other studies of New Guinea and the Pacific Islands appeared, they did not adopt the theory.

The geographer Carl Meinicke published a two-part work on the Pacific Islands in 1875 and 1876 that analyzed both Papuans and Palauans and in describing their physical features, did not compare them to those of Jewish people (Meinicke 1875, 1876). In an extended review of the second part of the study written by Alfred Kirchhoff, another geographer, Semper's theory once again emerged, however. The reviewer noted a disagreement between Meinicke and the German naturalist over the origin of the people of Palau and repeated the latter's claim that they possessed a "Jewish profile" (*jüdische Profil*) (Kirchhoff 1876, p. 1130). The former scholar argued that they were not related to Papuans, but solely derived from Micronesian ancestry based on their language. Semper's theory that the people of Palau were related to those of New Guinea was being contested, though not how he established it via reference to Jewish physical features. It is not clear why Kirchhoff brought up the point comparing Palauans to Jews if he merely needed to explain a link to New Guineans. His ease in bringing up the idea demonstrates that this stereotype was normal and acceptable in early Imperial Germany.

These debates among scholars over the ancestries of the people of Palau were not the only arena in which such portraits manifested, however. They also found their way into an encyclopedia published in 1877. In the entry on Papuans, it demarked this "oceanic race", as one inhabiting New Guinea, the Philippines, the Palau Islands, and the Solomon Islands, but also described their physical features, including making the point that "the broad nose curves downward and give the face a Jewish expression [*jüdische Ausdruck*]" (Papuas 1877, p. 1239). The entry listed several sources at the end among which was Semper's 1869 study of the Philippines, though not his book about Palau (Semper 1869). Yet, none of the other sources discussed the theory of Papuans in possession of Jewish facial features, so perhaps it unintentionally omitted the naturalist's account of Palau.

As the 1870s drew to a close, the global economy had not stabilized since the crash earlier in the decade and antisemitism was growing as a force in Imperial German politics, as Peter Pulzer shows in his classic study (Pulzer 1988). Prominent writers argued against the integration of Jewish people into the wider society, like Glagau before them. Wilhelm Marr, for example, in his infamous 1879 tract, not only coined the term antisemitism, but

also described Jewish people as having achieved “victory” (*Sieg*) over Germans in the title to the book, as if a military struggle (Marr 1879, p. 5).

Visiting a Spanish colony in the Pacific Ocean, Semper equated certain features among the inhabitants of Palau with those of Jewish people and several writers repeated his claim. In a different vein, the antisemitic authors Glagau and Marr marked Jewish people as foreign and a threat to Germany. These two kinds of writing about Jewish people rested on stereotypes and demonstrate different layers that could, of course, overlap at any time. While the popular scientific path still seemed to promise assimilation, political antisemitism vehemently and fundamentally opposed it. As the 1880s dawned, scholars continued to reproduce Semper’s fantasy, political antisemitism expanded, and Imperial Germany began to acquire overseas colonies, including those with people of Papuan ancestry.

5. Colonizing Jewish Types and Pacific Peoples

In 1880, Friedrich von Hellwald published a natural history of mankind that utilized Semper’s information about Palau and reasserted his claims involving the inhabitants’ physical features. He revisited the encounter with the “small man with pronounced Jewish features [*jüdischen Zügen*]” to generalize about Palauans, but the author also applied the same thinking elsewhere in his book (Hellwald 1880, p. 139). The Papuans of the New Hebrides, for example, had a “Jewish facial expression” (*jüdischen Gesichtsausdruck*), he wrote (*ibid.*, p. 114). The way of seeing particular people in the Pacific Islands embraced by Semper continued to hold value for other authors whose works circulated in Imperial Germany.

At the same time, not all scholars opted to refer to Jewish people in their descriptions of the physical features of Pacific Islanders. In a study of islands and trade in the South Pacific also published in 1880, for example, Alfred Kirchhoff wrote about the peoples of the Marianas, Palau, and Carolines, but merely remarked that they possessed a “curved nose” (*gebogene Nase*) without explicitly associating this characteristic with Jewish people (Kirchhoff 1880, p. 250). It is interesting that the geographer combined such a detail with his discussion of trade, as if physical features were somehow relevant, while his point about Palauan noses could still be implicitly read as reflecting a trait typically imagined among particular others. Nonetheless, it also shows that one need not directly link Jewish people to those of the Pacific Islands when enumerating certain physical features.

