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Provenance & Research

Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts

 German **Lost Art**
Foundation

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Preface

The Nazi regime committed injustice against millions of people in Germany and in the European countries occupied by German troops, which included the looting and confiscation of works of art and other cultural goods. It has taken long enough for this to be acknowledged and accepted in mainstream society. In this area, there is still much that needs to be critically addressed and acts of wrongdoing put right, at least symbolically.

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on another topic, which previously received little attention: the confiscation and looting of cultural goods during the colonial era. First initiated by the debate concerning the future Humboldt Forum in the reconstructed Berlin Palace, then fueled by the Sarr-Savoy report, discussions on how to deal with the tangible and intangible legacy of colonialism are now being held in Germany as well. This debate goes hand in hand with the current sharper focus on manifestations of racism in our society.

The Sarr-Savoy report, written by economist Felwine Sarr, professor at Université Gaston Berger in Senegal, and art historian Bénédicte Savoy, who teaches at the Technische Universität Berlin and the Collège de France in Paris, was commissioned by French president Emmanuel Macron. His aim was to find out what cultural goods originating from former French colonies in Africa could still be found today in museums from Nice to Lille and explore the possibilities for returning these objects to their places of origin. This report and its implications will not be discussed in any further detail here. But it may be safe to assume that the report had perhaps a greater impact in Germany than in France itself. Evidence of this can be seen in the aforementioned lively public debate and also in a growing awareness of the fact that this whole area cannot be tackled without the involvement of the societies of origin. And not least, an increased sensitivity can be observed in museums with regard to the



Susa Ubra

Il gruppo di Susa Ubra si è formato in un momento molto breve. Dopo un anno, quando il Museo nazionale d'Arte d'Europa ha deciso di organizzare una mostra di arte africana, il gruppo si è formato. Il gruppo è formato da artisti che lavorano in Italia e in Francia. Il gruppo è formato da artisti che lavorano in Italia e in Francia. Il gruppo è formato da artisti che lavorano in Italia e in Francia.

Danzon

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controversial nature of objects from colonial contexts, combined with an increasing willingness to deal with issues of provenance and ultimately also return.

Clarification of provenance—as is also the experience from dealing with cultural property expropriated as a result of Nazi persecution—requires expert researchers and financial resources, in addition to good will and an open attitude in the collecting institutions. This is where the German Lost Art Foundation comes into play. The Foundation Board has tasked it with providing support to public institutions in Germany for relevant provenance research on objects seized during the colonial era. This support comprises funding, advice and the fostering of links and networks. The Foundation has thus been assigned a major new area of responsibility, in addition to its continuing core area of cultural goods looted in the Nazi state, wartime losses and the confiscation of cultural property in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR. This new work area is not limited to former German colonies for the very reason that colonialism was not a national but an international system; in many cases objects from other colonial territories ended up in German collections. Furthermore, ethnological museums are by no means the only institutions affected. Objects from colonial contexts can just as easily be found in natural history, cultural history and archaeological collections, for example, and in historical museums, art museums and local history museums.

In practice, support is provided primarily through funding for provenance research projects—preferably involving close communication on an equal footing with the societies from which the object originated—, through initiating and interlinking such projects, through specialist information and through promoting research communication (for example, by means of a monthly colloquium). A dedicated specialist department has been set up to ensure all these tasks are performed in a competent and professional manner.

This issue of *Provenance & Research* brings together a number of initial reports from projects that are being funded by the Foundation. They are snapshots of the work currently being carried out and, as such, are not able to deliver any conclusive results yet, but they do raise important issues and demonstrate ways of dealing with different aspects. At the same time, the varied nature of these projects provides an insight into the depth and breadth of this field.

PROF. DR. GILBERT LUPFER,
GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION,
MAGDEBURG

Théo Mercier's
African wooden
masks in the
Musée de l'Homme,
Paris, 2017/18

The Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts

Nearly two years ago, the German Lost Art Foundation was expanded to include a new subject area, covered by the Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts. The new department was created following intensive discussions among researchers, the general public and policymakers. Playing a key role in these were the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy entitled “The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage, Toward a New Relational Ethics” the pledge by the coalition government to “critically reappraise the provenance of cultural property from the colonial past” and the commitment of the German government, the federal states and the municipal umbrella organizations as set out in the “Framework Principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts.”

Civil society stakeholders and researchers had emphasized the need to address the colonial legacy and had founded initiatives, requested resources in meetings and identified ways to permanently establish postcolonial provenance research at museums and universities. With the Foundation’s funding guideline on cultural goods and collections, these are now available.

The years 2017 – 2019 represent a turning point in this regard. Since then, the German Empire’s history of expansion—until then never critically addressed—has been part of impassioned debates not only on German history but also on global inequality and racism, as the Black Lives Matter movement made clear.

The establishment of the new department is an important first step in institutionalizing the practice of postcolonial provenance research. After the department was set up as a central point of contact for issues relating to colonial heritage in German museums, collections and universities, new structures were subsequently created by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media and at the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States.

The response to the funding guideline is strong: not only have ethnographic museums and collections—which have dealt extensively with the subject of colonialism for many years—submitted research proposals, but individual natural history, archaeological and historic institutions and collections are now beginning to engage in postcolonial provenance research as well.

The department regards the task of fostering networks between stakeholders in Germany and in the countries of origin of the examined objects as particularly important. Workshops and conferences enable the supra-regional and transnational exchange of information and the alignment of interests and aspirations. In this way, relevant topics are explored and ideas developed for innovative instruments and formats that support postcolonial provenance research on a long-term basis. This applies to basic and context research as well as to issues of digitization, teaching and training and public discussion on the topic—or, in tangible terms, tools for the day-to-day practice of provenance research.

The new team has been able to benefit tremendously from the many years of experience and extensive knowledge possessed by colleagues in all of the Foundation’s other departments. Debate on provenance research into cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution has informed the new field of work from the outset—in future, the departments will hold joint events for the purpose of discussing similarities and differences and developing overarching strategies and viewpoints. Substantial support is also being provided by the Funding Committee “Colonial Contexts”, which consists of nine international experts.

Dr. Larissa Förster is head of the Department for Cultural Goods from Colonial Contexts.
Sarah Fründt and Dr. Jan Hüsgen are research consultants in the department.

WARUM SAMMELTE EIN LEHRER
ETHNOGRAPHISCHE OBJEKTE?

EINE „TRAURIGE GESCHICHTE“? ODER
VERKLÄRUNG DER KOLONIALEN VERGANGENHEIT?

WEL
GES
SAM



Supported Projects

WAS HAT EIN „KLAPPSTUHL“ MIT
KOLONIALVERGANGENHEIT ZU TUN?

WELCHE QUELLEN? WIE KANN DIE
GESCHICHTE DER ETHNOGRAPHISCHEN
SAMMLUNG REKONSTRUIERT WERDEN?



Informational label for the seated wooden sculpture.



Informational label for the wooden folding stool.

“The Answers Are As Varied As The People Themselves”

Initial Field Research Findings on the Provenance of a Colonial Collection From Cameroon at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich

The provenance research project “The Blue Rider Post and Max von Stetten’s collection (1893 – 1896) from Cameroon at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich” was launched in November 2019. It is funded by the German Lost Art Foundation and the Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst (Bavarian State Ministry for Science and the Arts).

There is an urgent need for research into this collection of more than 200 objects, firstly because of the professional positions held by Max von Stetten in the early phase of the occupation of Cameroon by Imperial Germany. He was made chief of the police force in 1892 and then became commander of the Schutztruppe (protection force) until 1895. Secondly, the collector was a leading figure involved in a number of so-called “punitive expeditions.” Thirdly, the collection includes one of the most important works in the museum’s Africa holdings. It is called the “Blue Rider Post” because of its depiction in the almanac “Der Blaue Reiter” (The Blue Rider) edited in 1912 by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc (Fig. 1). Research by ethnologists in the Global North into the origin and acquisition circumstances of this carved wooden post, as well as into its function and meaning, has so far resulted only in assumptions. And fourthly, another cult object (Fig. 2) is likely to be a war booty according to information in the Museum Fünf Kontinente’s accession catalog.

The project is proactive; no restitution claims have been made by Cameroon to date. The aim is to work together with researchers in Cameroon and members of former communities of origin to conduct a thorough and detailed examination of the specific situations and locations in



which the objects were acquired, while also taking into account Max von Stetten's professional positions and activities. Furthermore, the research aims to address the entangled history of Germany and Cameroon in this phase of colonial expansion, using Max von Stetten himself as an illustrative example. By documenting the oral traditions of the communities of origin in relation to the artifacts, the Cameroon perspective will be made much more prominent. However, the project is not only focused on exploring the past, but also on the present and the future. Hence it is vital for dialog to begin in and with the communities of origin about the present-day significance of these cultural objects that are more than 120 years old and, related to this, about the importance of earlier traditions for the way these communities live now and in the future. This will only be possible by an intense, long-term collaboration.

As a consequence of the post-German colonial period, Cameroon today consists of Francophone and Anglophone regions, between which there are currently severe political conflicts that can also be traced back to the unresolved German colonial past.¹ The research investigations are therefore divided: Yrène Matchinda and Lucie Mbogni Nankeng (both

1
Cult house post (?) /
Blue Rider Post · Before
1893 · Wood, natural
dyes · Height 182 cm ·
Munich, Museum
Fünf Kontinente,
inv. no. 93-13

2
"Byéri" reliquary
figure · Fang, Ngumba,
before 1896 · Wood,
brass sheet, teeth ·
Height 57.5 cm ·
Munich, Museum
Fünf Kontinente, inv.
no. 96-245

from Université de Dschang) are responsible for the Francophone regions of origin of the objects, while historians Joseph Ebune and Ngome Elvis Nkome (both from the University of Buea) are responsible for the Anglophone areas. Leading the team are Karin Guggeis (Munich) as overall project manager and Albert Gouaffo (Université de Dschang) as project manager for Cameroon.

But who are the communities of origin from whom Max von Stetten obtained his collection, which he gave to the museum—then called the *Königlich Ethnographische Sammlung*—as a “gift” in six parts between 1893 and 1896? The surviving information in the museum proves that they were varied in nature. Very often, only the general description “Cameroon” is recorded in the receipt documentation. Quite a few more precise details of origin first need to be identified and confirmed, such as in the case of the Blue Rider Post. Due to their high degree of mobility, a number of related groups were wrongly classified as separate entities by German colonial officers. This constant mobility makes it difficult for other communities to be assigned to a particular region. Both of these factors hinder reliable classification, and thus even supposedly reliable localizations must be checked. Place names were often incorrectly transcribed from local languages by German colonial officers and are therefore misleading. “Probably comes from Premierleutnant Bartsch & from his war in Aktona on the Nyong River in Yaoundé”² is the entry, unusually detailed for that period, in the receipt book for a sensitive cultural object that is today identified as a “byeri” reliquary figure. Surprisingly, it has not yet been possible to find Aktona on current or historical maps, despite intensive searches. In the course of investigations, a visit was made to a village called Atok, whose colonial past is evident from ruins like the palace of the village chief which, according to those interviewed there, had been built with support from the Germans.

In their quest to find Aktona and other possible communities of origin of important objects, the francophone research team members Yrène Matchinda and Lucie Mbogni Nankeng took the first field trip to the eastern and southern region of Cameroon, to the districts of Atok-Bebeng, Lolodorf, Nguila, Yaoundé and Akono. In each location, interviews were conducted in several towns and villages with decision-makers such as village chiefs and notable figures, with district leaders in the region and with craftspeople and other inhabitants. Because of the diverse range of people interviewed, the interpretations and assessments varied widely.

All the interviewees in the Atok district could only vaguely place the reliquary figure from Max von Stetten’s collection. But in Atok-Maka, the village chief (Fig. 3) emphasized that Pallottine missionaries had taken



many of the village's cult objects away with them to Germany. Three heads of families also said that priests had collected such objects as part of their civilizing mission with the aim of getting people to give up their ancient practices. They said that the religious objects had been denigrated as “fetishes” originating from the devil.

This special figure was also not identified by interviewees in another sub-group of the Fang, the Ngumba in Lolodorf. The majority interpreted this type of figure as a past protective god from the village of Nvulmaladé (god of the Ngumba). They said this god had been housed in a sacred shrine in the woods and was only allowed to be consulted by insiders in order to solve problems like infertility. But there were also other interpretations. One family head thought that the figure had been created as an object of power and authority “in honor of Queen Anzouer.” Furthermore, the Ngumba of Lolodorf confirmed the comments made by their cultural relations, the Maka of Atok, that the missionaries had stolen their cult objects.

In the museum documentation, a number of weapons are assigned to the higher-level population group “Wute,” which is why various places in the district of Nguila were visited. The interviewees were able to classify all the objects. They consider themselves to have been a community of warriors in their past and interpreted all the artifacts shown to them in photographs as past objects of warfare. They said that similar objects

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Lucie Mbogni Nankeng
in conversation with
83-year-old Gervais
Minne, village chief of
Atok-Maka on the
Nyong River · May 7,
2020



4
The 86-year-old village chief Abdoulaye Mossi with the framed lineage of the Wute chiefs of Nguila and important items from their culture of remembrance · May 14, 2020

were still used today, particularly in traditional parades and in rituals at the graves of ancestors, and they were stored safely in a special room in the royal palace. The interviewees considered it important to preserve these objects for future generations as evidence of their cultural traditions, especially because the Wute have long since abandoned these warlike practices.

