

*Project: Reciprocal Provenance Research with Restitution Prospect  
on Human Skeletal Remains from Colonial contexts in Africa*

**Fourth Meeting of the Advisory Board**

**MINUTES**

Date & Time of Meeting	12.10.2021, 12pm CET
Meeting Room	Zoom
Meeting called by	Andreas Mehler
Minutes prepared by	Lydia Rust
Present	Wazi Apoh, Albert Gouaffo, Reinhart Kößler, Andreas Mehler, Dieter Speck, Ursula Wittwer, Anna Lagia, Lena Seidel
Apologies	Kokou Azamede, Memory Biwa, Lionel Cédric Ikogou-Renamy, Pearl Lamptey, Flower Manase, Ciraj-Rassool, Holger Stoecker
Approved by	

**MAIN POINTS**

**1. Welcome**

- Introducing Annika Becher, new director of ABI.
- There were no objections or comments about the minutes from the last meeting. The minutes are therefore considered approved by the board.

**2. Reciprocity – Short report on the visit by Pearl Lamptey**

- Pearl Lamptey was in Freiburg for a total of six weeks – from 21 July through 30 August, 2021.
  - She will tell about her visit at the next board meeting, as she is conducting field work and could not attend the current meeting.
- General activities during Pearl's visit:
  - Getting familiar with the Biological Anthropology Institute's research projects such as; data modeling, archaeological projects, forensic projects and casework, and osteological methods research
  - Meeting with ABI staff and guests
  - Visiting the anthropological collection of the Natural History Museum in Basel, Switzerland with the curator Dr. Gerhard Hotz
  - Meeting with students, including exchanging thesis experiences and research topics
  - Learning about the history and facilities of Freiburg University (in particular the Uniseum)
  - Getting familiar with Freiburg and the surrounding areas: city tours, Black Forest excursions, hiking, student life, typical regional/German food
- The lab training within the Biological Anthropology that Pearl received while in Freiburg included:
  - The treatment and curation of human remains within the current project;

- Data standard of biological anthropological traits within the DZK project;
- Anthropological measurements (e.g. Microscribe use with Barbara Teßmann [Virchow Collection, Charite Berlin) and provenance analysis with FORDISC software);
- TCA, Tooth Cementum Annulation (age at death analysis);
- Age and sex estimation;
- Individual life-history traits such as pathologies, dental and cranial mutilations;
- Project data acquisition

### 3. Progress Report

#### 3a. Bioanthropological research

- After internal communication at the Institute of Biological Anthropology and communication with colleagues in the Advisory Board, we have agreed on the necessity to conduct anthropological research on the ancestral remains (i.e. the human skeletal and dental remains).
- The quality of information to be collected, and the mode of collecting it have been concluded. A standardized databank has been developed to facilitate collection and storage of this information. It will form the basis for linking other forms of evidence on the history of acquisition and curation of the remains.
- Until now approximately half of the ancestral remains that are part of the restitution project are under study at the Institute of Biological Anthropology.
- Our aim is to have completed the collection of information on the ancestral remains currently at the Institute of Biological Anthropology (half of the total under consideration for restitution) by the end of the year.

#### 3b. Historical research

Caveat: There are fundamental problems with the identification of the specimens

- There is a large documentation gap in the inventories between 1907 and 1985. The collection suffered major damages and losses during World War I (WWI) due to an air raid on April 14, 1917 and a subsequent fire. In the following years during the restoration of the collection damaged and lost specimens were replaced. However, it is not documented which specimens were lost or replaced.
- The written records of the institute of anatomy were almost completely destroyed on Nov 27, 1944 during WWII. Therefore, the documentation has very large gaps and the inventory can no longer be traced without doubt for the period 1907-1986.
- In order to put the identification of the specimens on a secure basis, an anthropological cross-check of the specimens is necessary. Biological anthropology can help verify or falsify whether the existing specimens and their provenance can be those of the historical descriptions. This has significant consequences for the tracing of the provenance of the specimens. Here is the need for, or essential connection with, the biological anthropology.
- There is information about the acquisition and the collector for each specimen, but this information may not correspond to the human remains currently in the collection. This is the fundamental issue with the documentary information.
- Important progress note: the initiative has been started to make documentary information available for the larger public to make information about the collection widely, universally

available. This is possible via the so-called 3-way strategy: [https://www.cp3c.org/3-road-strategy/link\\_collection.php](https://www.cp3c.org/3-road-strategy/link_collection.php)

#### 4. Comments/Questions from Advisory Board Members

- Concerns expressed on having decided upon the purpose and mode of collecting data when so little documentary information on the acquisition of the collection is available and we do not know about the mode of acquisition of the skulls from the collectors.
  - SIDE NOTE – The “*purpose*” and “*mode*” referred to in the Progress Report of the Biological Anthropology (see above) refer to the current data collection process within the DZK project, not the historical acquisition or data collection of the individual specimen or collection as a whole.
- We need to make a differentiation between information acquired from the human skeletal remains and that from the historical documentation - there is some information for a number of the human remains.
  - From each of these sources (human remains or historical documentation) we can learn a lot. For example, from the documentation from Ecker or Fischer we can possibly learn about some aspects of the purpose of the collection.
  - Our major challenge in this project is to bring the existing historical documentation together with the human remains.
- We have members of the advisory board with relevant experience; for example, Holger Stoecker and Reinhardt Kössler have experience in communicating with communities of origin.
- There is information about the acquisition and the collector for each specimen, but this information may not correspond to the human remains currently in the collection. This is the fundamental issue with the documentary information.
- It was not clearly communicated to the board what has happened with the aspect raised in a previous meeting; namely, the issue of non-identifiable human remains. Are these remains to be examined with the same type of methods used?
- To what extent would the research by Pearl have helped in regard to this question? Are there any remains from Ghana, which Pearl’s expertise/knowledge may have helped with the identification of the until now non-identifiable human remains?
  - The methods discussed with Pearl, in particular traits that can give insight into the life-ways of the individuals (skull deformations, tooth mutilations, etc.) can be used to determine a geographical/ethnic region of origin for the skulls for which the documentary information does not provide a more solid personal identification.
- Steps to take to make some kind of identification:
  - 1) Look for information in the documentation that would indicate that the individual remains do indeed belong to the number/remains in the documentation – here additional information from previous examinations or observations can be useful (age and sex information, anthropological measurements);
  - 2) Utilize examinations of particular traits, dental and cranial mutilations, life-ways information, pathologies, forensic traits (i.e. degenerative traits) from the remains.