In the following year, the fifth edition of Peschel’s ethnography appeared edited by Kirchhoff. It reasserted Semper’s claim about Palauan people having similar characteristics as Jewish people, but with a partial modification. Now the text explained that Palauans possessed (my italics) “curved, almost Jewish noses” (*gebogenen, fast jüdischen Nasen*) (Peschel 1881, p. 357). Clearly, Kirchhoff’s earlier neutral word choice extended part way into this work. Yet, it still assumed that Jewish noses existed as a category, only distinguishing that Palauans’ noses nearly fit into it. Kirchhoff’s subtle shift from the earlier editions illustrates an awareness of the issue, even if it remained unresolved. The modification merely began to set Palauans into a type of their own rather than breaking down the category applied to Jewish people as a group bound by physical characteristics.

Also in 1881, Richard Andree published his ethnographic study of Jewish people. In the section of the book in which he analyzed the “immutability of the Jewish type” (*Unveränderlichkeit des jüdischen Typus*), he quoted from Peschel’s ethnography (Andree 1881, p. 24). Popular ethnography in Imperial Germany represented a powerful locale for the dissemination of ideas about race prior to the nation’s acquisition of an overseas empire. It was in this setting that scholars conceived of both Palauan and Jewish people as well as others across the world in terms of race and territory. Jewish stereotypes were related to the eventual take-over of colonies, at least in part. As George Steinmetz shows in his study of German imperialism in Namibia, China, and Samoa, “blueprints for colonialism were prepared not so much in Europe’s official foreign ministries as in the scholar’s study, the traveler’s diary, and the playwright’s tale of Oceanic shipwreck and African adventure” (Steinmetz 2008, p. 25).

Although Semper's account of Palau was part study, part diary, and part tale of Oceanic shipwreck, its claim about the physical characteristics of the islands' inhabitants as Jewish circulated widely in the years that followed its publication. It was a type of fantasy in essence that saw people in a colony as familiar by associating them with a people imagined as foreign at home in Germany. This familiarity illustrates not just a colonial fantasy previously unrecognized by contemporary German scholars, it also shows that certain colonial discourses relied on Jewish stereotypes.

In 1884, Imperial Germany declared protectorates over territories in Africa and New Guinea, thus entering the age of imperialism as a colonizing power (Knoll and Hiery 2010; Smith 1978). The following year another revised edition of Peschel's ethnography edited by Kirchoff was published still claiming that Palauans possessed "curved, almost Jewish noses" and citing Semper's 1873 study (Peschel 1885, p. 374). The subtle shift from the first four editions of Peschel's study to "almost" remained as did the implication of a connection between the two people's physical characteristics, even if it had retreated from making the association direct. Also in 1885, Kubary published another study of the ethnography of Palau, though it was still silent on the inhabitants as a race (Kubary 1885).

In the same year, Imperial Germany attempted to annex the Caroline Islands, which included Palau, by sending naval vessels to raise the nation's flag to lay claim to the islands before Spain could respond (Hezel 1995, pp. 4–5). In this endeavor, Kubary actually took part as an interpreter on a German warship (Paszkowski 1971, p. 58). Semper and his work played a role in the "Carolines Crisis" too. He delivered a lecture on Palau before the Würzburg branch of the German Colonial Association (*Deutscher Kolonialverein*) rejecting Spain's claim to the islands. The editors of the *German Colonial Times* newspaper in turn recommended his study of Palau. Semper's text also appeared in a bibliography of works relevant to the topics covered in that particular issue of the newspaper (*Deutscher Kolonialverein* 1885, pp. 757, 776). Although Imperial Germany's bid to take over the Caroline Islands ultimately proved unsuccessful, ethnographers played important roles in the attempt.