For the most part, the interviewed members of the visited communities spoke very nostalgically about the colonial period. Even brutal acts carried out by the German colonial rulers were construed positively as an “expression of the German desire to inculcate the values of work done well in the local population.”³ Evidence of this could still be seen in the durability and longevity of the buildings, bridges and roads that the colonial masters had left behind. The French-speaking team of researchers in Cameroon interpret this nostalgic attitude as evidence that the German colonial period as well as colonization as a pan-European project has never been thoroughly reviewed.

Overall, it became apparent that even communities of origin are not homogeneous entities, but are made up of individuals with different knowledge, interpretations and interests. This raises the question of interpretative authority. Who may speak for the communities? Who may

participate at all in the discourse within the communities of origin? Who there ultimately decides what is accepted and shared as an interpretation?

It also became apparent that, between the descendants of possible communities of origin in the Francophone regions, there was a wide range of attitudes towards traditions and their artifacts, practices and values. At one end of the spectrum are the Wute, who—according to the interviewees—generally still adhere to their traditional values and practices, and who preserve and treasure items used in the past as objects of remembrance. According to the French-speaking Cameroon research team, all the other communities visited had lost their cultural roots, values and traditions as a result of the increasing dominance of Christianity and the changes of the modern age and believed a return to these was no longer necessary. The Cameroon project leader attributed this diminished interest in the knowledge of ancestors to the fact that no knowledge of cultural practices was passed on. There was therefore an urgent need to increase their awareness of the existence of these traditional cultural goods in German museums, to maintain dialog with these institutions and to work together on equal terms to negotiate ways of appropriately handling cultural heritage from violent acquisition contexts and culturally sensitive objects. In the communities of origin, there may be a desire for objects to be returned and also for cooperation, circulation, damages or other forms of compensation.

For five objects from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, a new and urgent need for research had emerged regarding their acquisition. A synopsis of the museum's acquisition date, the documented origin in the receipt book and the consulted literature gives rise to a strong suspicion that these objects originate from a "punitive expedition" to the Bakwiri in Buea. The English-speaking project team, Joseph Ebune and Ngome Elvis Nkome, contacted more than 120 people within this community. The researchers concluded that the answers given by the interviewees in the communities of origin were as varied as the people themselves. But some informants were able to attach local names to one of the two culturally sensitive objects and also describe their use, storage and ownership; the same was true for two objects used in warfare contexts. These researchers also emphasized that Max von Stetten's sacred objects in particular could have been acquired possibly via missionaries, such from the Basel Mission in this case.

Despite the fact that the objects in the Max von Stetten collection had been brought to Germany from Cameroon more than 120 years ago, initial research activities involving the descendants of (possible) commu-

nities of origin in the Francophone and Anglophone regions found members who were certainly able to recall these types of objects, even if they could not precisely remember these specific objects. As a result, it is hoped that—instead of the anonymity of generalized ethnonyms such as “Wute”—it will be possible during the research to reconstruct specific names of individuals, family communities or cult communities who once commissioned, produced and used the cultural goods in the collection. The restoration of knowledge about these objects and the renewed interest on the German and the Cameroonian side in these cultural goods and the associated traditions may also lead to their re-evaluation in the former communities of origin.

- 1 The French and the British divided Cameroon between them after the First World War and introduced different administration systems in the country (direct and indirect rule). These administration systems completely ignored the German heritage.
- 2 Receipt book, Museum Fünf Kontinente, Sammlung Manuskripte und Schriften, SMV 24 (1894–1902), sheet 96.
- 3 Quoted from the summary made by the two researchers of statements by the interviewees Biabé Alphones and Mbuda Nkong Charles, notables and patriarch of the Makogou community on May 5, 2020, and by Ndama Bvouma, notable in Bikala on May 11, 2020.

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The long-term project “The Blue Rider Post and Max von Stetten’s collection (1893–1896) from Cameroon at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich” is being funded from November 2019 to January 2022 (expected end date).

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Provenance Clarified— What Now?

Provenance Research in Oldenburg on Human Remains of Non-European Origin

The Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg (State Museum for Nature and Man, LMNM) was founded in 1836 as the Naturhistorisches Museum (Museum of Natural History). It was based on a collection of objects owned by the Grand Duke. The date of the museum's founding and the initial focus on natural history would suggest that Oldenburg, like so many other European museums, houses a collection of human remains. Besides a regional collection focus¹, the interest of the Oldenburg museum also centered on the newly discovered worlds overseas. Collectors, dealers and often navy personnel brought exotic fauna and flora—and also human remains—back from there to the north-west province of Germany. Believing in progress and under the influence of evolutionary theory, people imagined that the “natives” of the colonies were threatened with extinction, which is why there was a desire to bring as many skeletons as possible to Europe for documentation purposes.² These acquisitions were (mostly) not legal, and not only in light of our modern-day ethical and moral understanding. In the colonial territories, the corpses of local people were stolen from graves, mortuaries and infirmaries, or were bought or traded for small amounts of money. Added to this injustice was the fact that the traditions practiced by various indigenous societies regarding their dead were not observed.

The Oldenburg collection of human remains of non-European origin consists almost entirely of skulls. The recommendations of the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory) of 1872³ called for whole skeletons, ideally with skin and hair, to be collected where possible. The collectors were expected to at least obtain skulls, almost as a

1884

Jan. 17

Zwei fohimoffidat u. 14: Stück Mineralien aus d. Cumberland - Land,
(Die beiden fohimoffidat so wie die Mineralien sind von der Insel
Kikastan im Cumberland - Land. - Das Exemplar Germania,
Luzl. Wahlstedt, welches 1883 im Auftrage der Kaiserlichen
Museumsgesellschaft von der Station Kingawa - Fjord im Cumberland
Land gekauft, fast die beiden u. Mineralien mitgebracht. Die sind
von Hansmann H. Wenke dort gesammelt.)

1

Entry from the register of new additions from 1863 to 1900 relating to the acquisition of two Inuit skulls

minimum requirement. Most of the specimens entered the Oldenburg museum in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. The exceptions are the acquisitions of skulls made in 1962 and 2001. In the project “Provenance research on the anthropological skull collection at the LMNM,” funded by the German Lost Art Foundation, one of the first steps involves examining the written documentation relating to the acquisition circumstances of the approx. 30 skulls to show conclusively how they made their way from their place of origin to Oldenburg. Unlike some other collections which contain a number of skeletons or skulls from one area, the Oldenburg collection contains skulls from almost every part of the world (North and South America, Africa, Asia, Oceania and Australia), but never more than two from one particular place. Even though the provenances are so disparate, piecing together the history of origin of the skulls always involves a similar set of questions: When did the human remains come into the museum? Where did they come from? Do they originate directly from a context of injustice? Were there any other objects that arrived here from the region at the same time? Who were the suppliers and the dealers? Was the object acquired by barter or purchase or is it a gift (Fig. 1)? Was an order issued by the museum and what happened upon arrival at the destination?

The second step focuses on any further questions concerning participation with the communities of origin or, more specifically, returns. These are equally multifaceted and complex. Even where it is possible to clarify the provenance and the museum is committed to returning the human remains, repatriation in this context can be a lengthy and drawn-out process. This is partly due to the existing lack of practical guidance on repatriations.⁴ A step in this direction has been made by politicians during

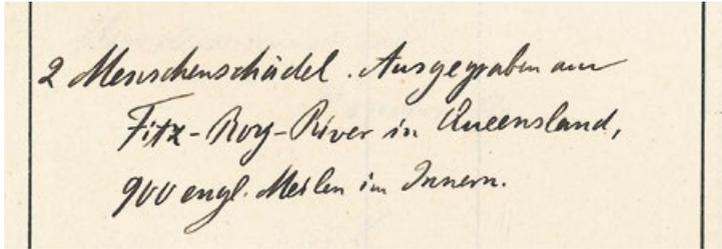
the past year with a key issues paper in which the intention to return human remains is clearly emphasized.⁵ Nevertheless, it is still the responsibility of each institution to identify who the contact partners are and what they expect. Who will meet the costs of the return ceremony and transportation of the bones to the country of origin? Hence the preparations for repatriation initially prove to be a bureaucratic act. Ultimately, besides the more practical questions, there is still an ethical and moral component: Does the repatriation mean everything is done? Or does the restitution of historical injustice look different? First and foremost, ongoing dialog with the communities and countries of origin could bring some clarity here because it appears difficult to anticipate different expectations.

In the Oldenburg project, the historical research is complemented by the anthropological classification of the skulls that are physically located at the LMNM.⁶ One finding, however, is that not all of the specimens recorded in the receipt and inventory books are still in existence today, or no entry can be assigned to the skulls that are still held in the collection. Because of this, it is not possible to recreate a biography, i.e., to go beyond the inventory number assigned by the museum and give the anonymous skulls their identity back. In other cases, in which it is possible to tell from the archive materials where the skull comes from, anthropology can help determine the age, sex and, in some cases, the possible cause of death.

An example from the field illustrates this: From the sparse documentation relating to two Australian skulls, it can be ascertained only that they had been dug up near the Fitzroy River in Queensland. They are assumed to have entered the Oldenburg museum before 1894 because even though they are not documented in any receipt register, the then director recorded them in a notebook he created in 1894 (Fig. 2). The wording corresponds with the label attached to the skulls: "Dug up by the Fitzroy River, Queensland, 900 engl. miles inland" (Fig. 3). On the anthropological side, it was possible to confirm that the two skulls had probably been in the ground for some time and that they did not have any injuries that would suggest a violent death. On this basis, the indication of an excavation appears to be confirmed. There are, however, other inconsistencies: The Fitzroy River flows through Queensland, but at no point is it 900 English miles (= 1448.41 km) inland. So how did this entry on the label come about? Is it due to wrong information from a dealer, an incorrect reading or should it actually say 90 English miles? Other archive documents and discussions with experts and representatives from the area of origin could provide answers.

2

Entry by Johannes Martin in "Scelette und Menschenschädel" (1894), p. 31



3

Label on one of the two Aborigine skulls (inv. no. 3328)



A restitution claim for these two skulls has been made to the museum by indigenous Australians, communicated through the government. We agree with the justification that repatriation will promote healing, justice and reconciliation.⁷ Therefore, the plan is to return the two ancestors, as they are called in the official letter from the Australian side, even though their provenance has not been definitively clarified. In line with the ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums, they are of "spiritual and/or cultural significance" for the descendants of the indigenous population.⁸ The LMNM is acting merely as a place of storage for the skulls, as human remains from non-European contexts are neither researched nor exhibited nowadays, a fact that again appears to make repatriation to the communities of origin necessary.

"Stamina is needed for provenance research"—that could be the interim conclusion from this project after six months. But the very real and rewarding conclusion is the realization that when each individual skull is examined in detail, it comes to be understood as part of an individual person with its own unique history and not merely a collection object with an inventory number.

- 1 Etta Bengen: Vom Großherzoglichen Naturhistorischen Museum zum Landesmuseum für Natur und Mensch, in: Oldenburger Jahrbuch 101 (2001), pp. 207 – 234, esp. p. 208.
- 2 See Sarah Fründt: Die Menschen-Sammler. Über den Umgang mit menschlichen Überresten im Übersee-Museum Bremen, Marburg 2011, pp. 9 – 22.
- 3 Rudolf Virchow et al.: Rathschläge für anthropologische Untersuchungen auf Expeditionen der Marine. Auf Veranlassung des Chefs der Kaiserlich Deutschen Admiralität ausgearbeitet von der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, in: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 4 (1872), pp. 325 – 356, esp. p. 335.
- 4 See Deutscher Museumsbund e. V. (ed.): Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections, Berlin 2013; critical discussion of these: Larissa Förster et al.: A Good Starting Point? Critical Perspectives from Various Disciplines; in: Larissa Förster, Sarah Fründt (eds.): Human Remains in Museums and Collections. A Critical Engagement with the "Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections" of the German Museums Association, Berlin 2017, pp. 9 – 20, esp. p. 11.
- 5 See www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-03-25_Erste-Eckpunkte-Sammlungsgut-koloniale-Kontexte_final.pdf (May 15, 2020), p. 2, lines 10 – 15, p. 7, esp. line. 23 and following.
- 6 The anthropologist Marianne Kupetz worked on the project for six months as part of Musealog training.
- 7 See official letter from the Australian government to the Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg dated July 3, 2019.
- 8 See <http://icom-oesterreich.at/publikationen/icom-ethikkodex-fuer-naturhistorische-museen> (May 28, 2020), p. 1, section G.

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Dr. Ivonne Kaiser is research assistant for provenance research on human remains at Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg and is working on the project named below.

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The long-term project "Provenance research on the anthropological skull collection at Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg" is being funded from December 2019 to November 2021 (expected end date).

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A Gift of Idols and a Midwife's Skull

Between Research, Tourism and Genocide: Colonial Acquisitions in Lübeck

Funding from the German Lost Art Foundation is providing unique opportunities for Lübeck's Völkerkundesammlung (Ethnographic Collection), a small museum in a city that is only just starting to critically examine its colonial history. Accordingly, there is a focus on two areas of the collection involving holdings from Central Africa and present-day Namibia. The research is predominantly concerned with objects from the Fang (formerly Pangwe) which were collected during the Lübeck Pangwe-Expedition (1907–1909) to parts of Africa that are now Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Diaries from this expedition prove that these objects changed hands mainly as purchases and gifts, but that some were also acquired in exchange for hostages or were obtained in raids on non-cooperative villages. Of the 1,200 objects originally collected, only 158 survived the bombing of Lübeck during World War II. Besides examining these remaining items to establish whether any are looted property, researchers are also investigating the complex backgrounds of the transactions carried out during the expedition period.

