

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

**Fifth Meeting of the Advisory Board  
MINUTES**

Date & Time of Meeting	28.02.2022, 11am CET
Meeting Room	Zoom
Meeting called by	Andreas Mehler
Minutes prepared by	Lydia Rust
Present	Andreas Mehler, Dieter Speck, Ursula Wittwer, Anna Lagia, Lena Seidel, Pearl Lamptey, Holger Stoecker, Wazi Apoh, Kokou Azamede, Anika Becher
Apologies	Memory Biwa, Lionel Cédric Ikogou-Renamy, <b>Flower Manase</b> , Ciraj-Rassool, Albert Gouaffo, <b>Reinhart Kößler</b>
Approved by	

**MAIN POINTS**

**1. Welcome**

- There were no objections or comments about the minutes from the last meeting. The minutes are therefore considered approved by the board.

**2. Short report on Freiburg stay by Pearl Lamptey**

- Freiburg city tour/ Visit to the archives/ Natural History Museum (Basel, Switzerland)
- Introduction to theses of master's students from the institute
- Lectures in forensic anthropology → Facial recognition methods, profiling
- Recording anthropological data – Methods for this provenance project
- Workshop and experience exchange (Berlin, Basel and Freiburg) – focused on Virchow Collection in Berlin, curated by Barbara Teßmann
  - Similarities in anthropological methods and practice (Basel, Berlin & Freiburg)
  - Varied perspectives on the importance of inter- and intra-exchange of information/experiences
  - **Transparency in research** (especially utilization of methods and potential outcomes)
  - Diverse responses to studying human remains; little to no **resistance** to the methods and practices in the Berlin and Basel (Collections) by the State/communities as against the situation in Ghana → Many sensitivities and skepticism
- Participation – capacity-building and exchange exercise:
  - Monitor the methods for the provenance analysis
  - Discussions on ethical considerations for provenance analysis and repatriation procedures
  - Anthropological data collection on several of the human remains from the Ecker Collection
- Insights on the provenance analysis:
  - Method/Approach to re-humanizing → standard, non-invasive anthropological methods; craniometrics for ancestry
  - Relevance of provenance analysis on the skulls → limited data on life histories (from archival data)

- Significant balance of the anthropological methods with historical/archival data and political perspectives

**Discussion:** Pearl's experience at the Natural History museum in Basel, Switzerland showed how receptive the citizens of Basel are to anthropological research on human remains. This is in stark contrast to the resistance she's experienced from various communities in Ghana. What are possible hypotheses for welcomed acceptance of or strong resistance against the use of anthropological analyses on human skeletal remains from various countries/communities?

- Cultural practices around the death of a chief or head of a community may lead to resistance on the part of the community.
- Knowledge of cultural practices, historical events, and geo-political relationships is essential to making decisions about the utilization of certain anthropological analyses.

### 3. Reallocation of funding – Status report

- We are optimistic that we have found a solution – pending a formal decision by the German Lost Arts Foundation: African members of the Advisory Board will receive a lump sum covering time and money spent on preparations and participation at Board meetings.
  - This should be equivalent to €1000 over the entire period
  - Discussions with donor were complicated...

### 4. Sharing progress – Sharing concerns

- A deeper inquiry into what we have at hand has revealed ethical and practical problems associated with the handling of the remains and the prospect of repatriation → Need for advice!
  - Should corrective measures be used on the remains, i.e. to correct misplaced teeth, remove adhesive/wires keeping the mandible attached to the cranium, etc.?
  - Should marks made on the remains from previous analyses be removed and/or the remains cleaned of dust remaining within the cranial cavities?
- Could correcting such errors provide the opportunity to do some justice to the deceased while preparing their remains for repatriation or should these be left to give silent witness of that happened to them? [Even if some damages could be corrected, other, such as drilling, will always bear evidence of their handling.]
- Address more concretely the finality of unidentified remains
  - Unidentified remains include; 1. Remains for which provenance cannot be determined with non-invasive methods, 2. Isolated mandibles that bear evidence whether the whole skull has been part of the collection, 3. Fragments of bone and teeth that do not match the rest of the remains in the box
- Possible solution – steps to take?
  - Ask (representatives of) the communities of origin to decide about the fate of such remains, as done by repatriation projects in North America and Germany (as shared by Holger Stoecker).
  - Should we deal with this problem at a later stage of the project or start making contacts?