Here the expertise of Wazi and Pearl can be utilized to collect individualized and/or more specific information.

#### 4. Way Forward – VAD 2022 (7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2022 in Freiburg)

- VAD Conference “Africa-Europe: Reciprocal Perspectives” → three German projects from different universities Göttingen, Tübingen, Freiburg will be presented in a panel at the conference:
  - Panel Proposal VAD 2022 “Human Remains from Africa in German University Collections: Sensitivity, Co-Production of Knowledge and the Restitution Perspective.”  
  
~ Abstract: After decades of neglect the interest in Collections of Human Remains has strongly expanded. In Germany, a number of innovative research projects have been started in recent years. They permit to go much deeper into the historical circumstances of acquisitions, following an established provenance research perspective. At the same time, they are facing a much stronger fundamental questioning, but also involvement by researchers and activists from “communities of origin” requesting repatriation/restitution. A strong focus on such projects is on former German colonies in Africa.”
- The idea is that some members from the advisory board, with expertise fitting to this topic, could join the panel discussion in regard to the ethics of such projects. → Wazi can attend.
- Integration of some of the advisory board members in the panel would be great, but there is also a round-table with a political focus (potentially in co-operation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation) which could also benefit from the participation of members.
- An individual email will be sent to all of the board members to separately ask who will be available to travel in June 2022 and attend the conference.
- We should have fleshed out enough in this project and on the policy paper by June 2022 to be able to present what we’ve been working on. The policy paper can hopefully make significant contributions to the debate on repatriation at the conference.
- The initial workshop that was planned for this DZK project and canceled due to Corona could be turned into an activity relating to the VAD Conference. The funding for this initial workshop (by the German Lost Arts Foundation) should still be available to us. An idea is to have an internal, live meeting of the Advisory Board on 7 June, 2022 as part of this conference.
- Policy Paper
  - No further input for the moment
  - Sub-committee has to meet again before the end of the year to produce a more consolidated version.
- Add-ons to the project
  - The “Turko” remains in the collection currently trigger attention by historians: significance of the German-French war 1870-71 for the search on racial interpretations/race theory?
    - Discussed in other advisory board meetings – we came to the conclusion that these remains are “African” although they possibly do not originate from Africa and do not come from a colonial context being from the German-French war in 1870-71.

- This triggers research into the non-importance of colonialism when it comes to rather racist interpretations/ideas/theories in terms of attributing race to objects in the collection.
    - There is the idea to work on these particular remains, with the above listed topics in mind, on their acquisition, etc.
  - “Excellence Initiative” (in research) in Germany, which is a major event every 7 years or so, maybe offer linkages to our project with the suggestion for an “Initiative”/ “Excellence Cluster” for research on issues of “Decoloniality”. Our current project might fall within this initiative.
  - All members should take note that generally there may be a broader “outflow” of this current project being (potentially) part of other projects or research initiatives. For example, of the ca. 30 Professors interested in the possibility of a project on “Decoloniality” a number of them are linguists. But, this potential research idea does not only have Africa in its sights, but rather “decolonialization” as a boarder, global research initiative.
  - Further project ideas? → It’s not too early to start thinking about how to proceed after this current project is finished. What are possible extensions or continuations of this project?
- Final Conference
  - Probably in December 2022/ possibly January 2023 in order to have all project personnel still on board as some members are retiring or moving on to other projects.

## 6. Internal matters

- Homepage
  - “Internal area” available under the following address:
    - <https://www.act.uni-freiburg.de/de/reziproke-provenienzforschung/interner-bereich>
    - Password: Kulturverluste
  - The documents within the internal area are, at the moment, only accessible with login information (user name and password). This should be changed so all members can access the uploaded documents with the above password.
  - Work on the new homepage is underway, but the reciprocity in regard to being transparent with all of the documentation is given within the homepage and should be available to all members of the board soon.
- Request to allocate funds differently
  - A request was made to allocate funds from the initial advisory board workshop to the board members in Africa without a stable internet connection. In the response from the foundation it was asked how many board members need this technical setup so that the foundation can decide in what way and how much should/can be reallocated to this aspect. ☑ Currently two members have stated that they are affected by this issue.
  - Members of the advisory board from Africa spend their own funds on purchasing internet for the 1.5 – 2 hours Zoom meeting for the advisory board due to a lack

of stable internet at some of their facilities. Funding for this issue or the donation of technical equipment would help greatly.

## **7. Next Meeting**

December 2021/January 2022.

- o At the next meeting we should (try to) have more concrete cases, objects, research aspects to propose for the board instead of abstract, theoretical statements.
- o The date for the meeting depends on the progress of the project.