The best example of this is the “byeri”: wooden figures which guarded the venerated skulls of ancestors that were conserved in cylindrical containers made from tree bark. The expedition leader and amateur ethnologist Günther Tessmann (1884–1969) did not actually succeed in collecting the reliquaries. Given the power relations at the time, this deserves to be seen as a remarkable achievement by the Fang in protecting their cultural property. Acquisition of the figures proved to be easier. For instance, in his memoirs Tessman wrote of a meeting in June 1908 in what is now Equatorial Guinea: “Various chiefs from villages nearby and further afield came with gifts. I wanted to give them gifts in return, of course, but what they sought was a “book,” i.e., written confirmation of their



1
Male reliquary figure
"niämödo" of the
Ntumu (?)-Fang ·
Around 1900 · Wood,
feathers, metal, plant
fibers · Height 95 cm ·
Ethnographic Collec-
tion of the Hanseatic
City of Lübeck,
inv. no. 70.13:3 (T 13) ·
Acquired in June 1908
in Equatorial Guinea
during the Lübeck
Pangwe-Expeditio



2 and 3
Carbine with percussion lock · Europe, before 1841 · Wood, steel, brass · Length 86.5 cm · Ethnographic Collection of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck, inv. no. 45.3a

The stamps on the gun show that it was overhauled in 1841.

authority. Despite not representing an official government in any way I went along with it, even though I also found such an arrogation of supreme governmental power dubious and not at all commensurate with the actual circumstances. In this case, I acted against my conscience, but only out of love for the Lübeck museum, or rather for science, as I had realized that this was the only way I could obtain genuinely valuable ethnological things. [...] I obtained the most valuable item of all my acquisitions in this inexpensive though not entirely unobjectionable manner: a magnificently carved ancestor figure over 1 meter in length.”¹

Therefore, it seems that this reliquary figure (Fig. 1)—today considered one of the most valuable objects in the Völkerkundesammlung collection—was apparently a gift. However, we must not be too hasty to classify this transaction as unobjectionable; Tessmann’s behavior could indeed be considered an arrogation of authority. However, the indigenous community should not be labeled naive victims either. In having their authority confirmed by the “powerful” foreigners, the leaders could have gained an advantage in regional power struggles. For instance, one of the chiefs referred to this “book” shortly afterwards in his war campaigns against neighboring villages.² Objects such as the reliquary figure may have seemed to him a fair price for this conferral of legitimacy. The Fang’s increasing resentment towards Tessmann suggests, however, that they saw through his duplicity, condemned his brutal methods or simply no longer saw any benefit in his presence. However, just killing the foreign invader was out of the question because this would have resulted in draconian retribution on the part of the colonial government. Hence the Fang opted for a form of passive resistance. Without wishing to downplay



the scientific benefit or the colonial injustice, this expedition thus illustrates the Fang's skillful and successful resistance against colonialism.

Questions concerning the religious sensitivity of the byeris are difficult to answer. African art has yielded numerous examples of ritual objects that were deconsecrated for sale or produced specifically for the European market and left unconsecrated. As Tessmann observed: “[...] for all those who are uninitiated, container and figure are both a ‘noli me tangere.’ For those who are initiated, they are of little importance, as shown by the fact that these wooden figures, which are often highly valued by Europeans as “idols,” are given away by the Pangwe in exchange for payment not only without ceremony, but in areas that are influenced by white people they are often offered to them for sale.”³

In contrast to other reliquary figures, the statue located in Lübeck is distinctive due to its size and movable limbs. These modifications could be interpreted as an attempt to enhance the attractiveness of the ceremonies in the face of Christianization and colonialism, and also as an effect of other religious traditions in Central Africa. Perhaps it was precisely this “hybrid” nature that made the object dispensable for its previous owner. The cult of the byeris is said to have died out by the 1920s.⁴ However, the question remains as to what significance these figures have today for the descendants of the Fang communities in Equatorial Guinea. Research findings from Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe, who is carrying out fieldwork in this area, are expected to provide further insights here.

A completely different dimension of injustice, albeit with a no less complex acquisition situation, is revealed by the holdings associated with



4-8
Colonial tourist
photographs of the
Duderstadt, 1911

- a) Prisoners in chains
in Otjiwarongo
- b) Slums of surviving
Herero near Windhoek
- c) Wilhelm Drews
(right) in Okahandja
- d) Indigenous
ethnographica dealers
in Cape Town and
- e) on the Uganda
Railway





10
Lidded container with
pinpoint decoration, no
signs of use · Namibia,
around 1900 · Leather,
wood, iron · Height
16.5 cm · Ethnographic
Collection of the
Hanseatic City of
Lübeck, inv. no. 20.19:3

the Herero and Nama genocide (1904–1908) in what is now Namibia. These come from a nurse, two officers and two doctors in the German Schutztruppe (colonial troops), whose biographies were still relatively unknown before the project started. One of them, Dr. Ernst Berg (1864–?), took part in the campaign against the Herero as a senior military medical officer. However, archive documents and the discovery of a handwritten note in a receptacle collected by him prove that his objects originating from Waterberg had already been obtained by 1903. Also involved in the military operations was Lübeck physician Dr. Gerald Jorns (1876–1937), who donated two Herero skulls to the museum in 1906. These were lost in the bombing of the museum in 1942. The other objects amassed by Jorns are equally questionable. Of the two officers, Wilhelm Thiel (1881–1915), who was a lieutenant in the 4th supply column division, stands out in particular. Among the items he collected were two rifles (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) which he himself may have obtained on the battlefield or stolen from a stock of confiscated weapons. These unusually old weapons perhaps carried particular personal memories for Thiel and his family because they were not given to the museum until 1945. Hence these rifles also testify to the fact that ethnographic objects always have an “afterlife” as witnesses to their collectors’ biographies. This is also true for the collection of Wilhelm Drews (1881–1918, Fig. 4–8) who, as a lieutenant in the 1st Field Regiment of the Schutztruppe, took part in the

genocide and later worked in the cartographic field. He collected objects from various ethnic groups and a fragment of a rock carving. Thiel and Drews died in World War I and are commemorated in Lübeck's Cemetery of Honor (Fig. 9). The identification of their tombs could be the starting point for a public debate about traces of the colonial past in the city. Another point that must be mentioned is that all the researched collections include unused and richly decorated objects, some of which were not produced by the Herero themselves. In the case of such items (Fig. 10), the question arises as to whether they are early forms of a tourist handicraft. As regards good-as-new everyday objects in the collection of an officer involved in the genocide, it is conceivable that they were either looted or bought as a souvenir at a local market. The production and pricing of these souvenirs always remained subject to colonial power relations. And yet it is exactly these objects that prove that the indigenous population played an active role in the transfer of objects.

Nowhere is this juxtaposition of racism and tourism more evident than in the collection of Elisabeth Kulow (* 1888). Besides new items like those mentioned above, she also donated a skull and two lower jaws to the museum; these are marked as "Herero?" in the inventory book. The anthropological examination of a skull presumed to originate from this collection revealed that it is that of an elderly man who exhibits both African and European characteristics.⁵ The skull was buried in the ground for a long time and shows no signs of violent impact or traces of use as a specimen, such as those that can be observed on skull specimens produced in German concentration camps. It is possible, however, that the remains could come from a ransacked grave or could have been discovered by chance during excavation work. Kulow began working as a midwife for the German Red Cross in Gobabis in 1909 and spent prolonged periods on remote farms. The remains could have been found there and given to her as a curiosity. With her medical background, Kulow had perhaps developed an interest in anatomy or the pseudoscience of racial anthropology, which was popular at the time, and obtained the human remains in the setting of the military hospital in Gobabis. All that is known is that Kulow returned to Germany in 1912, completed a further period of service in Cameroon and was interned in Spain at the beginning of 1916. She became seriously ill and went back to Germany before the end of the war, as evidenced by her will, which was drawn up in Lübeck General Hospital on October 26, 1918. She gave her collection to the museum in 1920 and emigrated to the Netherlands in the following year, where all trace of her has vanished to this day. Despite these scant sources, Elisabeth Kulow is an important biographical case which focuses atten-



9
Grave of honor for
Wilhelm Drews in
Lübeck Cemetery of
Honor

tion on the role of women as collectors of human remains, an area in which very little research has been carried out to date. It also raises further questions about the role of nurses, the German Red Cross and women in general in the system of German colonial rule.

Upon reviewing the project at its mid-point, it can therefore be said that there are just as many findings as new questions. However, more than anything else, the Lübeck holdings clearly show how complex it can be to evaluate colonial collections and that the process of critically dealing with historical injustice cannot be reduced to the issues of looted property and returns.

- 1 Brigitte Templin, Sabine Dinslage (eds.): Günther Tessmann. Mein Leben – Tagebuch in 12 Bänden, Part 2, Lübeck 2015, p. 121 and following page.
- 2 Ibid., p. 122.
- 3 Günther Tessmann: Die Pangwe. Völkerkundliche Monographie eines westafrikanischen Negerstammes. Ergebnisse der Lübecker Pangwe-Expedition und früherer Forschungen 1904–1907, vol. 2, Berlin 1913, p. 117.
- 4 See Kairn A. Klieman: Of Ancestors and Earth Spirits: New Approaches for Interpreting Central African Politics, Religion, and Art, in: Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary, exhibition catalog, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2007/08, Alisa LaGamma (ed.), Barbara Drake Boehm et al., New York 2007, pp. 56–58.
- 5 The investigation was carried out by anthropologist Birgit Großkopf from the University of Göttingen in March 2020.

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Dr. Lars Frühsorge is an ethnologist and head of the Ethnographic Collection of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck.

Michael Schütte is a historian and a researcher on the project named below.

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The long-term project “Herero and Fang Objects in the Lübecker Völkerkundesammlung” is being funded from December 1, 2019, to November 30, 2020.

How Did the Objects Come Into the Museum?

First Results of Provenance Research at the Museum im Ritterhaus, Offenburg

When the permanent exhibition of colonial era objects at the Museum im Ritterhaus, Offenburg, was redesigned in 2017, it became clear that the provenance of only a few objects could be clarified and these classified as lawful acquisitions. The museum, which was founded 120 years ago as the “Museum für Natur- und Völkerkunde” (Museum of Natural History and Ethnology), today holds an ethnographic collection of more than 600 objects, these mainly having been collected between 1884 and 1917. Many of the objects come from the former German colonies.

The museum’s founder, Carl Frowin Mayer (1827–1919), believed that natural history also included ethnology as the study of foreign cultures of so-called primitive peoples. It was for this reason that he also collected ethnographic objects. He directly contacted colonial administrations and consulates to inquire about dealers and collectors who could provide him with objects from the colonies. Mayer also made requests in the local press asking people from Offenburg who lived in the colonies to bring him back “interesting” objects. That included a number of military personnel from Offenburg, a garrison city in Baden, who had volunteered to serve in German South West Africa or Tsingtao. Mayer did not regard it important for the provenance of objects to be properly documented (Fig. 1).¹ A project to research the provenance of these objects, funded by the German Lost Art Foundation, began in February 2020.

First of all, the documents available in the museum were inspected: files from the period when the museum was founded, along with all of Mayer’s surviving correspondence and the 1st inventory book he kept from 1894 onwards.² Unfortunately, there are numerous inconsistencies in these documents. For example, the correspondence indicates that objects were purchased which were not initially entered into the receipt



1
Presentation of the
ethnographic collection
at the Städtisches
Museum für Natur-
und Völkerkunde,
Offenburg, from 1900
to 1917

book, but for which there are entries later on in the inventory book of 1911.³ The documents from a stock-take in the 1980s also show that many of the objects from the early years can no longer be found in the museum today.⁴

In reviews of the sources, some names came up repeatedly, such as that of a military medical officer “Dr. Nahm,” who first appears in the receipt book in 1898, then in 1899 and finally in 1907.⁵ There are also references to donations made by him in the Offenburg press of that time.⁶ In the municipal accounts records of 1900, he is mentioned as a sponsor of painting work in the museum.⁷ Johann Adam Manfred Nahm was born on October 19, 1867, in Gernsbach, Baden. He was the first child of teacher Johann Adam Nahm and his wife Maria Magdalena.⁸ The family moved to Offenburg in the 1870s.⁹ After leaving school and completing his medical studies, Nahm became a physician in the German Imperial Navy in 1892. In September 1897, Nahm, by then 30 years old, was instructed to report on board the survey vessel SMS Möwe, which was moored in Hong Kong. The ship and Nahm set sail for the former colony of German New Guinea in March 1898. Nahm worked as a ship’s



doctor in the South Seas for two years.¹⁰ He kept a diary during this period and later summarized his experiences from just the first year in two volumes, richly illustrated with his own drawings.¹¹ The journalist Johannes Wilda, who was a guest on board the ship from March to June 1899, reported on the second year.¹² There are no records of the last six months.

