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British royals dined on human flesh: Book

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London: British royals who have long been famed for their love of lavish banquets and rich recipes also had a taste for human flesh, according to a book.

The book has revealed that British royals as recently as the end of the 18th century possibly swallowed parts of the human body.

The practice was not only reserved for monarchs but was also widespread among the rich in Europe, the Daily Mail reported Saturday quoting the author of the book "Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires".

Although the royals denounced the barbaric cannibals of the New World, they applied, drank, or wore powdered Egyptian mummy, human fat, flesh, bone, blood, brains and skin.

Moss taken from the skulls of dead soldiers was even used as a cure for nosebleeds, said author of the book Richard Sugg of Durham University.

"The human body has been widely used as a therapeutic agent with the most popular treatments involving flesh, bone or blood.

"Cannibalism was found not only in the New World, as often believed, but also in Europe," he said.

"One thing we are rarely taught at school yet is evidenced in literary and historic texts of the time is this: James I refused corpse medicine; Charles II made his own corpse medicine; and Charles I was made into corpse medicine," the Mail quoted Sugg as saying.

The history of medicinal cannibalism, Sugg argues, raised a number of important social questions.

"Medicinal cannibalism used the formidable weight of European science, publishing, trade networks and educated theory. Whilst corpse medicine has sometimes been presented as a medieval therapy, it was at its height during the social and scientific revolutions of early-modern Britain.

"It survived well into the 18th century, and amongst the poor it lingered

stubbornly on into the time of Queen Victoria," Sugg said.

"In the heyday of medicinal cannibalism bodies or bones were routinely taken from Egyptian tombs and European graveyards. Not only that, but some way into the eighteenth century one of the biggest imports from Ireland into Britain was human skulls," he added.

The book gives numerous vivid, often disturbing examples of the practice, ranging from the execution scaffolds of Germany and Scandinavia, through the courts and laboratories of Italy, France and Britain, to the battlefields of Holland and Ireland and on to the tribal man-eating of the Americas, according to the newspaper.

Sugg said: "Over in continental Europe, where the axe fell routinely on the necks of criminals, blood was the medicine of choice for many epileptics."

Whilst James I had refused to take human skull, his grandson Charles II liked the idea so much that he bought the recipe. Having paid perhaps 6,000 pounds for this, he often distilled human skull himself in his private laboratory, the report said.

The book will be published June 29 by Routledge and charts the largely forgotten history of European corpse medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians.