

Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit

Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte

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Das Buch versammelt die Beiträge zur gleichnamigen Tagung am 7./8. April 2017 – veranstaltet von der AG Museum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie (DGSKA) und dem Museum Fünf Kontinente, München. Herausgeberinnen und Autor_innen behandeln darin u.a. die Frage nach einer sinnvollen Systematisierung und Institutionalisierung von postkolonialer Provenienzforschung, nach internationaler Vernetzung, insbesondere zu den Herkunftsländern und -gesellschaften, und stellen aktuelle Forschungs- und Ausstellungsprojekte zum Thema vor.

The book collects the contributions to the conference of the same name that took place on 7th/8th April 2017, and was organised by the Working Group on Museums of the German Anthropological Association and the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich. Editors and authors discuss issues such as meaningful systematization and institutionalization of postcolonial provenance research, international networking and collaboration, in particular with regards to source countries and communities, and present current research and exhibition projects on the subject.

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1 International Perspectives

Challenges and Opportunities of Systematic Provenance Research

Introduction

Sarah Fründt

In hindsight, some might ask why the first panel of this conference had to be an international one. Should questions like »What is an appropriate methodology for systematic provenance research? What type of expertise do we need (ethnological, historiographical, anthropological, political)? How can we pool resources and findings? How can we establish structures that ensure research is not only efficient but also transparent? Do ethnographic methods like fieldwork matter?« not first and foremost be discussed among German museum staff? Why should a meeting of the Working Group Museum (AG Museum) of the German Association for Social and Cultural Anthropology (DGSKA) start by inviting guests from other continents?

The answer to this is twofold. Yes, this is a matter that must be discussed in German institutions, and yes, this is probably done best within smaller and more concentrated settings. And no, because not only are we dealing with collections here that by their very nature invite and even require a cooperation across borders, but also because it would be foolish to not cast a glance at already existing solutions and approaches. German institutions are not the only ones confronted with these questions, and looking around we indeed find that some people have already spent time and effort trying to find answers to them. Mostly due to a combination of political and historical reasons, debates on how to decolonize museums are significantly more advanced in places like New Zealand, Australia or Canada, than in Germany. This also results in much more tested theories, practices and infrastructures in terms of provenance research, including the development of standards and working routines. Examples from Scandinavia and Namibia, working under very different conditions, complement the selection. All of these examples have the potential to offer points for comparison and orientation, and might help framing our debate. All invited authors have several decades of working experience in these fields, most work for national or even transnational programmes. Additionally, they all come from countries in which many of the German collections originate and can thus also speak of the importance of provenance research for the people there. Why should we not learn from their experiences?

Provenance research into any type of museum collection is always concerned with reconstructing the biography of an object from the moment when it was produced or first used all the way up to its current location, association and meaning. Doing provenance research means to follow this trajectory across space and time, through numerous hands, while the object accumulates several, sometimes conflicting layers of meaning. In the case of collections associated with colonial conditions, the most important point of this trajectory is the precise moment of collection by or for European institutions: What did these objects mean for who at the moment of collection? Who did they belong to? Under what conditions were they collected and how do these relate to colonial contexts? How were objects incorporated and used by the museum? Ethnographic collections in German institutions originate from all over the world. Going back to this moment in time can thus only mean to do research across great geographical distances. Thus, while research might necessarily start in the

Amber Kiri Aranui (Te Papa Tongarewa Museum, New Zealand)

The Importance of Working with Communities – Combining Oral History, the Archive and Institutional Knowledge in Provenance Research. A Repatriation Perspective

Provenance research, whether it be in relation to objects or ancestral human remains, can be a daunting process for any museum curator. Knowing where to start, confirming accession information, and identifying the country, specific location, or even the communities/cultures of origin can seem too difficult a task to achieve at times. This contribution looks at the various types of research avenues I have ventured down in my role as repatriation researcher for the *Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme* at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. This includes oral and tribal histories, archival material, private and published material, and archaeological information. I also draw on my experiences as an anthropologist and archaeologist as well as an indigenous person and discuss the importance of working with communities in this type of research, especially with regard to collaboration and relationship building which in some countries like New Zealand is an integral part of a museum's philosophy. Making contact with communities does not have to be a difficult process and there are many benefits to creating lasting relationships of this nature. Networks within the museum world are also very important, especially if your work seems isolating. Knowing there are other colleagues out there willing to provide support and knowledge not only nationally but also internationally can help. I will discuss the strong networks I have created over the years and share some of the positive outcomes.