In November 1899, Nahm left SMS *Möwe* in Sydney and began the journey home. In the years that followed, he was deployed in various locations on land and at sea until he finally retired from the German Imperial Navy in May 1914. He got married in Berlin in 1919 and moved to Munich, where he practiced as a physician. He died there on October 13, 1933. The two above-mentioned, never-published volumes were found among his papers.¹³

Nahm's notes not only give an account of life on board an Imperial Navy ship but also document the living conditions of Germans and natives in what was then German New Guinea. He repeatedly criticizes the German Empire in its role as a colonial power. Writing about the mass deaths of Germans in 1891 as a result of unhygienic conditions, malaria



and diseases, Nahm says: “Such is the fate of colonizers, who, as inexperienced as they are, refuse to learn from older experienced nations. In order that the German remains as he is, namely a simpleton beholden to authority and the realm of abstraction, the colonies [...] were taken from him.”¹⁴

Nahm used his time on shore leave to observe the local people and get in contact with them. He forged a special relationship with the inhabitants of Massilia, a village on the northeast coast. In this context, he describes how he made friends with Ipeh, a young villager (Fig. 2). Ipeh gave him a “fine chain made from fiber rings”; he in turn gave Ipeh a “cigar cord” as a gift.¹⁵

Nahm visited the village repeatedly: “Spent a few hours with the Mossulis later and, after the hunt, in the men’s house [...] watching the smoke of my cigar rise up above me. [...] and got to know something about them. In war with their neighbors, around the chest [...] they hang pretty war shields made of boars’ teeth, which are decorated with cowries and red abrus seeds. I purchased such shields from them in large numbers.”¹⁶ A specimen (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) was also noted in the Offenburg receipt book.¹⁷ There is no information about the currency used to pay for the shields. However, elsewhere Nahm describes how he used glass beads in transactions: “In Hong Kong I asked [...] our ship’s agent to bring me glass



beads for bartering. On the day of departure he left me four packets of tiny beads [...] in the room. They were the miniature beads our grandmothers used to embroider tobacco pouches [...]. I was disgruntled as all the other gentlemen had bigger ones. On Tami I tried to buy a bracelet with these beads. I was astonished at the glow in the chief's eyes. [...] I gave his wife a handful for her fiber skirt. When we later [...] returned to the boat, all the women of the village came after me [...]. They tore their skirts from their bodies and held them out to me in exchange for the splendid beads. [...] With the look of a pure fool I gave each [...] a small palmful.”¹⁸



5
Malanggan sculpture ·
New Ireland, Papua New
Guinea, 19th century ·
Wood, cowries, coconut
fiber, pigments · Height
144 cm · Offenburg,
Museum im Ritterhaus,
inv. no. 2612, II/ 59

He repeatedly describes how he actively tried to purchase items, sometimes successfully and sometimes not: “A [...] shark fishing rod, which I saw but could not buy [...]”¹⁹ In Melanesia, bartering has always been an established part of the culture, as much in the past as it is today. Transactions usually only come about when what is offered in exchange for an item or service is of an acceptable value to the seller.

Nahm also obtained some objects as gifts—for example, on October 21, 1898, in the guest house of the Hershheim company in Matupi: “In the evenings on the Raulle terrace, I stretched my limbs with a cool drink [...]. A schooner captain [from] Mioko sat down next to me and told me about the large tree, the beautiful coral caves and the roar of the surf on the reefs near his settlement. Because I listened to him attentively, he rewarded me the next day by giving me three very beautiful dance masks from New Ireland, which my boy [...] put into the large chest along with the other treasures.”²⁰

Thanks to these diary entries as well as other documents, it is possible for many of the objects in the Offenburg collection to be definitively attributed to Manfred Nahm. These include the combat shield and two of the three dance masks mentioned, which are on display as Malanggan sculptures in the permanent exhibition in the Museum im Ritterhaus (Fig. 5).²¹ All three objects are in the 1st inventory book; the latter are described in an article from 1934 as “two large idols [...]” of the Nahm collection.²² To date, it is not known precisely how they made their way into the museum—whether they came from Nahm himself, from his father who lived in Offenburg or via freight shipment. Further clarification is also needed on whether a Tatanua mask in our collection is the third dance mask, on who the unnamed schooner captain²³ actually was and on whether any more of the “treasures” from the “large chest” are to be found in the Museum im Ritterhaus.

Nahm’s diary entries portray a critical and insightful person who was open in his approach to other people and largely fair in his dealings with them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine whether and—if applicable—which of his objects originate from contexts in which force may have been a factor. This is because even though SMS M \ddot{o} we sailed the South Seas as a survey vessel, she was still a German Imperial Navy warship and was always ready to be used as such in exceptional situations. After 1899 in particular, so-called “punitive expeditions” were repeatedly undertaken under the new Imperial judge, Heinrich Schnee, and the first governor of German New Guinea, Rudolf von Bennigsen. SMS M \ddot{o} we was

requisitioned as part of these expeditions. No punitive expeditions are known to have taken place in 1898, when Albert Hahl was still in office as Imperial judge, but in the following year there were three involving the survey vessel. Nahm was on board during this period.²⁴ Therefore, it is not unlikely that the Nahm collection may also include objects that were stolen as part of these expeditions. The research to be conducted over the coming months will establish whether this is the case.

- 1 For Mayer's correspondence see Offenburg city archive (StA OG), AZ 351/10-1, AZ 5/5251; Klaus Weschenfelder: *Völkerkunde im Heimatmuseum*, in: *Andenken an den Kolonialismus*, exhib. cat. University of Tübingen 1984, Volker Harms (ed.), Tübingen 1984, pp. 82–94.
- 2 1st inventory book, Museum für Natur- und Völkerkunde, Offenburg, 1894–1912 (henceforth cited as: 1st inventory book 1894–1912), Museum im Ritterhaus, no shelf mark.
- 3 Inventory book, Museum für Natur- und Völkerkunde, Offenburg, 1911 (henceforth cited as: inventory book 1911), Museum im Ritterhaus, no shelf mark.
- 4 See StA OG, AZ 351/10-1, AZ 5/5251; 1st inventory book 1894–1912; inventory book 1911.
- 5 See 1st inventory book 1894–1912, p. 23 and following, p. 28, p. 39.
- 6 See *D'r alt Offeburger*, no. 1017 dated Nov. 16, 1919.
- 7 StA OG, 11/3866, p. 1763.
- 8 Gernsbach, katholische Gemeinde: *Geburtenbuch 1810–1869*, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, 390, no. 1674; Philippsburg, katholische und israelitische Gemeinde: *Standesbuch 1841–1850*, *ibid.*, 390, no. 3965.
- 9 There is no registration card in StA OG which could provide information on the exact year. There are no documents referring to this in the Gernsbach municipal archive either.
- 10 See also Hartmut Nöldeke: *Mit dem Vermessungsschiff MÖWE zwei Jahre in der Südsee (1898–1899)*. *Zur Biografie des Schiffszarzes Dr. med. Manfred Nahm (1867–1933)*, Bremerhaven 2008, p. 18 and following.
- 11 Dr. Limlimburr [Manfred Nahm]: *Auf dem Weg zu den Kanaken der Südsee. Reiseerinnerungen eines Münchner Arztes. Ein Jahr aus dem Leben eines deutschen Marinearztes*, typewritten manuscript, 2 vols, Munich 1933, Wehrgeschichtliches Ausbildungszentrum at Marineschule Mürwik, inv. no. 16746 XVI. Special thanks go to Joachim Scherneck-Czech of the Wehrgeschichtliches Ausbildungszentrum at Marineschule Mürwik for the provision of the Nahm manuscript. Without this, it would not have been possible to produce this article during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 12 Johannes Wilda: *Reise auf S.M.S. "Möwe." Streifzüge in Südseekolonien und Ostasien*, Berlin 1903.
- 13 See Nöldeke 2008, pp. 17–62.
- 14 Nahm 1933, vol.2, p. 50 and following.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 17 1st inventory book 1894–1912, p. 24, no. 26; inventory book 1911, p. 127, no. 286.
- 18 Nahm 1933, vol.2, p. 70 and following.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 21 See 1st inventory book 1894–1912, p. 24, no. 27, p. 28, no. 57; inventory book 1911, p. 127, nos. 289 and 290.
- 22 Ernst Batzer: *Kurzer Wegweiser durch die Städtischen Sammlungen Offenburg*, Offenburg 1934, p. 8.

23 Presumed to be Captain Weber (first name unknown), who worked for the trading company Deutsche Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft; see Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg: Samoa, Bismarckarchipel und Neuguinea. Drei Deutsche Kolonien in der Südsee, Leipzig 1902, p. 186 and following.

24 See Albert Hahl: Gouverneursjahre in Neuguinea, Berlin 1937; Heinrich Schnee: Bilder aus der Südsee. Unter den kannibalischen Stämmen des Bismarck-Archipels, Berlin 1904, pp. 142–151, pp. 160–180; Wilda 1903, pp. 171–184.

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Ethnologist Susanne Leiendecker has been conducting research into the provenance of objects in the colonial era collection at the Museum im Ritterhaus, Offenburg, since February 2020.

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The long-term project “Researching the provenance of the colonial era collection at the Museum im Ritterhaus, Offenburg” is being funded from February 2020 to January 2022 (expected end date).

Challenges of Transnational Cooperation:

A Discussion with Researchers From the Global South

In September 2019 a workshop entitled “Perspectives of Transnational Provenance Research in Ethnographic Collections in Germany” was organized by the German Lost Art Foundation and the joint project PAESE (the German acronym for “Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnography in Lower Saxony”). Visiting scholars from six African and Oceanic countries joined colleagues from eleven collecting institutions in German-speaking countries (ill. P. 38 and ill. 1 – 2).¹ Larissa Förster (German Lost Art Foundation) and Lars Müller (PAESE) asked five provenance researchers from Cameroon, Gabon, Namibia und Papua New Guinea about their experiences in co-operating with German institutions.

Larissa Förster (LF) & Lars Müller (LM): At the moment there is a lot of debate about postcolonial provenance research. From your perspective, what is particularly important in practical terms?

Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba: It is essential to reflect on the research objective—is it the return of ethnographical objects, reparations to individual communities, the decolonisation of knowledge, or an exploration of new forms of knowledge? As a result, it becomes clearer how and through which means research results should be communicated and disseminated. In addition, it is important to have an open discussion about questions pertaining to the sustainability of provenance research, such as how long the research process can last, and who benefits from the research.

Ndzodo Awono: From my perspective, “postcolonial provenance research” should firstly focus on the interaction between colonisers and colonised during the collection of objects. It is necessary to look into the different collecting strategies of colonial rulers and the role of the colonised. Neither of the two groups could act alone and without the other. A



Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe



Tommy Yaulin Buga



Ndzodo Awono



Richard Tsogang Fossi



Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba

second important aspect is memory culture. Researchers should therefore make contact with source communities. In addition to existing reports and other publications, oral history is an indispensable contribution. Even today it remains deeply rooted in many source communities: Hamidou Bello, the current Lamido (highest Chief) of Tibati (Cameroon), spoke to me about the attack of the Sultan's palace on 11 March 1899 during a field trip I conducted between September 2018 and January 2019 as if he had witnessed it himself. A third important aspect is knowledge about objects and their original cultural spheres. Since there are objects in many locations in the former colonies which are comparable to those in European museums, cooperation with source communities is necessary. Ethnic groups in the former colonies know better than others what the cultural significance of these objects is and to which community or communities they should be attributed. Further aspects to take into account are the effects of colonial collecting in the former colonies, the perception of non-European objects in the West and the point of view of the source communities with regard to the objects' possible reintegration or not into local cultural practices.

LF & LM: What is most important when conceiving a joint provenance research project between researchers in these parts and colleagues from African/Oceanic countries?

Tommy Yaulin Buga: With view to the basics of co-operation, both we researchers from the Global South and the institutions from the host country must be precise about the subject of discussion—whether the objective is for example a win-win-situation for both sides, or whether we are working towards solutions to resolve mistakes that were made in the past. In my opinion, it is very important that an agenda be distributed in advance of the visiting researchers' arrival. It has the advantage that we as visiting researchers can prepare and know what the subject is, as well as having an orientation for impending discussions about sensitive subject areas. While such an agenda can only be a basis for discussion about the envisaged approach, such an exchange of ideas does in fact improve co-operation. In addition, it should be ensured that everything is well prepared by the German institution, so that we can start our work without delay on arrival. Communication between the countries involved is very important here, even vital. To keep us mutually informed about our common work, we must communicate constantly and intensively, so that all those involved benefit from the exchange of information. If we take all these aspects into account with regard to a project, nothing can actually

go wrong in my opinion. Nobody should be excluded from our discussions. All participants are thus aware what they are doing and how they can reach our objectives in this co-operation project.

Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe: One important prerequisite is a definition of a joint goal which is precise and unambiguous, consensually and without a hidden agenda. Joint financing would be ideal in this. Also important are the joint development of a project plan, the determination of criteria for and frequency of measuring project success, including joint forms of evaluation, presentation and usage of project results. Project execution, record-keeping, and regular exchange of the entire documentation must take place amicably and with mutual trust. A key element for project success is an equal representation in working groups tasked with field-work, interpretation of results and documentation. African members of these groups enjoy much freer, unencumbered, and thus more complete access to information from the objects' source countries.

LF & LM: What do you see as the greatest challenges facing scholars from source countries and communities when researching collections in German institutions – and how could they be overcome?