Semper continued his work as a professor of zoology at the University of Würzburg until 1887, when he suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. He passed away in 1893 (Schuberg 1895, p. vii). Nonetheless, the legacy of his account of Palau continued to influence Germans writing about the islands even after his death. The seventh edition of Peschel's ethnography appeared in 1897, though Kirchoff was no longer listed as the editor (Peschel 1897). Instead of the former editor's remark that the people of Palau possessing "curved, almost Jewish noses", the latest edition lumped Palauans alongside inhabitants of the New Hebrides, the Fiji Islands, and New Guinea as people whose "broad nose curves downward and gives the face a Jewish expression [*jüdische Ausdruck*]" (ibid., p. 359). This was the exact phrase used in the 1877 encyclopedia entry on Papuans cited above. The section from the late Peschel's book still cited Semper's 1873 study.

The same claim about parallels between Jewish and Pacific Island people had become widespread in regard to colonized peoples in the Pacific under German rule elsewhere too. As discussed in the introduction, Arthur Baessler linked the physical features of Papuans to those of Jewish people in his 1895 book of photographs of Pacific Islanders. An aborigine woman had "Jews curls" (*Judenlocken*) and of the people of Tonga, he made a similar remark, claiming that among both genders one finds "a strong Jewish type" (*ein stark jüdischer Typus*) (Baessler 1895, pp. 179, 302). In a comprehensive study of New Guinea published in 1899, the anthropologist Felix von Luschan discussed the inhabitants of the German colony. He noted that a stylized bench (see Figure 2) had figures with a "Jewish-looking profile" (*jüdisch aussehenden Profil*) (Luschan 1899, p. 480).

In Christian Davis' study of antisemitism and colonialism in Imperial Germany, he shows that anti-Semites advocated for German overseas imperialism for the most part. His analysis of the anti-Semite Bernhard Förster's attempt to establish a German colony free of Jewish people is a particularly interesting case. It was not merely woven into the anti-Jewish political movements, frequently divided in their methods and goals as Davis points out,

but antisemitism also surfaced in colonial scientific circles via stereotypes about particular so-called racial features allegedly possessed by non-Europeans and Jewish people. It is not clear that the antisemitic writer Carl Paasch had been influenced by the colonial studies of Papuans when he recommended in 1891 that Jewish people be sent to New Guinea, as Davis observes (Davis 2012, pp. 39, 53, 112). Imagined linkages between colonized people and Jewish people continued to surface in writings during the years of German colonialism.



Figure 2. “Bench with heads from Bertrand Island” (Luschan 1899, p. 80).

6. The German Acquisition and Loss of the Palau Islands

Following the 1899 German acquisition of the Palau Islands from Spain, Kirchhoff published a review of Semper’s 1873 study in the *German Colonial Times*, which noted that the book’s price had been “reduced” by the publishing house (Kirchhoff 1899, p. 341). The geographer did not discuss the physical features of the local inhabitants and their imagined connection to those of Jewish people like several authors in Imperial Germany had done during the past three decades, although he nonetheless recommended the work because it dealt with “our new wards, the inhabitants of Palau” (ibid.). Readers would inevitably encounter Semper’s observations that claimed Jewish characteristics among Palauan people at both the beginning and end of his book, however.

Semper’s study continued to inform scholars about the inhabitants of Palau following the German take-over of the islands. Two works published in 1903 built on his decades-earlier observations. Geographer Georg Wegener argued that the people of Palau possessed a “peculiar Jewish formation of the face [*jüdischen Bildung des Gesichts*], which is also known in New Guinea” (Wegener 1903, p. 70). Semper’s study provided the foundation for the geographer’s information about Palau. Another geographer, Kurt Hassert, credited Semper with “specialized scientific research” on Palau in his book on German colonies in the Pacific (Hassert 1903, p. 4, n. 1). He also cited the German naturalist elsewhere in his study (ibid., pp. 37, 62, n. 1, 110), but when it came to his remark about several people in the Caroline Islands, including Palau, that they had a “strongly curved Jewish nose [*stark gekrümmter jüdischer Nase*]”, he did not reference Semper, or any other scholar, as if it had become common knowledge or had been derived from his own observations (Hassert 1903, p. 50).

