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## ON THE POSSIBLE DENTAL STIGMATA OF THE PUERTO RICO ABORIGINAL CRANIA IN STOCKHOLM – A CORRECTION

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In Markku Niskanen's Festschrift, we described the presence of stigmata-like features on the crown of a first molar from the Puerto Rico aboriginal collection in Stockholm and its implications for congenital syphilis (Núñez et al. 2023). Since the Festschrift was a limited edition, it is best to enter a brief background for those not acquainted with it.

The crania were found in a cave of northwestern Puerto Rico in the mid-1800s and donated by Justus Hjalmarsson to the Retzius Anatomical Museum collection in 1857. In addition to Gustaf Retzius, the crania were examined by renown anthropologists Rudolph Virchow and Nils-Gustav Gejvall before ending up in our mundane hands (Virchow 1896; Gejvall & Henschen 1971). We studied the crania in 2006-2007 and like Gejvall and Henschen attributed the lesions on the cranial bones to treponemal disease (Núñez et al. 2009).

In 2019, while going through old photos for a presentation at the Anthropos 2020 Congress in Havana, M. Núñez noticed what seemed like an anomaly on the crown of a first molar (Fig. 1a-b). It was reminiscent of the stigmata features characteristic of congenital syphilis (cf. Jacobi et al. 1992: fig.4; Lauc

et al. 2015: fig.8; Agarwal et al. 2017: fig.2). It seemed odd that we would have missed them while studying the material 12 years earlier, but we had mainly concentrated in the obvious syphilis-like lesions on the parietal and frontal bones. Unfortunately, we were not able to reexamine the mandible in time for the Anthropos Congress in March 2020 because the crania had been recently moved from the Stockholm University Osteoarchaeological Research Laboratory to Karolinska Institute. They were still unpacked and thus inaccessible. There was no congress proceedings publication and the Puerto Rico crania were left in peace during the pandemic.

When we again sought to examine the mandible for our Festschrift article in 2022, we found we could not because Karolinska was in the process redefining their policies about permissions to use its collections. We left in a request to access the mandible and mentioned tentatively the possible presence of dental-stigmata in our article, which we ended with 'To be continued'.

We eventually got access to the mandible last October but, unfortunately, the apparent stigmata lesion turned out to be the result of an optical illusion caused by an excess of

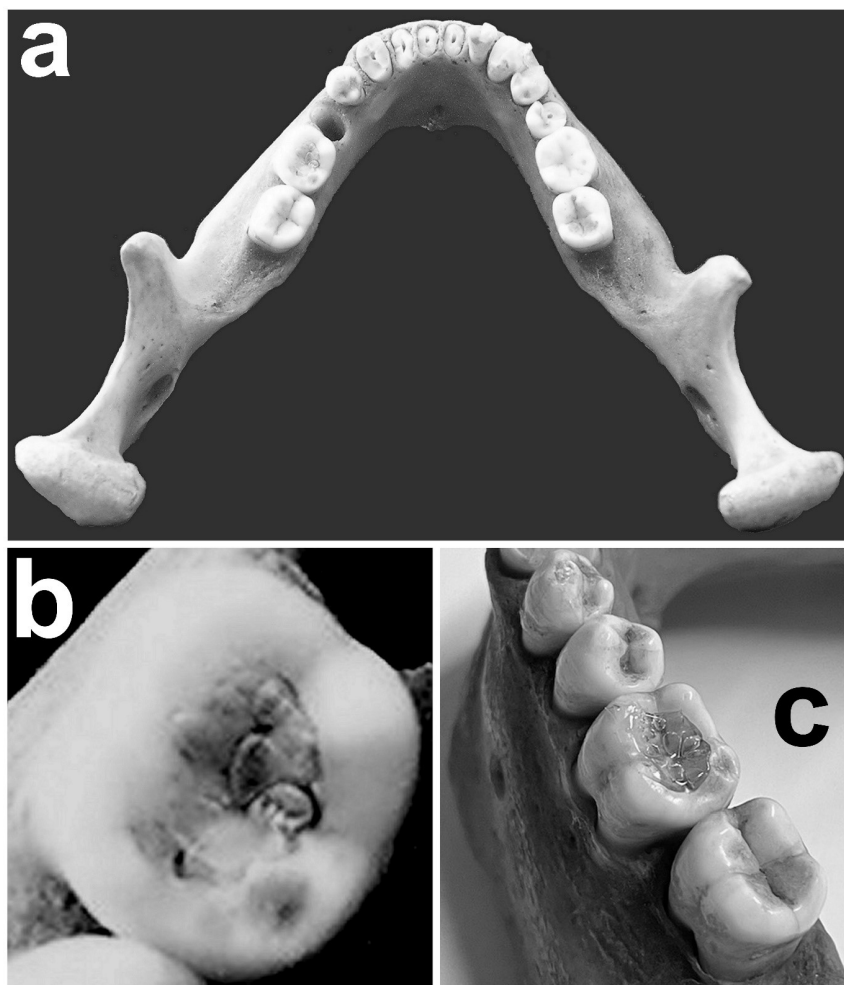


Figure 1. Old and new photographs of the left first molar of one of the Puerto Rico mandibles: (a) The mandible with the odd “formation” on the crown of the left first molar. (b) Fuzzy blown-up view of the molar in the same photograph, showing what appears to be stigmata-like lesions. (c) Recent photograph of the same molar which shows that what seemed to be stigmata lesions were an optical illusion caused by an excess of transparent glue on the crown. Photos: M. Núñez (a) and J. Storå (b).

transparent glue on the molar crown surface (Fig. 1c). The crown of the first molar in question is therefore fully normal.

Nevertheless, we feel that the lesions observed in the Puerto Rico aboriginal crania are consistent with some form of treponemal disease and, consequently, plan on carrying out AMS, stable isotope and aDNA determinations on the Puerto Rico crania to obtain information about their chronology, diet, kin relations, and potential treponemal infection.

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