Richard Tsogang Fossi: Joint provenance research projects must also take into account the emotions of those involved. Something that for German colleagues is often “just” an object can trigger memories of a tragic past in colleagues from former colonised countries, sometimes to the point of moving them to tears. The reason is a kind of inherited trauma that can ultimately not be suppressed and comes up again when being confronted with the objects. The fear of losing an object—for example in a restitution—can lead the German side to overlook the fact that there is a real person behind the objects who was robbed or even killed, or a community that was violently uprooted. How to handle this makes the difference in the goals of a project that go beyond mere questions of ownership and restitution and address the human sense of justice. It is equally important to discuss possible objectives for both sides in order to avoid the impression “who pays, decides!”

Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba: One challenge is presented by the limited time available to African scholars, due to visa problems and restrictions, among other things, and also the fact that the Africa guests must continue to meet their professional obligations in their countries of origin. Research trips are typically limited to a few weeks or months, which means that African colleagues can only do a cursory tour of the material. In comparison, German colleagues in the institutions have more time and



also greater access to familiarize themselves with the objects; in most cases they are professionally involved with the collections and have thus more time for research. I think one option would be to extend the length of the stay and to invite scholars with fewer professional commitments in their countries of origin, such as master students and doctoral candidates.

Tommy Yaulin Buga: In my opinion, time is a great problem. Even before we travel to Germany for research we must go on a time-consuming journey through bureaucracy. Then, when co-operating partners arrive in Germany, they must rush through objects or documentation, and important aspects that should really be discussed can thus fall to the way-side. This can have a negative effect on the project overall. A research project must also allow sufficient time for a detailed investigation of the objects. Only in this way can we give enough feedback to our German colleagues, as well as the type of information that is required. In my view, host countries need to allow at least three months for a stay, or involve students for a more intensive participation.

1
At the workshop
“Perspectives of Trans-
national Provenance
Research in Ethno-
graphic Collections in
Germany,” September
14–15, 2019



2
Participants of the workshop “Perspectives of Transnational Provenance Research in Ethnographic Collections in Germany” at the Landesmuseum Hannover

Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe: Cataloguing, evaluation, and description of African objects in German collections are incomplete and not generally accessible. Also, many African scholars are under the impression that objects are being withheld from them. The solution lies in collection documentation that is available online, including objects stored in depots. More joint research with equal participation would dispel any concerns that highly qualified researchers from the African continent do not yet exist. In addition, effectiveness, management, and results of the projects, as well as mutual acceptance of project partners, would be much improved.

1 For further information see www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/paese-dzk-workshop-2019 (June15, 2020).

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Ndzodo Awono is research assistant at Universität Hamburg and at Übersee-Museum Bremen, where he is in charge of the collection of objects from Cameroon.

Tommy Yaulin Buga is member of staff at Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby, and has worked on different collections in Lower Saxony as part of PAESE.

Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe is research assistant in the Ethnographic Collection of the Lübecker Museen with a project on the reassessment of objects from Central Africa.

Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba worked on Namibian objects in the collection of the Museum der Kulturen Basel and in the archive of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien.

Richard Tsogang Fossi is Curatorial Research Fellow at the Museum am Rothenbaum in Hamburg. He works on objects from Cameroon, particularly those of the Duala, and on the collection of the colonial officer Hans Dominik.

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AUFSTÄNDE IN TOGO



Aufstände

- "Araber-Aufstand"
- Aufstand der Herero
- Aufstand der Nama
- Aufstände in Kamerun
- Aufstände in Togo
- Maji-Maji Krieg
- Boxerkrieg
- Mau a Pule
- Ponape Aufstand

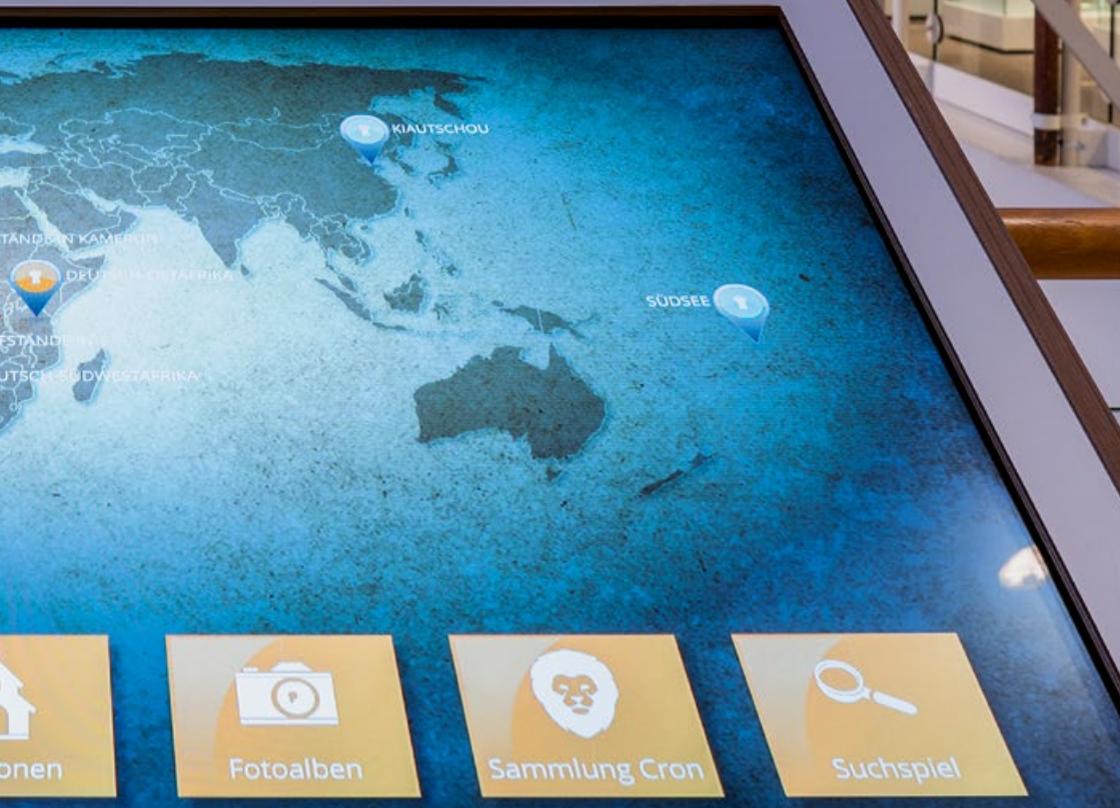


Koloniale Welt

Kolonien

Missionen

External Projects



Historical Research and Creative Practices

A Cooperative Project on Objects From Namibia at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin

In 2004, Namibia commemorated the 100th anniversary of the start of the genocide (1904–1908). It was not until 2011 that Berlin's Charité Hospital returned the bones of 20 individuals, whose body parts had been taken to Germany during the war. In 2015, the Namibian and German governments started negotiations regarding the effects of the colonial genocide perpetrated by German troops in Namibia. These negotiations helped to make the public more aware that ethnological museums in Germany hold Namibian cultural objects that were obtained under colonial—and sometimes also genocidal—conditions. This fact long attracted little attention.

The Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin was one of the first museums in Germany to establish a long-term partnership with Namibian institutions to examine its collection of objects from Namibia in their historical context and to reinterpret their scientific and artistic significance. The key partner in the project “Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures” is the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), which in turn works closely with the National Museum of Namibia.

In 2019, fashion designer Cynthia Schimming, curator Golda Ha-Eiros, cultural officer Hertha Bukassa, historian Nehoa Kautondokwa, exhibition designer Ndapewoshali Ashipala and historian and MAN director Jeremy Silvester visited Berlin for several weeks, or in some cases several months, to view the collection at the museum in Dahlem. Together with the Berlin-based team, they investigated the historical significance and origin of the objects and explored their potential for future projects and project ideas (Fig. 1).

The collection of more than 1,400 objects had barely been studied in detail until then. The earliest acquisition is a headdress (*ekori*) worn by Herero women that the anthropologist Gustav Fritsch gave to the Royal Prussian Art Chamber in 1871. Many German museums collected objects of this type at that time. Among the most recent acquisitions are objects that were donated to the museum in 2005 by the descendants of colonial officer Alfred Boehm-Tettelbach. Joint provenance research clearly demonstrated that objects had been contributed to the collection not only by colonial military soldiers, officers, and politicians, such as Boehm-Tettelbach, Gustav Nachtigal and François (as might be expected), but also by missionaries including Carl Gotthilf Büttner and Hermann Tönjes (Fig. 2 – 4). Most of the objects had already been acquired before the military conflicts began in the German colony; many groups of items were even sold to the museum before formal colonization in 1884. The early collections originating from missionary contexts were especially significant for the Namibian partners' research: They are evidence of cultural expressions that existed before colonization.

Research in the museum's own archives as well as in the archives of the United Evangelical Mission in Wuppertal and the military archives in Freiburg im Breisgau thus proved to be essential for clarifying the provenance of the objects. In order to generate knowledge about historical and contemporary cultural and artistic practices in Namibia, it was crucial for the researchers to analyze and discuss materials, techniques, and aesthetics, and also to explore the use and meaning of the objects. To

1
Ndapewoshali Ashipala, Jonathan Fine, Hertha Bukassa, Julia Binter and Golda Ha-Eiros discuss the significance of a perfume container.





2
Nehoa Kautondokwa, Cynthia Schimming and Julia Binter examine a doll (inv. no. III D 3656) whose provenance could largely be established thanks to extensive research. It was a gift from Queen Olugondo of Ondonga, a kingdom in the north of what is now Namibia, to Anna Rautanen, the daughter of a missionary, around 1900.

facilitate this, the Namibian researchers maintained close contact with †Nu-khoen,¹ Herero, Nama and Ovawambo/Aawambo colleagues in Namibia via digital media. Using this approach, the German–Namibian team is developing an exhibition to present the joint research process. It will be displayed in the Humboldt Forum in the Berliner Schloss. The exhibition focuses on how various forms of knowledge about the objects are brought together. Two particular artistic elements that will feature in the exhibition are a textile-based installation by Cynthia Schimming and a film by Berlin-based artist Moritz Fehr.

Working with the Namibian team in Berlin also paved the way for future research activities in Namibia, which will form the second part of the project. With the aid of project funding from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, the Namibian project partners conducted a multi-stage consultation process with local experts, interest groups, representatives of institutions and communities to select 23 objects from the Berlin collection with special historic, thematic, and/or aesthetic significance. These will be sent to the National Museum of Namibia on loan as soon as conditions permit, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In Namibia, they will be compared with objects from the National Museum’s ethnographic collection, parts of which are on display in the Owela Museum in Windhoek. The



3 and 4
The rag doll (inv. no. III D 1300) was sold to the missionary Carl Gotthilf Büttner in 1879 in return for cattle. He gave it to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (Royal Museum of Ethnology) in 1888. Cynthia Schimming named the doll "Uaṣunua," which means "touched." In doing so, she refers not only to the many hands that created, bought, gave away, inventoried and restored the doll, but also to the violence that Herero women were exposed to in the colonial wars.

project funding has made it possible to hire a conservator (Johanna Ngishiko) and two museologists (Maria Randy Mwatondange and Kave-nauarue Tjiworo) to take care of the Windhoek collection and to manage the inventory. There will be two workshops on conserving and restoring historical objects and another four workshops designed to facilitate discussions about the stories and meanings associated with them. These will involve Namibian historians, oral historians, activists, creative professionals, and artists. Two MA students at the University of Namibia, who have also received funding through the Gerda Henkel project, are writing their theses on one or more of the 23 objects.

In returning the objects to Namibia, the aim is to examine the intertwined history of Germany and Namibia and enable the objects to be “reactivated” with knowledge from Namibia. Discussions will also be held about where the objects should be kept and dealt with in the future, and thus also about whether permanent return is desired. The repatriation of human remains to Namibia referred to at the start of this article prompted a long debate on the subject of objects in museum collections from colonial contexts. As a result, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Namibia set up the Namibian Human Remains and Objects Committee in 2019. Its remit also covers objects of cultural heritage from Namibia held in museums and collections in Europe. The project at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin sees itself as a kind of experimental platform for robust models of German–Namibian dialogue on museum and collection histories.

Materials and findings from the project will eventually be incorporated into a Museum of Namibian Fashion currently being planned by the MAN. Because a large proportion of the Namibia collection in Berlin consists of items of clothing and jewelry, the objects may be understood not only as evidence of historical events and relations, but also as a source of inspiration for contemporary clothing and design practices. That is why the post of curator of the Museum of Namibian Fashion (Kevanhu Muifi) will also be funded from the project.

The multifaceted, consecutive project steps are intended to link two aspects that are important for the decolonization of European museums. First, collecting institutions must be critical of power in their investigations into the origin and relationship histories of objects and collections from colonial contexts—to a great extent this concerns questions of property and ownership, which are especially important in provenance research. Second, but equally important, institutions must open themselves to the needs and requirements of their project partners beyond

provenance and must support them in implementing projects in this context. Within the framework of the project, it has thus been possible for a laboratory for future creative practices to emerge out of a reappraisal of intertwined colonial history.

Dr. Jeremy Silvester, director of MAN, passed away on July 5, 2021. We mourn his passing and pay tribute to the enthusiasm, vision and ambition with which he co-initiated and worked on the project. They will continue to inspire the team.

1 The preceding special character represents a Namibian click sound.

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Dr. des. Julia Binter is a provenance researcher at the Zentralarchiv, Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Dr. Jonathan Fine is the head (Leiter) of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin and curator of the West Africa, Cameroon, Gabon and Namibia collections.