As Jeff Bowersox points out in his study of the impacts of imperialism on German youth in the context of rising consumer culture, the medical doctor and journalist Adolf Heilborn delivered twelve lectures in Berlin in 1904 on the nation’s colonies to an audience made up mostly of teachers, both male and female (Bowersox 2013, p. 103). These focused on the geography and ethnography of peoples under the German Empire in Africa, the Pacific Islands, and East Asia. Heilborn published the lectures as a monograph the following year and wrote in the foreword that having presented the material to the public showed

“how incredibly small the real knowledge of our colonial protectorates really is” (Heilborn 1906, n.p.). For his discussion of the Palau Islands, he drew on Semper’s account.

Heilborn wrote of the people of Palau that they possessed an “‘almost Jewish’, curved Nose” (*‘fast jüdische,’ gebogene Nase*), enclosing the “almost Jewish” phrase in quotes as if contesting the claim (ibid., p. 124). The remark was similar to the 1881 edition of Peschel’s ethnography (Peschel 1881, p. 357). Heilborn also noted of the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands that they have a “curved nose of the ‘Jewish type’” (Heilborn 1906, p. 138) again putting the connection to Jewish physical features in quotes. In two subsequent revised and expanded editions of his book, the observation about Palauans remained and yet the statement about the Marshallese people was removed (Heilborn 1908, p. 128; 1912, p. 137). In other publications on the people of the Pacific Islands since the colonization of Palau, German authors continued to associate them with what they imagined to be Jewish physical characteristics (von Hesse-Wartegg 1902, p. 24; Parkinson 1907, p. 203; Hassert 1910, p. 449; Neuhauss 1911, pp. 89, 97; Seidel 1913, p. 253; Friederici 1913, p. 150).

After the outbreak of World War I in Europe in the summer of 1914, however, the Japanese Empire occupied the Caroline Islands, taking over Palau on 8–9 October 1914 without resistance and expelling the German inhabitants completely by 16 November 1914. The new colonial rulers soon embarked on infrastructural development to facilitate the extraction of resources in addition to culturally assimilating the local people. The Japanese Empire retained the islands as a League of Nations mandate following the conclusion of the Great War and continued the colonial policies begun under the initial occupation (Hiery 1995).

The most definitive anthropological study of Palau was not published until World War I had broken out and the remaining volumes did not appear until after the war’s end. As part of an expedition to German colonies in the Pacific undertaken from 1908 to 1910, the anthropologist Augustin Krämer visited Palau between August and September 1909 and April through July 1910 (Krämer 2017, pp. 7–10). The first volume of his study consisting of five total volumes was published in 1917. It covered the History of Discovery (*Entdeckungsgeschichte*) and Geography of Palau and was dedicated to Johann Kubary. It frequently cited Semper’s work as a comparison to Krämer’s findings as well as those of other German scholars who had studied Palau.

Krämer described in detail Semper’s visit to the islands in the History of Discovery section of his work and characterized Semper’s book as “famous” (*bekanntes*) and a “lasting monument” (*bleibendes Denkmal*) (Krämer 1917, p. 137, n. 2, p. 141). It was not until his second volume, published in 1919, that Krämer addressed Semper’s claims about Jewish facial features among the people of Palau, however. Rather than fully rejecting the idea, he merely modified it. “Slightly curved noses are not that unusual”, Krämer explained, “but they cannot be described as Semitic” (Krämer 1919, p. 305). The anthropologist still assumed that there was a “Semitic” (i.e., Jewish) type, even if he located Palauan people outside of that category. At this point Germany’s colonies were lost and so only the most advanced specialists might be interested in Krämer’s findings on Palau, which continued to appear up until 1929.

7. Conclusions

Following the First World War, an abridged edition of Semper’s account was published (Semper 1925). Instead of the original introduction, a new one was written by Adolf Heilborn. Compared to the 1873 account, the abridged edition only included the second through sixth and eighth chapters of the original thirteen in the first edition. Semper’s observations of Jewish facial features among the people of Palau no longer appeared. It is possible that Heilborn, as a German of Jewish descent, removed it on ethical grounds or the general consensus on race now rendered such an imagined lineage absurd.

Yet, as the Great Depression sounded the death knell of the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist seizure of power ensured its demise, there was increasing attention on Jewish people in Germany, including their physical characteristics. Although the potential of Palau returning to German possession was next to nil, the question of Jewish facial

features still remained. In a booklet published by the Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, for example, the author Hans Diebow began with a discussion of “Where Does the Jewish Nose Come From?” (*Woher kommt die Judennase*) (Diebow 1937, p. 3). The booklet then compared illustrations of an “Ethiopian type” alongside a Hittite king and an Assyrian eunuch (*ibid.*). There was no mention of the Palau Islands, of course, but the wish to touch upon the facial feature most closely associated with Jewish stereotypes extended back to Imperial Germany and the studies of Pacific Islanders as a normal feature of the imagination of numerous German scholars. The groundwork for Nazi racial studies of Jewish people had been laid down solidly.

Jewish physical features were also a central aspect of Nazi visual propaganda. In a children’s book published in 1938, an illustration shows a classroom with a young boy at the chalkboard drawing a picture of a Jewish nose. The caption to the image states that “The Jew’s nose is curved at the tip” (*Die Judennase ist an ihrer Spitze gebogen*) (Hiemer 1938, p. 9). Such rituals, whether they actually took place in the National Socialist era or were the imagination of the antisemitic author, would not have originated with Hitler, but rather in the nineteenth century if not earlier. What began as a seemingly subtle and perhaps even innocent observation on the part of Semper gave fuel at least in part to the hyper-racism of the Nazis.

Heilborn committed suicide in 1941, the same year that the Nazi genocide of Jewish Europeans began (Heuer 1992, vol 10, p. 311). The mass murders were preceded by widespread circulation of antisemitic propaganda throughout Europe and Germany. In support of its own military and imperialist aims, the Japanese Empire used the Caroline and Palau Islands as a staging ground during the Second World War for expanding its territory in Asia and the Pacific but lost the islands along with the rest of its colonies following its defeat. In 1947, the United States became the administering authority of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which included Palau, as the fourth colonial power to rule the islands in less than a half century (Leibowitz 1996, p. xxi). In 1982, the Micronesian Area Research Center at the University of Guam published an English translation of Semper’s 1873 study of Palau. Mark Berg, the translator, noted of the book that it “ranks as the finest detailed first-person account” of Palauan culture and provides “a strong discussion of culture change and a humane appreciation of Palauan life” (Semper 1982, pp. i, ii). It still included Semper’s remarks about Jewish facial features among Palauans and yet the translator offered no refutation or acknowledgement of these claims.³

Carl Semper’s observation that the people of Palau shared traits with Jewish people became the norm for comprehending their racial makeup in Imperial Germany among popular anthropologists leading up to and during the German colonization of the Palau Islands. His claims spread over roughly four decades and reflect that the process of racializing Pacific Island people, specifically those of Palau, was rooted in ways of imagining other races, in this case Jewish people. Although Semper’s book on Palau was not embraced by professional anthropologists, it still made a powerful impact on the general public via popular anthropology created by geographers and other scholars. The assumption that Jewish people had specific common traits and constituted a clearly demarcated race in themselves derived from age-old stereotypes about them held in Germany and elsewhere. These types in turn extended into the realm of German colonial science as it began to categorize Pacific Islanders. While these ideas about race may have ultimately had little impact on people in the Pacific Islands, they nonetheless illustrated a kind of consensus in Imperial Germany that reflected deep-rooted antisemitic attitudes that at least indirectly connected to Nazi ideas of Jewish people as a distinct race possessing particular physical characteristics.

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Notes

- ¹ For a discussion of the uses of the term Papuan and other ways of describing black-skinned inhabitants of New Guinea and other Pacific Islands, see (Douglas 2008; Ballard 2008).
- ² In a later work, Wallace stated the following: “It is [...] by their features that [the Papuans] are best distinguished from all other races of men, and especially by the form and size of the nose. This is always large and long, usually arched as in the Jewish type [...] almost every traveller speaks of the ‘Jewish features’—the ‘aquiline’ or ‘arched’ or ‘very prominent’ noses—or makes use of other similar expressions” (Wallace 1879, p. 428).
- ³ Remarkably, many people in Papua New Guinea directly identify themselves as the descendants of Jewish people and feel strongly connected to the state of Israel (Parfitt 2004, pp. 53–56; Dundon 2011).

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