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museum's own archive, it can by no means stop there. During the process it will become almost unavoidable to also use archives in the countries of origin, to talk about the meaning of objects with the descendants of their initial owners or producers, or to re-construct historical events from multiple perspectives. German researchers cannot *do* this on their own, neither can they *discuss* it on their own. Their success will depend on finding ways to collaborate with colleagues in Germany as well as in

Abstracts |

Jeremy Silvester (Museums Association of Namibia)

The »Africa Accessioned Network« – Do Museum Collections Build Bridges or Barriers?

In Namibia, it is difficult today to locate many historical artefacts that embody the cultural identity of communities. Yet these objects have been collected and, often, archived (rather than displayed) in museums beyond the continent. The internet gives access to a disparate »virtual museum« of Namibian cultural heritage. The »Africa Accessioned« project aims to locate and list the diaspora of African ethnographic collections held in European museums as a tool to generate dialogue and collaborative projects. We see the project as a concept that could be extended, a concept that operates with little or no financial resources. Four African countries provided the initial focus for the project: Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project initially mapped relevant collections held in Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the UK. A secondary exercise has documented Namibian collections in Finnish museums in more detail and will be used to demonstrate the project's potential to develop the notion of the »museum as process«. However, the presentation will also speculate on the ways in which German museums might engage more effectively with Namibian communities. The project recognises the contextual framework of the circulation of material culture along colonial trade routes. It seeks to position museums as mediums for global dialogue. Conversations can enable source communities to provide greater historical depth regarding the intangible cultural heritage and places which provide a more complete biography of an object in a collection. However, establishing mechanisms to enable effective dialogue remains a challenge. The project is not a campaign for the repatriation of all African artefacts to the continent, but it will initiate debate about the provenance and significance of some artefacts. We believe that the willingness to review collections and to address the past can stimulate inter-cultural dialogue and lead to positive co-operation. European museums need to engage with this legacy, but should see dialogue as an opportunity, rather than a threat. Collections can generate connections. Museums can build bridges, rather than barriers, between communities.

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other places, with institutions, individuals, communities or initiatives. One of the major questions of this panel therefore was: How can this cooperation be achieved?

Inviting international guests from New Zealand, Namibia, Finland, Canada and Australia (in order of appearance) thus had two main aims: Firstly, to ask them to share their expertise with us, to present their projects and solutions, but also to acquaint us with problems and challenges they encountered on their way. Secondly, to see how and where we could cooperate for mutual benefits. This would also lead over to questions like how we can systematize our provenance research and thus conduct it with more efficiency or how we can collect, combine and store our information to make sure research findings are available to others?

Museum resources, both financial and human, are limited. Curators or researchers from Germany cannot frequently travel to the countries of origin and neither can people from the countries of origin come to Germany on a regular basis. Mutual visits will most often be the exception to the rule. Communication and cooperation need to work across other channels and digital tools provide some means for allowing that. People can talk via phone or video calls. Documents and information can be shared via file shares or cloud services and worked upon collaboratively. Objects can be looked at via high resolution images or even 3D scans that allow 360° turning of

Eeva-Kristiina Harlin (University of Oulu, Finland)

Recording Sámi Heritage in European Museums – Creating a Database for the People

The Sámi are the only Indigenous people living in the European Union. During the last 15 years, three larger surveys have been conducted on Sámi collections in Nordic and European museums. Today, Sámi museums have collections of at least 25,000 objects, but, according to our current knowledge, almost 50,000 objects – for example the sacred drums – are in the hands of others. The majority of objects are in Nordic collections, but other European museums house at least 4,000 objects; about 1,600 of these are for example in German museums. In this paper, I wish to reflect upon the experiences we have had during the surveys. I will discuss some challenges we faced and suggest what kind of proceedings could be useful for both sides – for museums in order to get an understanding of the relevance of the objects they guard in their collections and the Indigenous contemporary knowledge about them, and for the Indigenous people who are looking for their cultural heritage in museums across Europe.