Dr. Larissa Förster is head of the Department for Cultural Goods from Colonial Contexts at the German Lost Art Foundation and scientific consultant for the project.

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Challenges and Opportunities of Databases in Postcolonial Provenance Research

A Practice-Based Report
From the PAESE Project

“Open the inventories!” was the plea in an open letter signed by prominent scientists, artists and activists on October 17, 2019. They called upon German museums and collections to make their inventory listings of ethnological objects available for unrestricted and unregulated access as a basis for dialog on the handling of these items in future.¹ Several months earlier, the directors of ethnographic museums in the German-speaking countries had issued the Heidelberg Statement, in which they acknowledged the need for various measures to be supported, including the promotion of digitization.²

While this creates a framework for discussion about general and free accessibility to museum databases and thus on equal access to information, two aspects are often neglected: the options for medium-sized and small museum or university collections and the interests of the communities of origin. A fundamental problem appears to be that each institution is currently trying to create transparency in its own right and develop its own database. But this means interested parties are still compelled to use a variety of different database systems operated by the various institutions. A solution would be to have one comprehensive database that enabled objects to be researched centrally. However, this seems to be a distant prospect.³ In this context, the database designed in the PAESE project can be classed as this type of database.⁴ The fundamental objectives of this project, which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, are to link together a number of collections in Lower Saxony and to facilitate exchange with representatives of the communities of origin. The data-



base should not be regarded as a static product of a completed process; instead, it is intended to provide a dynamic (research) infrastructure which—as a work in progress—can be organized and adapted in parallel with ongoing projects.

The combined database faces a challenge on several fronts. It is meant to create a structure in which object information from various collections is standardized and is also flexible enough for information to be continually adapted, both with a view to increasing transparency and also with regard to dialog with the communities of origin and their requirements.

Structure of the database

As a first step, five collections in Lower Saxony (Municipal Museum Braunschweig, State Museum Hannover, Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim, State Museum Nature and Man Oldenburg, Ethnological Collection of the Georg-August-University Göttingen) are entering their information on objects into a central online database, either manually or with the aid of import/export interfaces. The database provides a basic structure in which new findings can be flexibly expanded. It is thus possible to adapt field functions or thesauruses in each case—this kind of structure also appears to offer an advantage with regard to future projects and the infrastructure of small and medium-sized collections in Lower Saxony, as these are not in a position to build their own database systems.⁵

The information to be populated is divided into three sections: Basis data, documentation and further information. Basis data – such as inventory number, object title and dimensions – also include a gallery, which can display several images of one object. “Documentation” section, information on provenance is captured, provided it could/can be ascertained

1
Axe (battle axe)/
Moholo battle axe/
chopper (muhóro) ·
Wood, iron ·
104 × 7 × 3 cm ·
Landesmuseum Natur
und Mensch Oldenburg
(State Museum Nature
and Man Oldenburg),
inv. no. 9894

Pitt Rivers
MUSEUM

HOME PAGE SEARCH TERMS OF USE

1939.11.4

Banana lopper. Made with a straight wooden shaft which flares slightly at the end - the blade is fixed into this end. The top edge of metal blade curved downwards to a rounded tip, the blade edge is straight with a right-angle heel. [AB [OPS Move] 1/12/2016]

Place details: AFRICA, Tanzania / Bukoba. Cultural Group: Haya Local Name: Unknown.
Materials: Metal / Wood Plant / ?. Processes: Carved / Forged (Metal) / ?. Dimensions: Max L = 833 mm Max W = 82 mm Max D = 36 mm Field Collector: Arthur Theodore Culwick & Geraldine Mary Culwick When Collected: By 1939 Other Owners: Arthur Theodore Culwick & Geraldine Mary Culwick PRM Source: Arthur Theodore Culwick & Geraldine Mary Culwick Acquired: Donated November 1939

KEYWORD: Agricultural Tool / CLASS: Agriculture / Tool / ?



2
Database extract
from Pitt Rivers Museum
"banana lopper"

in the project. This also includes provenance chains and gaps.⁶ It is also possible for further information on the objects and collections to be displayed, such as index cards, inventory books, references to a collector's objects in other museums or the "use" of objects in exhibitions. Finally, notes and comments, such as those by users, can also be stored.

Database and dialog—examples from everyday practice

The PAESE project is cooperating with colleagues from Cameroon, Namibia, Papua New Guinea and Tanzania. The question of how we can give them access to the objects and the object information and also enable the transparency of the individual collections features prominently throughout the entire working process. Prior to the guest visits as part of the PAESE project in September 2019, object lists were made available to the colleagues to some extent; in all cases, they could use the databases in the collections on site. At that point, it was not possible to provide multilingual object lists in full in all subprojects. The colleagues from the societies of origin are contributing their professional expertise to the investigation of the objects. The object lists are thus an important basis for an equal exchange of information.

In the following, two problem areas are presented—these emerged through cooperative research and dialog between the representatives of the societies of origin and the researchers. First of all, problems arose from the fact that information relating to the cultural reference or chronological and regional classifications of the individual objects was missing

Startseite Bananenmesser		
Bananenmesser		
Basisdaten	Dokumentation	Weiterführende Informationen
Investarnummer	LMNM_0896	
Alte Inventarnummer	223	
Standort	Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch/Oldenburg	
Objektbezeichnung	Bananenmesser	
Indigene Bezeichnung		
Sammlungsort	Ostafrika, Tansania, Moholo	
Material	Holz, Metall (Eisen)	
Maße	L: 106cm, B: 7cm, T: 3cm (Blattlänge:24,3 cm)	
Beschriftung/Aufdruck/Etikett	Willi 223	
Teil	Einzelteil	
Zustand	gut	

in some instances or was incorrectly stored in the individual collections. In the Tanzania collection at the Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg (State Museum Nature and Man Oldenburg), a relatively large number of objects were categorized simply as “weapon.”⁷ The object with the inventory number 9894 is classified in the museum’s internal database as “axe; battle axe” (Fig. 1). Reference to the collection’s access register revealed the information “Moholo battle axe,” which then meant the description could be researched in present-day reports with the finding that choppers (muhóro) were used “mostly for peaceful purposes” or more specifically for “cutting down bunches of bananas.” In comparative databases (e. g., that of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford) the name “banana lopper” and the categorization “agricultural tool” were found (Fig. 2). Whether these incorrect names in Oldenburg are based on the ignorance of the curator taking the inventory at the time or were a strategy of the seller, and how many objects in the museum database are also affected by such an incorrect classification, is not clear at the present time. However, the PAESE database is able to document these errors, discrepancies and inconsistencies (Fig. 3). This example also shows how important images are for the purpose of identifying missing or incorrect information.

Images also played a major role in discussions in the Göttingen sub-project.⁸ In a bundle which, as indicated in the internal documentation, includes items for “pagan use,” there is a “gourd” according to the collection catalog. Flower Manase, curator at the National Museum of Tanzania,

Flower Manase (Dar es Salaam) and Hannah Stieglitz (Göttingen) working with Tanzanian objects from the Ethnologische Sammlung der Universität Göttingen (Ethnographic Collection at the University of Göttingen)



Dar es Salaam, pointed out to the colleagues dealing with the university collection that the ornamentation and decoration on the object indicated that the object had been passed down within a family and was not intended to be seen by others (Fig. 4). In another case, she advised against using images in a publicly accessible database: various use contexts could be ascribed to an object recorded as a “wooden doll.” In discussions with Manase, it became clear that the doll had probably been used in the context of fertility beliefs and practices associated with the desire to have children, which is why depicting its image appears problematic. In discussions about the original function and meaning of the objects, other sensitive aspects became apparent for which the relevant information cannot be displayed but can be documented in the database. In dialog between the Lower Saxony collections and colleagues from the countries of origin, another step forward can thus be taken in calling for the greater transparency of museum databases.

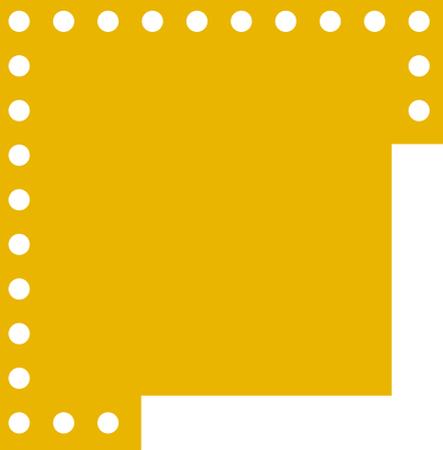
- 1 See <https://oeffnetdieinventare.com> (June 3, 2020).
- 2 Decolonising requires dialogue, expertise and support – The Heidelberg Statement, 2019, online at www.museumsbund.de/dekolonisierung-erfordert-dialog-expertise-und-unterstuetzung-heidelberger-stellungnahme (June 3, 2020). First collections have put their inventory listings online as PDF files; larger establishments are developing online databases or have already launched them. A list of databases at ethnographic museums is available at <http://ag-museum.de/index.php/weblinks/81-datenbanken> (June 3, 2020).
- 3 First steps are being taken, for example, in the project “SH-Welt,” in which ethnographica in Schleswig-Holstein is being digitized; see www.sh-welt.de (June 3, 2020); Claudia Kalka: Erfassung und Digitalisierung von ethnografischen Objekten in schleswig-holsteinischen Museen, in: *Provenienz & Forschung* 5 (2020), no. 1, pp. 42–47; or in initiatives collecting the inventory lists of collections from specific regions of origin, for Kenya see www.inventoriesprogramme.org (June 3, 2020). In fall 2020, the “Digital Benin” project was also launched. It will bring together dispersed objects from Benin in a database. For more information about the project, see <https://digitalbenin.org> (October 15, 2020).
- 4 See www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/datenbank (August 17, 2020).
- 5 The database’s running costs will be covered by the Netzwerk Provenienzforschung in Niedersachsen (Provenance Research Network in Lower Saxony) so that the database can be maintained beyond the funding period of the PAESE project and include collections in Lower Saxony that will be investigated in future projects. At present, preparations have been made, for example, to incorporate the ethnological collections of the evangelical mission in Hermannsburg and of Alfeld municipal museum.
- 6 See also Claudia Andratschke, Jasmin Hartmann, Johanna Poltermann et al.: *Leitfaden zur Standardisierung von Provenienzangaben*, Hamburg 2018.
- 7 The following example is largely based on the research of project researcher Jennifer Tadge.
- 8 The following example is largely based on the research of project researcher Hannah Stieglitz.

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Lars Müller is academic coordinator of the joint project “Provenance Research in Non-European Collection and Ethnography in Lower Saxony” (PAESE).

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News



The Working Group Colonial Provenances

Exchange and Networking

The Working Group Colonial Provenances was formed following the conference “Provenienzforschung zu ethnologischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit” (Provenance research on ethnographic collections from the colonial era), which was held in April 2017 and organized by the German Anthropological Association and the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich. The conference clearly demonstrated that there existed both a need and a desire for exchange, discussion, networking and self-organization among curators and researchers dealing with colonial provenance research. The Working Group Colonial Provenances has been organized as part of the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e.V. (Research Association for Provenance Research) since 2018. The members of the working group are involved in exchange and discussion on projects and initiatives, often funded by third parties, which are firmly devoted to critically examining colonial provenances. The pooling of information, transfer of knowledge and networking between stakeholders—within the German-speaking museums and university collections—are part of this exchange.

The working group consists of freelancers, permanent staff and project staff who all work as provenance researchers and who meet once a year at the annual conference of the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e.V. The group also gathers regularly at one of the ethnological museums in the German-speaking region (meetings have previously been held in Leipzig, Hildesheim, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Vienna). The topics discussed in presentations



Artistic research group from the project "Humboldt Lab Tanzania - Work in progress" - Conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, November 22, 2016

and workshops include the challenges and methods of postcolonial provenance research—for example, the urgent digitization of collections and their inclusion in a multi-collection online database, which is intended to combine the databases of various institutions. Another key issue is the question of how the research into the history of collections, which has been pursued for many years at numerous establishments, can be made visible for the public. To address this point, the working group has created an overview of ongoing and completed postcolonial provenance research projects and made it available online at www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/ag-projekte. The names of the relevant project staff and cooperation partners are provided. The overview outlines the variety of activities in this research field, especially with regard

to the increasing importance of cooperation with the descendants of previous owners, producers and users in the communities of origin. The list is continually updated and expanded.

The working group is open to researchers and museum experts from all disciplines who conduct provenance research and who deal with the translocation of objects in the context of colonialism.

KRISTIN WEBER-SINN,
WORKING GROUP COLONIAL
PROVENANCES

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Further information:

www.arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org/index.php?id=ag-koloniale-provenienzen
ag-koloniale-provenienzen@arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org

Dealing With Germany's Colonial Past

For a long time, the colonial period was a blind spot in European—and also in our German—culture of remembrance, particularly in ethnological museums. This changed significantly when the German government expressed its clear commitment to critically addressing Germany's colonial past and to examining the objects originating from this period which are held in museums and collections. Many measures have been taken in the current legislative period: in March 2019, the German government, the federal states and the municipal umbrella associations agreed on the "Framework Principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts." The German Lost Art Foundation has set up a new specialist department and is supporting research projects in the field of colonial contexts. A range of important projects have already been funded by the Foundation. In addition, at the start of August 2020 the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts co-funded by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media also commenced its work.

