

Uncovering Colonial Collections, Enabling Reconnection

Workshop
24th & 25th
September 2025

Provenance Research and Repatriation of Ancestral Remains

Venue: Historische Sternwarte
Geismar Landstraße 11
37083 Göttingen

Organising team

Annika Dörner
Hanna Lange
Holger Stoecker
Jan Thomas

Since the beginning of 2024, the project "Human Remains from Colonial Contexts: Provenance Research in the Anthropological Collections of the University of Göttingen and MARKK Hamburg" has been investigating the colonial entanglements of two anthropological collections. The project focuses on the one hand, on the Anthropological Collection at the University of Göttingen, which includes holdings transferred to the former Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg between the 1880s and 1930s. On the other hand, it examines ancestral remains housed in the Blumenbach Skull Collection at the University Medical Center Göttingen, a collection with origins dating back to the late 18th century. Both collections contain ancestral remains from different colonial contexts, regions and time periods. The aim of the project is to identify relevant ancestral remains from colonial origin, to proactively inform stakeholders in postcolonial states in order to determine their provenance and to be able to respond to claims for repatriation.

The workshop marks the conclusion of this interdisciplinary provenance research project, reflecting on its thematic, regional, and methodological approaches. Four panels will present key aspects of the research: historical provenance and collection trajectories of specific ancestral remains from colonial contexts in Africa and Oceania; methodological approaches and challenges in bio-anthropological provenance research; and, in the final panel on Repatriation: current perspectives, processes, and challenges associated with the return of ancestral remains.

If you are interested in taking part, you are most welcome to join the workshop. To ensure proper planning and organization, we kindly ask that you register by September 15th by sending an email to Annika Dörner: annika.doerner@kustodie.uni-goettingen.de

24th September 2025

9.00		Registration
9.30-10.00	Annika Dörner & Holger Stoecker	Welcome & Introduction
10.00-12.30		Panel 1: Provenance Research on Africa Chair: Sophie Schasiepen (HdGÖ Vienna)
	Annika Vosseler (Museum der Univ. Tübingen)	Tracing Silence: The Afterlife of Ancestral Remains from Lake Victoria in a German Collection
	Mikael Assilkinga (Linden-Museum Stuttgart)	The collection of human remains from Cameroon at the University of Göttingen. Perspectives for a collaborative rewriting of colonial history
	Anette Hoffmann (Univ. Cologne)	Ungrievable Lives: Ancestral Remains from the Frontier Wars in South Africa
	Werner Hillebrecht (Windhoek, Namibia)	Worldwide connections, dubious traders and gullible collectors: Experiences with repeatedly displaced human remains
12.30-14.00	Lunch	

24th September 2025

14.00-
16.30

Panel 2: Anthropology

Chair: Margit Berner

(Naturhistorisches Museum Wien)

Sarah Fründt
(Deutsches
Zentrum
Kulturgutverluste)

Ethics and Provenance Research:
Interdisciplinary Provenance
Research on Ancestral Remains
from Australia

Anne Kremmer
(Museum der Univ.
Tübingen)

Visual and Osteobiographical
Assessment of Human Remains in
the Context of Provenance
Research: The Case of Six Crania
from Marshall Islands at the SMNS
and the University of Freiburg

Birgit Großkopf/
Emily Behlert
(Univ. Göttingen),
Thato Rathokane
(Wits Johannesburg)

Anthropological examination of
human remains from colonial
contexts - focus on
morphological methods

Katharina Stötzel
(Univ. Hospital
Göttingen)

Chances, Challenges and
Contradictions – Bio-
anthropological Provenance
Research of Human Remains

17.00-
18.00

Visit to the Anthropological
Collection (t.b.c.)

19.00

Dinner at Hotel Eden

25th September 2025

9.00-
11.30

Panel 3: Provenances in Oceania

Chair: Hilary Howes (Australian National University, Canberra)

Richard Hölzl
(Museum Fünf
Kontinente, Munich)

Robbing Graves in the Name of Humanism, or, How the Skull of an Indigenous Australian entered the Blumenbach Skull Collection in 1793

Jasmin Günther
(MARKK Hamburg)

Ancestral Remains from Papua New Guinea. Reflections on Provenance Research and the Hamburg South Sea Expedition 1908/09

Godwin Kornes &
Stefan Merker
(SMNS, Stuttgart)

The trade in human remains from the Marshall Islands during the German colonial period: results from provenance research on anthropological collections in Stuttgart and Freiburg

Annika Dörner &
Holger Stoecker
(Univ. Göttingen)

Australian Ancestral Remains: German Collectors and networks to Göttingen

11.30-
13.00

Lunch break

25th September 2025

13.00-
16.00

Panel 4: Repatriation

Chair: NN

Hilary Howes
(Australian
National University
Canberra)

Repatriation in Australia today:
directions, opportunities and
challenges

Maximilian Chami
(Univ. of Dar es
Salaam / Univ.
Stellenbosch)

Working with Local Community in
Central Tanzania: Restitution of
Ancestral Human Remains from the
University of Göttingen to Tanzania

Ruby Satele
(Univ. Vienna /
Samoa)

To Rematriate Is To Recentre:
Voices from Sāmoa

Sophie Schasiepen
(HdGÖ, Vienna)

Restitution networks: policies,
politics, and the question of the
human

Napo Labodja
Oubo-Gbati
(Univ. Kassel /
Togo)

„Le retour de l'ancêtre de Kuyunle
au Togo” – „Rückkehr des Vorfahren
von Kuyunle nach Togo”

16.15

Key Note

Ciraj Rassool
(Univ. of the
Western Cape)

Restitution, rehumanisation and
deracialisation