

Press release

Kaspar Hauser's alleged noble origin - New molecular genetic analyses resolve the controversy

The identity and origin of Kaspar Hauser have been the subject of research and controversial debate for nearly 200 years. Besides the opinion that he was merely a more or less pathological liar and deceiver, the most enduring theory is that he was the hereditary prince of Baden who was born on September 29, 1812 and who died (officially) at the age of just 18 days and even before he was given a name. According to this theory, the prince was exchanged with a moribund working-class child and cast aside in order to pave the way to the throne for a collateral lineage. The prince was then subjected to many years of solitary confinement, until he was finally released in Nuremberg in 1828, with the name 'Kaspar Hauser' and at the developmental stage of a small child. With the help of caring people, he made up for his deficits over time, but he died only five and a half years after his mysterious appearance due to an assassination (as his supporters say) or a self-inflicted injury (as his critics say).

In the last 28 years, various genetic analyses have been carried out to clarify Kaspar Hauser's postulated noble origin. The earlier investigations from 1996 (based on a blood stain, initiated by the magazine DER SPIEGEL; Weichhold et al.) and from 2001/2002 (mainly based on 'pooled' hair samples, with participation of the TV channel ZDF) yielded contradictory results, and doubts remained specifically about the authenticity of the blood stain examined in 1996.

In a recent publication in the journal *iScience* (Parson et al.), the results of new DNA analyses of single hair shafts are presented that resolve the controversy. In these analyses, carried out in Innsbruck in 2019 and in Potsdam in 2020/2021, modern and considerably more sensitive methods were used, and they confirm the results from 1996. By including different samples that yielded identical results, the authenticity of the samples examined and their assignment to Kaspar Hauser could be proven for the first time, with an impressive confidence level of 99.9994%. The now confirmed mitochondrial DNA sequence of Kaspar Hauser (mitotype W) clearly deviates from the "Baden" lineage (mitotype H1bs), which rules out a maternal relationship to the House of Baden and thus the widespread "prince theory". However, the authors emphasize that this result should not be misunderstood as evidence for the competing "fraud theory" because even if Kaspar Hauser was not a prince, he could nonetheless have been a crime victim.

References:

Parson, W., Amory, C., King, T., Preick, M., Berger, C., König, A., Huber, G., Anslinger, K., Bayer, B., Weichhold, G., Sängler, T., Lutz-Bonengel, S., Pfeiffer, H., Hofreiter, M., Pfründer, D., Hohoff, C., Brinkmann, B. Kaspar Hauser's alleged noble origin – New molecular genetic analyses resolve the controversy, *iScience* (2024), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2024.110539>

Weichhold, G., Bark, J., Korte, W., Eisenmenger, W., Sullivan, K. M. DNA analysis in the case of Kaspar Hauser. *Int J Leg Med* 111, 287–291 (1998). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s004140050173>