Invaluable hands-on assistance for practical work in museums is provided in the publications "Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections" and "Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts," both of which are produced by the German Museums Association and provided from the budget of the Minister of State for Culture and the Media. Many of the establishments funded by the Federal budget for Culture are also involved in critically reviewing Germany's colonial past. Two prominent examples are the "Postcolonial Remembrance in the City" five-year model project funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the



Stone cross (padrão) from Cape Cross · Before 1486 · Limestone, sandstone (base) · Height 354 cm · In the process of being returned to the Republic of Namibia

"Colonial Repercussions" event series organized by the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts) in Berlin. The German colonial era will also be critically examined and communicated in events and exhibitions due to take place in the new Humboldt Forum in the future. Another highlight is the close and trust-based collabora-

tion between the German government and the federal states and municipal authorities, who are responsible for the majority of the establishments concerned.

Germany's willingness to reach a common understanding with the countries and communities of origin is also demonstrated in the way it handles official restitution requests. A prime example is the return of the symbolic Stone Cross of Cape Cross to the Republic of Namibia. The cross was previously part of the collection at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum), where it had been on display in the permanent exhibition since 2006. As Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum Foundation), I expressly approved the decision to return the cross.

Last year, the Minister of State for Culture and the Media established a separate specialist department for investigating collection objects from colonial contexts and for coordinating cultural policy guidance on these. This shows how important the issue of colonialism has now become in the cultural policy of the German government.

In the future, we must focus more intensively on addressing the European and international dimension of this issue as well, including during Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2020. The Federal Foreign Office is also currently establishing an International Museum Cooperation Agency. Through the participation of the Minister of State for Culture and the Media in the museum agency's committees, it will be possible for linkages to be further strengthened in cultural policy, internally and externally.

Dealing with the topic of collections from colonial contexts will be actively and intensively pursued at all political levels. A crucial

aspect here is to seek direct exchange with the countries and communities of origin. Critical examination and remembrance can succeed only as a joint effort.

DR. GÜNTER WINANDS,
OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONER FOR
CULTURE AND THE MEDIA

Information, Guidance, Networking

German Contact Point for Collections from
Colonial Contexts

On March 13, 2019, the Minister of State for Culture and the Media, the Federal Foreign Office Minister of State for International Cultural Policy, the Cultural Affairs Ministers of the Länder and the municipal umbrella associations agreed on the "Framework Principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts" (Framework Principles). Article 3 states: "We will give people and institutions from the countries and societies of origin in particular the possibility to learn about the collections from colonial contexts held in Germany and to obtain concrete advice, also as regards possible return and cooperation. In order to greatly facilitate and improve access to such information, we will draw up a proposal for the establishment and organisation of a contact point."

At the 11th cultural policy summit talk on October 16, 2019, the "Concept on the establishment and organisation of a German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts" was approved and a decision was taken to establish a "German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts" based at the

Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States. The Contact Point is aimed in particular at individuals and institutions from the countries and societies of origin. As the first point of contact, it is intended to give them access to information on collections in Germany that originate from colonial contexts. In addition, it will offer guidance and facilitate the formation of networks. The Contact Point also supports the Federation-Länder Working Group on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts in Germany in defining and further developing the areas of activity and objectives laid down in the "Framework Principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts."

For cooperation with the Contact Point and in order to coordinate and support its tasks, institutions and organizations from the fields of policymakers responsible for the Framework Principles have formed a group for the purpose of contributing their own relevant expertise to the work of the Contact Point. The group's partners are: the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, which is financed by the German states and responsible for the Contact Point's administrative and organizational tasks; the German Lost Art Foundation, funded by the the Minister of State for Culture and the Media; the International Museum Cooperation Agency, which is being planned by and will be funded by the Federal Foreign Office; and the municipal umbrella organizations. Other institutions that can help the Contact Point fulfill its role will be involved based on cooperation agreements. The Contact Point will initially be tested as a pilot project (36 months) and evaluated at the end of this pilot period.

PROF. DR. MARKUS HILGERT,
 CULTURAL FOUNDATION OF THE
 GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

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International Cooperation and Co-production

Shared Platforms for a Shared Future

The 2018 coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and the SPD refers to the critical reappraisal of German colonial history as part of the "democratic basic consensus" for the first time. It also places important emphasis on increased cultural cooperation with Africa and on the promotion of stronger cultural exchange. Dealing with collections from colonial contexts is a key aspect here, even though addressing the impact of colonialism obviously extends far beyond this and is intended to contribute towards overcoming ways of thinking and acting that are still too often based on racist stereotypes and prejudices.

A major step forward has been made in this complex field with the "Framework Principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts," which were adopted by the German government, the federal states and the municipal umbrella organizations in March 2019. The areas of activity and objectives in the Framework Principles are:

- Transparency and documentation;
- Provenance research;
- Presentation and information;
- Return;
- Cultural exchange, international cooperation;
- Science and research.

To implement the Framework Principles, a decision was taken in October 2019 to set up a joint Contact Point. This commenced its work at the beginning of August 2020. It is intended to serve as a platform for networking internally and externally with regard to areas covered by the Framework Principles.

The Agency for International Museum Cooperation, which is being set up by the Federal Foreign Office, will also be involved in activities at the Contact Point and will contribute in particular to the area of international cooperation and returns. In numerous discussions with the the Minister of State for Culture and the Media, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, museums, the Cultural Affairs Ministers of the Länder and intermediary and partner organizations in Germany and worldwide, it has become clear that German museums want to contribute with their expertise on an even greater scale than before, both internationally and in various cooperative partnerships. The agency will support this with a four-pillar concept: (1) providing administrative support for German museums in international cooperative partnerships, (2) funding exhibitions abroad, (3) reinforcing museum infrastructures abroad and (4) pooling capacity and networks through education and training programs in the field of museum management.

The museum agency is designed to complement existing international cooperation structures and enable new ways of cooperation and co-production. The contributions—such as those made by the Federal Cultural Foundation via the TURN Fund, the Goethe-Institut via its discussion events on museums in Africa or the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen with the Martin Roth Symposium—are important input. A groundbreaking feature is that the venture will be fully supported as regards content by the the Minister of State for Culture and the Media and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, with both neighboring departments endorsing the approval application to the Federal Ministry of Finance. The result will be a productive symbiosis of internal and external elements in cultural policy and of

cultural and development policy, driven forward by means of a joint institution for the first time. This can be seen as a milestone in the continued development of Germany's cultural relations policy overall.

DR. ANDREAS GÖRGEN,
FEDERAL FOREIGN OFFICE,
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR CULTURE
AND COMMUNICATION, BERLIN

Using the Example of Berlin

The Dekoloniale Project Critically Examines Colonial History

You would never suspect it from the prefabricated buildings, but anyone walking along Wilhelmstraße in Berlin is in fact retracing the steps of German colonial history. Number 77 is the site of the former Imperial Chancellery where, at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, colonial powers laid the groundwork for the partitioning of Africa. The Imperial Colonial Office once stood at Wilhelmstraße 62, and at the next corner you cross Mohrenstraße—but not for much longer: the council of the Berlin district of Mitte has decided to get rid of this controversial name (which means “Street of the Moors”) and rename the street after Anton Wilhelm Amo, the first known philosopher of African origin in Germany.

In the midst of this square, colonial history and its consequences are now being critically examined. Wilhelmstraße 92 is home to the model project “Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City”. In this joint cultural project, Berlin Postkolonial e.V., the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD) and Each One Teach One e.V. are aiming to develop a “decolonial

memory culture” using the example of Berlin. It is a project that will reach far beyond the renaming of streets and the boundaries of this city.

Dekoloniale runs until the end of 2024 and is funded by the Federal State of Berlin and the German Federal Cultural Foundation. It will deal with colonial history and stories in exhibitions, festivals, interventions, think tanks and digital mapping. One thousand colonial locations in Berlin, all over Germany and in former colonial territories will be charted on an online map, telling as many stories of those who were colonized as those who colonized.

The Stadtmuseum Berlin is also represented in the Dekoloniale project consortium as a major institution. Its director Paul Spies sees the Stadtmuseum in the role of learner. He says the experts from the initiatives can help look at the museum’s collection from a new perspective and surrender interpretative authority: “We don’t want to dominate once again with a large central exhibition in the Stadtmuseum.”

The emphasis is deliberately on locally based projects. During Dekoloniale, the aim is for a different Berlin district museum to open with an exhibition each year; for example, the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum is planning an exhibition on colonial migration. The museums are faced with a number of questions, including that of whether and how racist colonial objects can be shown: “With the district museums, we’re not only trying to tell people about colonial history but also change perspectives”, says Christian Kopp of Berlin Postkolonial.

An example of this can be found in Museum Treptow, which created its permanent exhibition on colonial history, “zurückGESCHAUT”, back in 2017 together with Berlin Postkolonial and the ISD. It is dedicated to the First German

Colonial Exhibition of 1896, in which 106 people from the colonies were presented to the Berlin public so they could be stared at. “We advised the museum to put the main focus on the biographies of the people who came here as a result of this ‘human zoo’”, says Christian Kopp. The exhibition will be expanded and revised as part of Dekoloniale. Decolonizing the gaze is a process that has only just begun.

LENA GRUNDHUBER,
GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION,
MAGDEBURG

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Five Years of the Foundation

The German Lost Art Foundation celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2020. That might not sound like a particularly noteworthy age for a cultural institution, not when their existence is usually measured in centuries. But in the fast-moving field of provenance research, five years can be quite a long time.

During the past half-decade, the Foundation has expanded and further developed its main area of responsibility—funding the search for Nazi-looted art and forging networks—always with the aim of contributing to just and fair solutions as defined in the Washington Principles. To mention just a few examples of significant milestones: the research projects that were dedicated to examining the spectacular Gurlitt Art Trove (2013) were conducted under the Foundation’s remit, with the selected scientific findings on this subject published in the Provenire publication series in 2020. At the end of 2018, the Foundation hosted the international conference “20 Years Washington Principles: Roadmap for the Future” in Berlin. Not only did the conference provide an oppor-

tunity to take stock of progress since the momentous Washington Conference of 1998, it also served as a platform for intensive dialog and debate on the future of provenance research. As one of the outcomes of the discussions at the Berlin conference, a helpdesk was established in 2020 as a central point of contact for the descendants of the mostly Jewish victims of National Socialist looting.

At the beginning of 2020, the Foundation activated its new research database, Proveana, and in doing so made a vital contribution towards strengthening provenance research and fostering networks. The wealth of information held in the database includes the evaluated and edited final reports of projects funded by the Foundation. This means there is now a second extensive database in operation in Magdeburg alongside the Lost Art Database, which was set up two decades ago and has since become an internationally established brand.

Financial support from the Foundation—which was initially restricted to publicly funded museums, libraries and archives—has now been opened up to include private applicants. Not only does this enable private museums and collectors to have their holdings checked, it is now also possible for descendants to reconstruct collections that were broken up between 1933 and 1945—and potentially regain possession of works that were stolen from their ancestors and have now been rediscovered.

The Foundation's remit has also widened considerably, without it losing sight of its core responsibilities as outlined above. Firstly, the expropriation of cultural property in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR was established as a new field of research, largely on the initiative of Uwe M. Schneede, founding member of the executive board. Since then, a range of historical context research projects—in collabora-

tion with renowned academic institutions and museums—has yielded numerous new findings.

In 2019, the Foundation started funding provenance research on cultural goods that had been seized or stolen in colonial contexts, and also began helping to build strong and stable research networks which extend beyond Europe. A dedicated specialist department was set up to carry out this work. Like the helpdesk, it is located in the branch office in Berlin-Mitte which was opened in 2020.

This means that, over the past five years, the Magdeburg-based Foundation has grown rapidly and increased in importance, both nationally and internationally. There is probably no other institution in the world with a comparable structure and authority in this field.

Rüdiger Hütte, full-time head of the executive board, played a significant role in shaping the Foundation over this five-year period. During this establishment phase, Hütte, a lawyer, managed to create strong and sustainable structures for the sometimes difficult and challenging work of the Foundation. He ensured that all the financial resources allocated to the Foundation by the German government were handled in a careful and responsible manner; this was confirmed in various audits. He also attached great importance to strengthening the Foundation's international presence. We would like to express our sincere thanks to him for this. Rüdiger Hütte stepped down as full-time Foundation director on May 15, 2020, at his own request in order to pursue new challenges.

