



(Fig. 1)



Aging dried shark specimens used as decorative objects

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INTRODUCTION

A first comprehensive inventory of animal life was composed by Aristoteles 400 bc (ancient Greek Περι τὰ ζῷα ιστορίαι; Zoology'). For several centuries, it remained the single available reference. Not until the medieval ages Aristoteles' work was translated into several other languages including Latin and Arabian (Filius, 2007; Lulofs, 1992). Conrad Gessner was the first around 1550 ad who described all at that time known plant and animal life on 4500 pages. Later, the originally Latin-written book was translated to German in several compendia. The 'Vogelbuch' (bird book) was released in 1557 followed by the 'Thierbuch' (animal book) in 1563 and the 'Fischbuch' (fish book) in 1575. The latter comprising several figure drawings made it one of the most used zoological references of its time in German-speaking areas. At the same time, first natural cabinets were established, comparable to first zoological museum collections including stuffed and preserved animal specimens. Over the next centuries, several hundred of such ancestors of today's natural history collections were mounted. Dried shark specimen preparations are also known from this period (z.B. Kunstkammer Erzherzog Ferdinand II, 1529-1595) (Pollerspöck & Bauernfeind, 2021).

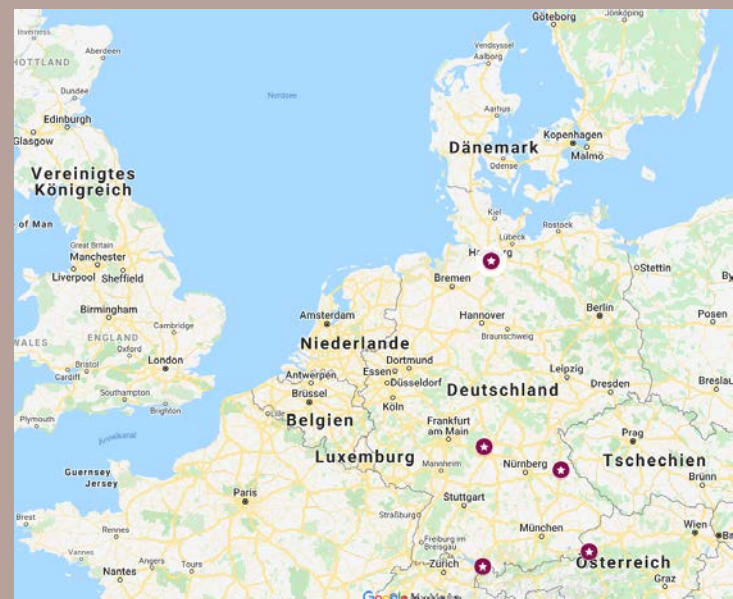
MATERIAL AND METHODS

We conducted comprehensive research on available medieval zoological and specifically ichthyological literature in the German-speaking areas where dried and mounted shark specimens were located (Figure 2). We further identify all specimens as Lamna nasus (Porbeagle shark) based on tooth morphology and general morphological characters which were still visible and interpretable on the mounted specimens (n=6).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 depicts dried shark specimens from the German town Pfreimd. Tooth and body morphology allows to identify it as Lamna nasus (Porbeagle shark). Similar exhibition specimens of the same species are known from several other localities in Southern Germany and Austria (additional material). The specimens share a similar appearance which is notably similar to one of the figures depicting a shark shown in Conrad Gessner's 'Thierbuch', i.e. widely opened mouths and an unnaturally upwards curved spine and tail. No details regarding origin and age of the sharks shown in Pfreimd are known. We were able to locate a newspaper article from 1865 which mentions their existence. It is noteworthy that all such preparations were located in German-speaking areas. We speculate that the widely distributed German compendium 'Fischbuch' which includes the figure of a shark in notably similar display of the mounted specimens (Gessner 1575, p.174) served as basis for the way the shark specimens were mounted. That would mean that the dried specimens have a minimum age of 464 (Latin version of Gessner's book) and 447 years (publication of Gessner's 'Fischbuch'). As future perspective we plan to make use of stable isotope analysis to review our hypothesis.

REFERENCES (see Additional Information)



Material (Fig. 2)

Additional Information