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the artefact. Archival documents can be scanned and sent across the entire globe. More and more publications from the late 19th and early 20th century, essential sources for provenance research, become digitalized and thus accessible to more people. However, all this information needs to be brought together, collected somewhere, be interpreted and regularly updated, and be available again for all stakeholders involved.

Several presentations talked about the potential benefits but also disadvantages of digital networks and databases. The use of databases is certainly nothing new, neither for researchers nor for museum staff. However, how to get away from the notion of every individual (institution) setting up his or her own spread sheet because of discontent with existing systems or solutions is a different story. Individual databases might be best adapted to a certain problem or collection, but they lack reliability to other sources of knowledge, such as other databases, archive materials or reports of other researchers, especially when they are found only during research and were not known during the original design stage of the programme. The issue is thus not the principal use of databases, but rather how to use digital tools in a way that allows the combination of different sources and the exchange of information in different formats.

All solutions presented collect information from different sources. Some of them allow community involvement and the sharing of information, some support networking, some allow global mapping of connections between collections, collectors, objects, communities, individuals and institutions. Another recurring theme was the combination of different types of knowledge such as oral history and institutional history, both existent in many different locations. Certainly none of them was perfect, but taken together they present an interesting range of ideas and am-

Susan Rowley, Nicholas Jakobsen and Ryan Wallace, Vancouver
The Reciprocal Research Network – Working towards an Online Research Community

The Reciprocal Research Network (RRN – rrncommunity.org) is an online research tool allowing users to connect with Northwest Coast cultural heritage in multiple museum collections. It was built in order to facilitate reciprocal, collaborative research between and across researchers, originating community members, artists, and museum professionals.

► Additional contribution in this volume

ple opportunities to think about links and connection points where German researchers could tie in.

Discussion in the aftermath of the presentations showed that many members of the audience were interested in shared research opportunities and infrastructure. However, to many the task of familiarizing themselves with digital tools and databases, and the actual setup of them, appeared as a rather daunting task. A valid point of discussion was also how the usability and durability of any software solution could be guaranteed over longer time periods and how access could be negotiated. Given that some of the objects and/or associated knowledge or information come with restrictions on public use in the original communities, access might need to be limited. Data protection (not globally uniform) could also play a role in some cases. On the other hand, thorough provenance research might need some of this information in order to proceed. One way of dealing with this issue could be the solution of the Australian project, where some information is only accessible to communities but can be made

Trevor Isaac (U'mista Cultural Centre, Canada)

Using the Reciprocal Research Network for both Indigenous and Western Cultural Provenance Standards

What are the potential benefits of digital networks and databases that collect information from different sources – and what are their disadvantages? My contribution details the Research Reciprocal Network (RRN) and its approach to sourcing object provenance. The RRN is a collaborative online database created by the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in Vancouver, Canada, through the »A Partnership of Peoples« project. The U'mista Cultural Centre is one of four co-developers of this groundbreaking online database. Focused on Northwest Coast museum collections, this research website supports the exchange of information from traditional knowledge keepers and academics alike. Users can share information, create discussions, collaboratively write documents, or upload files regarding specific objects from any particular partner holding institute. This unique platform facilitates collaboration and creates easy access to information to a greater audience, benefiting museum collections and the artefacts' communities of origin. Provenance is especially important when speaking about collections of the Pacific Northwest Coast of British Columbia; mainly because of the way many of these artefacts have been taken and dispersed around the world. The RRN is a great way to learn multiple histories of objects from many contributors, but what are the pros and cons of this platform?

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available to researchers by them on request. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the panel provided an interesting snapshot of existing international solutions and debates that informed discussions during the conference and will hopefully have ramifications on later developments.

Paul Turnbull (University of Tasmania, Australia)

Digitally Analysing Colonial Collecting – The »Return, Reconcile, Renew Project«

The »Return, Reconcile, Renew Project«, a major research initiative funded by the Australian Research Council, has several aims. One important goal is the creation of digital resources for provenance research, primarily in connection with the repatriation of the bodily remains of Old People by Indigenous Australian communities. Digitally mapping the history of the collecting of ancestral bodily remains and important cultural property of Australian and other Indigenous peoples since the mid-eighteenth century can greatly enhance the kinds of provenance research that western museums now commonly find themselves obliged to undertake.

► Contribution in this volume