PROF. DR. GILBERT LUPFER,
GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION,
MAGDEBURG

Conference Reports

Museum Collections in Motion. Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters

July 15–17, 2019, University of
Cologne in cooperation with the
University of Bremen and the
Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum,
Cologne

Museum Collections in Motion was not a harmonious conference. It became clear right at the start that the perspectives of the various participants differed, often considerably. This was due in particular to the large number of researchers and activists present from the Global South. The main focus was on controversial discussions about the provenance of objects in colonial contexts and about possibilities for restitution. The speakers covered a range of acquisition contexts—objects were given as gifts, exchanged, bought, stolen, appropriated as the spoils of war or taken from places where the inhabitants had been expelled or killed. While the majority of the participants recognized this wide variety of different acquisition contexts, the consequences were fiercely discussed. The key question centered on what contribution provenance research could make. Is research on a large scale possible given the sometimes limited amount of available sources which often reflect only a European perspective, and, in view of the general unjust nature of colonial rule, even necessary at all? How can the complexity of the provenance of objects be recognized without underplaying colonial injustice or slowing down return processes? And should objects be understood as “ethnographic” at all nowadays, as a part of a museum collection or rather as ethnographized objects,



Antje Van Wichelen · Noisy Images · 2019 · Image installation at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne, which aims to reveal and question colonial perspectives

for whose meaning only their original context plays a role? This naturally gave rise to the question: Which objects should be given back and in what ways? Many of the participants agreed that returns were an ethical necessity and should be undertaken irrespective of the situation in the countries of origin. Some called for the question to be reversed: What should remain in Europe? A debate followed on the future function of objects, both those that were returned and those that remained in Europe. Could they bring about reconciliation and become symbols of a shared history? Could they keep moving as hybrid intermediaries in a literal and figurative sense? Other participants

expressed practical concerns: How and, in particular, when would the returns be made? How could smaller communities and stakeholders within large nation states be involved? Many of the questions raised remained unanswered during the conference. There was often a lack of language adequate enough to properly convey the emotional meaning of objects and returns. But in bringing together stakeholders from a global context, the conference was able to lay the foundation for the development of such a common language.

CARL DEUSSEN,
COLOGNE

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A Colonial Thing

December 5, 2019 – September 6, 2020,
Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna

Questions on how ethnological museums should deal with their own colonial pasts and arguments around returning objects that entered the collections during colonial times are currently being intensively discussed. However, the public discourse is not only being conducted at the level of political and specialist debates. Ethnological museums too are increasingly taking a critical look at their own colonial pasts in exhibitions focusing on the history of their collections or through provenance research. The exhibition “A Colonial Thing” at the Weltmuseum Wien, curated by Claudia Augustat, took the public debate as its starting point by presenting the guidance published in recent years—including the Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts, issued by the German Museums Association, and the Indigenous Repatriation Handbook (see p. 75 and following page)—in relation to twelve selected objects.

The exhibition on the mezzanine floor of the museum presented the objects to visitors in a series of twelve table display cases. The chosen objects in each one served to illustrate individual colonial contexts. By accompanying the exhibits with quotes from historical collectors and representatives of the societies of origin and explanations by the curator, a many-voiced narrative was created. This multi-perspective approach was designed to provoke thought and allow visitors to reflect on the issue of collection objects from colonial contexts and, more generally, on the societal structures shaped by colonialism. It was under-



A view of the exhibition "A Colonial Thing" at the Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna

pinned by the wide variety of different object biographies and collecting contexts.

The exhibition covered a significant time span: from the acquisition of ethnological objects in Brazil at the beginning of the 19th century through to the purchase of archaeological objects from Colombia in the 1980s. The acquisition contexts discussed were equally wide-ranging. Visitors were thus able to observe objects considered to have come into the possession of their collectors as "gifts" as well as items thought to have been stolen against the will of their owners. Besides these central questions of provenance research, however, the exhibition also aimed to address a further topic. The very title of "A Colonial Thing" clearly indicated that visitors were to be confronted with

the question of what a "colonial thing" actually was. In this context, the issue of copyright for Maori tattoos and the right to produce replicas of bronze statues from Benin were among the examples explored. Also forming part of the exhibition was a smartphone, representing a global economic system based on exploitation.

Visitors were led through the exhibition with the aid of a free accompanying booklet which, in addition to an introduction to the topic, contained key statements from some of the guidance published in recent years and brought together the texts about the objects. Couches placed opposite the display cases offered a welcome opportunity for visitors to study the booklet at their leisure within the surroundings of the exhibition itself.



A view of the exhibition "A Colonial Thing" at the Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna

By presenting such a carefully selected set of object biographies, the curator succeeded in introducing visitors to the complexity of the subject area. The exhibition impressively demonstrated how difficult it is to assess individual objects with regard to their colonial context. It is to be welcomed that the curator chose to focus on only a few exhibits and was thus able to take a much more detailed look at these as a "colonial thing."

DR. JAN HÜSGEN,
GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION,
BERLIN



Koloniales Erbe
Kritische Weißseins-
forschung in der
praktischen
Museumsarbeit
Anna Greve
transcript Verlag,
Bielefeld 2019,
263 pages

On the Right Track

What are the pitfalls that *white* museum professionals might encounter in a critical revisit of colonial history, its legacy and heritage? How can Eurocentric perspectives on history be made visible? How can artefacts, representations and displays challenge these one-sided

perspectives? Can polyphony even completely eradicate Eurocentrism? Anna Greve's book addresses these questions, targeting *white* experts and laypersons involved in exhibition and museum curation who might seek examples of best practice and successful models. Using case studies from the German museum sector, the author offers what she calls "new" "ideas" and exhibition formats that enable adjustments to current requirements in the field.

Although the title promises a radical position as far as postcolonial engagement colonial heritage in museums is concerned, the author's approach remains rather an introduction to appropriate methods for (re)presenting bodies and cultures in German museums. In other words, it is about identifying historical racism, addressing colonial entanglements in collections, and integrating those as a subject matter in curatorial practice. Greve examines how this unfolds differently for five categories of museums: cabinets of curiosities local history museums, so-called "world museums" (i.e. ethnological museums), federal state museums, and art museums, the latter focusing rather on painting galleries. The book ends with two chapters emphasizing the positive effects of critical reflection upon colonial continuities and postcolonial remembrance in city-wide and global frameworks.

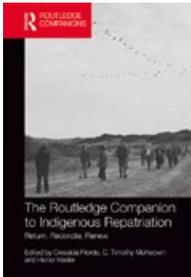
The author picks up important issues at an early stage: normative paradigms when it comes to Eurocentric/*white* perspectives; choices of colours and representation of bodies in European art history; the wording in titles and descriptions; and, last but not least, the unequal distribution of power and resources. These issues are then skilfully addressed throughout in the chapters. She occasionally adds a dash of irony to her analysis to shed light

upon inaccurate and/or exoticizing object descriptions. This enables her indeed to bring out Eurocentrism in the perception of Syrian glasses and oliphants in cabinets of curiosities. Using examples from "world museums" and federal state museums in Bremen, Cologne and Stuttgart, Anna Greve further argues that the presence of contemporary art and the inclusion of non-white voices can encourage a shift in perspective. Because *white* museum staff still often lack expertise in this area, she encourages them to give up their authority in interpretation and proactively seek different options for "developing new and appropriate forms of presentation for [...] problematic works" (p. 107).

Even though these methods in museum practice are on the right track, it should be noted that they are neither new nor so widely successful. The inclusion of affected societies and Indigenous nations in museums has already been part of the "new ways" of participatory museum work since the 1980s. The book makes clear that there is a need for a reorganisation in German museums but fails to transcend its wish to cater to the interest of mainstream audiences. Furthermore, the question of returning heritage is left unmentioned. Anna Greve understands the role of *white* museum staff to be one of mediation and "opening doors" for participatory processes that can bring about change and multiple perspectives. However, she lacks the courage to endorse radical curatorial work, which would imply granting authority to non-*white* and non-German experts and laypersons and giving them a free hand to curate exhibitions in museums, for these places have remained mostly *white* until today.

YANN LEGALL,
BERLIN

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The Routledge
Companion to Indigenous
Repatriation
Return, Reconcile, Renew
Cressida Fforde,
C. Timothy McKeown,
Honor Keeler (Hg.)
Routledge, London /
New York 2020,
982 pages

New Reference Work on the Subject of Repatriation

The new edited volume in the Routledge Companions series aims to provide a comprehensive global overview of the illegitimate collection of human remains in colonial contexts and their return to the affected communities in recent times. It is particularly notable for its multi-perspective and global approach. Among the contributors are researchers of both indigenous and non-indigenous background as well as individuals with decades of experience in the field of repatriation from nearly all continents.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first looks at regional and national repatriation movements and discussions from the last four decades, with global comparisons also made in several articles. It explains the importance of the individual debates as an element of a more global, interconnected movement. The second part is devoted to collecting practices during the 19th century, particularly the networks between collectors and institutions. There is an informative shift between focusing on specific individuals and concentrating on structures and larger stakeholder groups, such as trading

companies. The third part explores provenance research issues and the implementation of returns in practice. This section presents the different perspectives of the museum staff returning the objects and of the representatives from the respective communities or nations requesting the objects. These are interesting to read side by side and in conjunction with each other. The fourth part gathers reflections on the significance and value of repatriations and their positive effects for the societies involved. Here, the contributors emphasize the particular potential for reconciliation, the healing of historical traumas and the revitalization of cultural and political self-confidence. Overall, the publication thus provides a wealth of reference points for practical and theoretical connections and observations of various kinds.

The full importance of the edited volume only really becomes apparent when it is considered as part of the cooperative research project with the same name, in which the three editors and also many of the authors are involved. The most striking result was the design of the website (<https://returnreconcilerenew.info>), on which comprehensive information about provenance research, repatriation and historical contexts of collecting human remains, with specific reference to Australia, can be found. The site combines a publicly visible section with a data archive that is accessible only to the communities affected. It thus sets new benchmarks as regards the question of what protocols may be used in the future for making information of an extremely culturally sensitive nature accessible in digital form.

Together, the book and the website provide a fascinating and comprehensive foundation for everyone interested in repatriation and provenance research, or in current museologi-

cal issues, collection and colonial history, and indigenous historiography and self-empowerment.

SARAH FRÜNDT,
GERMAN LOST ART FOUNDATION,
BERLIN



A Repatriation Handbook

A guide to repatriating Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains

Michael Pickering
National Museum of Australia Press,
Canberra 2020

PDF-file, 120 pages open access via www.nma.gov.au/about/publications/repatriation-handbook

Using Past Experience to Inform Future Practice

Since the 1980s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been enforcing the unconditional return of the mortal remains of their ancestors from museums and medical and scientific collections—with increasing support from universities and government bodies. Michael Pickering has now published “A Repatriation Handbook.” The author is a long-established expert at the National Museum of Australia and former director of its Repatriation Program. He participated in the “Return, Reconcile, Renew” (2014–2018) and “Restoring Dignity” (2018–2020) projects, which were funded by the Australian Research Council for

the purpose of building the necessary infrastructure and resources to support and document national and international repatriations. The handbook was developed as part of these two projects, alongside the website www.returnreconcilerenew.info and the volume *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation*, which is presented by Sarah Fründt in this issue (see p.74 and following page).

By making available the knowledge accumulated from decades working in this field in an easily accessible format, Pickering seeks to drive repatriations further forward. With this in mind, the handbook is aimed at staff within the communities and their organizations and also at national and international collecting institutions and governments. It is available free of charge as an online version. The reference work broken down into detailed chapters is enabling users to find information on a diverse range of repatriation issues, from identification through to final resting places. Bitte diesen Satz einfügen. The various stages of the repatriation process are tracked in the 13 main chapters, which are themselves divided into short subchapters. The first three chapters provide a thorough introduction to the backgrounds and importance of repatriations, to the historical context of the collections and to the indigenous movement to (re)bury displaced ancestors (reburial movement). There is also an overview of the relevant conventions, guidelines and legislation. The fourth and seventh chapters focus on issues relating to the representatives recognized by the communities or the authorized representative institutions that have emerged in Australia over the past few years. The fifth chapter describes the work being done in the museums. Here, Pickering

notes that repatriation is a service provided to indigenous communities by the collecting institution. Chapters six and eight outline the significant issues, approaches and methods of provenance research. The following chapters examine the issues and aspects that arise during and after repatriation. The handbook concludes with a list of contacts, further resources and online links. The final eight empty pages are meant for users' own notes in line with the wish expressed at the beginning that users should adapt the handbook to suit their own particular situations and develop and edit the processes during the course of future repatriations.

With its wide range of practical tips and information, this book is also an important reference work for use in a German context—particularly for all those associated with institutions that are responsible for taking care of human remains and/or burial objects or who work in this area. The overview of Australia's increased practice of recognizing those entrusted with taking care of mortal remains (custodians) and the representatives, organizations and institutions responsibilities (affiliation) is of particular importance. It may provide further information about issues around "rightful owners" and "those entitled to claim returns," which are sometimes still problematic and not sufficiently clarified in the German context.

For successful collaboration, it is important for everyone involved to understand the pressures, responsibilities, authority, obligations and powers that other participants face—that is the basic thrust of the book. Repatriation can only be undertaken successfully if it is understood as an act of empowerment (p. 97) and as a service provided to Indigenous communities by the collecting institution (p. 43).

The handbook thus conveys an ethical attitude, which promotes respect and recognition of the cultural responsibilities and indigenous rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their organizations.

Therefore, the handbook may also serve as inspiration for the authors of guidelines that are currently being written on the subject of collection items from colonial contexts in Germany—for example, in natural history or university collections. This would ensure these guidelines address not only institutions in Germany but also those in the communities of descendants. They could even be created as a collaborative venture.

ISABELLE REIMANN,
LEIPZIG

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Weshalb? Warum? Fragen an die Ethnographische
Sammlung«, 2019, Oberhessisches Museum Gießen ·
Pages 44–45: View of the media station in the
Museum im Ritterhaus in Offenburg

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Since 2018, a key objective of German cultural politics has been to come to terms with the colonial period. For this purpose, the area of responsibility of the German Lost Art Foundation was expanded with a new department and funding offered for research in the field of provenance research on »cultural goods and collections from colonial contexts« since 2019. This issue offers a first insight into current research perspectives and introduces major participants in the political and societal debate.