**Discussion:** All the members who commented on these questions are against making any kind of corrections, as the communities of origin will most likely want to find out what the treatment of the remains was like and which assessments were done on them. It was agreed that the curatorial modifications (markings, drilling, adhesives, etc.) should be thoroughly documented and available for the recipient (community of origin or representatives) at the time of repatriation.

With a founded idea of which communities/country the remains could come from, it is possible to start making contact now without definitive provenance data. The contact persons should be informed that the provenance is not confirmed (!) and new data may change the status of the remains. From the experience of some board members, the African contacts for this process tend to be at the national level.

- **Interaction with other projects on collections in Germany**

- Exchange about procedures on provenance analysis between Göttingen (Blumenbach collection) and Tübingen (Anthropological collection) with Freiburg project group concerning bioanthropological and historical approaches (all projects funded by DZK) reveal several matches concerning;
  - Persons (collecting and distributing human remains) involved across collections
  - Labelling systems (indicating same source of collections)
  - Treatment of remains such as mounting, marking (indicating same persons involved)
- Ongoing exchange with Barbara Teßmann (Berlin collection) currently asking for help to install contact concerning remains from West African countries (about 130 from Togo, 300 from Cameroon, some from Ghana). → **Anyone who could help here, please contact Ursula to get the contact information for Barbara.**

**Discussion:** Such requests have an inherently political aspect to them and it may be helpful to have a paragraph about this issue in the policy paper and to make German embassies in Africa aware of such collections of human remains in Germany.

- Would it be helpful to have collective requests/announcements about human remains from particular communities/countries held in German collections so that repetition can be avoided where possible?

## 5. History: Inventory now accessible

- Project page is amended; you are able to access all basic information on the collection. <http://act.uni-freiburg.de/en/reciprocal-provenance-research/the-alexander-ecker-collection>
  - Already by now there is full transparency on what is state of the art of our research: [http://zeuas003.vm.uni-freiburg.de:8080/actaproweb//document/Best\\_d4486c8d-bf5c-4cc4-9d79-19a1f42901c7](http://zeuas003.vm.uni-freiburg.de:8080/actaproweb//document/Best_d4486c8d-bf5c-4cc4-9d79-19a1f42901c7)
  - Please also make use of our user service: <https://archiv.uni-freiburg.de:8443/actaproweb/search.xhtml>
  - Or search yourself with the full text search in all our holdings: <https://archiv.uni-freiburg.de:8443/actaproweb/search.jsf>. In the search results, open the records by clicking on the + sign. After that you can see the detailed information.
- As mentioned in previous meetings, specimen from the collection were destroyed in World War II and subsequently replaced with similar specimen without detailed documentation. For this reason, the anthropological analyses are essential to cross-check the specimen currently in the collection.
- **Interim project report**
  - An interim project report to the funder DZK is due in May. It will mainly include formal aspects of the projects progress and leaves some space for first results.
  - Are there important aspects from your side to be integrated into the interim report? (Sharing of results part of the report/draft?)
- Suggestion → Each of the contributing disciplines could prepare questions that are important from their perspective to discuss in interaction with the advisory board at the next meeting.

## **6. Presence of the project at conference**

- VAD conference “Africa-Europe: Reciprocal Perspectives” 7-10 June 2022 in Freiburg
- Three board members are already on the roundtable, but there is still a spot left for one advisory board member. **If you are able and would like to join, please contact Andreas.**

## **7. Policy Paper (status) and way forward**

- A new draft was sent around – are there any aspects that the advisory board wants to discuss? Specifically to the questions on the slide (see PowerPoint):

**Discussion:** If no communities want to claim the remains, mass burial would be an option that would be in line with the cultural burial practices held by the majority of African nations. It should be noted that specifically Muslim communities often have very timely burial practices (within 1-2 days of death) and may need particular accommodations for skeletal remains.

- A section in the policy paper specifically about Freiburg with concrete examples would be an addition to the already published papers and policies on the recommendations for handling of human remains in German contexts.
- Maybe a different type of organization of the policy paper would help to make the recommendations clearer.
- A timeline for scientific research on skeletal human remains from Africa should be established and may have a space within this policy paper – foreign researchers who take skeletal remains to their home country for study and forget or just simply do not return them is also an adjacent issue.

**Comments on the latest draft of the policy paper are greatly appreciated and should be directed to Andreas so that a (more or less) final copy of the policy paper could be used at the roundtable discussions in the beginning of June at the VAD conference.**

## **8. Miscellaneous**

- Next meeting, end of April or beginning of May?