

Systemizing Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

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Abstract

Recent debates surrounding the establishment of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin have given rise to questions of how to address the colonial histories of collections housed in Germany's ethnographic museums. So far, research into the colonial background of these collections has focused mostly on exemplary case studies, specific objects or donors. Between 2016 and 2018, the Project *Discomforting Heritage: Objects from Colonial Contexts in Anthropological Museums*,¹ a cooperation between the Linden Museum Stuttgart and the University of Tübingen, sought a more systematic mode for researching objects from colonial contexts. This article reports on the resulting survey of the Linden Museum's collections from former colonial territories, which asked two key questions: when did the objects arrive and who donated or sold them to the museum. Based on the results, the article details how this approach addresses the collections' interconnectedness with colonial structures, provides a foundation for a systematic and pro-active handling of these collections, and lays down important groundwork for the respectful sharing of information with stakeholder communities.

Key words: Museum studies; colonial history; ethnographic collections; provenance research

Introduction

Since Bénédicte Savoy made her concerns regarding the evolving Humboldt Forum public in 2017, (post)colonial criticism of Germany's ethnographic museums has become a contentious topic amongst media commentators as well as the public (Häntzschel 2017). German ethnographic museums are criticised for an inadequate engagement with their colonial origins, a lack of historical contextualization of objects, insufficient knowledge about the provenance of their collections as well as exhibition and representation practices that continue to accentuate cultural differences. As a result, demands to intensify research into the acquisition of objects from colonial contexts have markedly increased.²

The problem had, in fact, been recognized before. In 2015, Larissa Förster pleaded for a more systematic approach to provenance research on collections from colonial contexts in her presentation at the conference *Positioning Ethnological Museums in the 21st century* convened in Hanover, Germany. She argued that provenance research should be carried out independently from restitution claims and incorporate long-term models of cooperation, and that the outcomes of the research need to be publicly discussed (Förster 2016a: 51-3). Furthermore, Förster insisted that provenance research should lead to a broader and more in-depth historiography of collections: It 'should systematically inquire about the making and unmaking of museum collections' (Förster 2016a: 52).

The following year, the issue of systemizing provenance research on objects from colonial contexts was addressed in the research project *Discomforting Heritage: Objects from Colonial Contexts in Anthropological Museums*,³ a cooperation between the University of Tübingen, namely, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology and the Institute of Historical and Cultural Anthropology, and the Linden Museum in Stuttgart. Running from March 2016 to March 2018, it combined two strands of interest: On the one hand, it focused

on the recent problematization of ethnographic museums and the socio-political processes underlying this development. On the other, it addressed the histories of ethnographic museums and their collections by seeking a systematic approach to provenance research.

In relation to provenance research, the initial project proposal identified three aspects that make the development of a systematic approach particularly difficult. The first refers to the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the objects, by noting that archival records are often incomplete: 'While the documentation concerning the incorporation of objects into museum collections is generally good, often very little is known about the specific situations pertaining to their acquisition in the societies and/or places of origin of those objects.'⁴ The magnitude of ethnographic collections, which does not allow for a determination of the individual provenance for every object, was seen as a second problem.⁵ The third point was the need for a moral-ethical evaluation of the acquisition contexts and, subsequently, a discussion on the legitimacy of ownership.

Considering these aspects, the primary goal of provenance research in the *Discomforting Heritage* project was the development of an approach for the systematic analysis of collections acquired in colonial contexts, which would extend beyond research on individual objects and collectors, thus making it possible to survey large-scale collections and to provide a first basis for evaluating the moral status of acquisitions.

The Debate on Objects from Colonial Contexts and Provenance Research in Germany

Germany's ethnographic museums house extensive collections of objects from all over the world. The majority of these objects were acquired when Europe's colonial expansion peaked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to the explorer and ethnographer Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), ethnographic museums became as swollen 'as pregnant hippos' during this era (Frobenius 1925: 19). Encouraged by the theoretical principles of the emerging discipline of Ethnology, or *Völkerkunde*, vast collections of objects were amassed. According to its first exponents, such as Adolf Bastian (1826-1905), the first director of the Ethnological Museum Berlin, making scientific statements about human nature and its development could only be possible, if a sufficient amount of empirical data in the form of ethnographic objects was available. It was also assumed that the impact of the European colonial intrusion would wipe out culture-specific characteristics of societies, and that particular peoples labelled as 'primitive' would gradually disappear. Based on this assumption, ethnographic museums focused almost exclusively on the accumulation of material culture from these societies (Zimmerman 2001; Penny 2002). Furthermore, due to colonial expansion, access to these items – now considered to be ethnographic objects – increased rapidly. The establishment of colonial structures in civil and military administration, transportation and the economic sector, led especially to a rising number of people who could act as suppliers for museums (Zimmerman 2001: 149-71). Ethnographic knowledge concerning colonized regions and societies – their classification into ethnic and linguistic groups, and 'racial types', as well as the attribution of (alleged) cultural characteristics – offered, in turn, support for the implementation and consolidation of colonial rule, and served as a scientific legitimization of European colonization (Osterhammel and Jansen 2012: 117-20; Conrad 2016: 79-86).

As research and educational institutions, museums were involved not only in the production of colonial knowledge but also in conveying it to the public. Societies presented in ethnographic museums were described as 'primitive', 'backwards', 'primordial', and, increasingly, as 'racially inferior'. The demarcation and devaluation of the *Other*, made tangible in exhibitions, enabled museum visitors to experience their (alleged) cultural superiority. Their self-image and perception of the world were reassured by the reduction of the colonized to an inferior *Other* (Laukötter 2007, 2013). Thus, effects of colonial power were not limited to the colonies and their colonized inhabitants. They were also present in the colonizing societies (Zimmerman 2015).

These aspects of ethnographic collecting, however, were not a topic of relevance for most German ethnographic museums. Only rarely did they focus on the colonial background of their collections. If they did, it was mostly short-lived. For example, in the 1980s, several

publications, such as *Nofretete will nach Hause* (Paczensky and Ganslmayr 1984) and *Die Hamburger Südsee-Expedition: über Ethnographie und Kolonialismus* (Fischer 1981), as well as exhibitions, such as *Andenken an den Kolonialismus*, shown at the Ethnological Institute of the University of Tübingen (Harms 1984), discussed the issues temporarily but failed to permanently establish the investigation into the colonial histories of ethnographic museums as a relevant topic. The museums' interest continued to lay primarily in the societies and communities that had created and used the objects, and in conveying their assumed cultural characteristics in an appealing way to the public.

The lack of engagement by museums with their colonial past has, since the early 2000s, become particularly problematic in the context of the development of postcolonialism. Museums have been publicly criticized by activist groups in particular, as well as by an increasing number of historians and cultural scientists. In recent years, criticism has centred mainly on the establishment of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. Its planners are especially criticized for their ignorance regarding the colonial backgrounds of the collections that are going to be presented, as well as Germany's colonial history in general (AfricAvenir 2017). When art historian Bénédicte Savoy announced her resignation from the advisory board of the Humboldt Forum in 2017, she catapulted the topic into the culture sections of Germany's newspapers. During an interview, she called for more research into the provenance of ethnographic collections: '[...] without this research, no Humboldt Forum or ethnographic museum can be opened today' (Häntzschel 2017). In light of growing criticisms, Hermann Parzinger, president of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz,⁶ called, in January 2018, for the establishment of an international agreement for dealing with objects from colonial contexts (Parzinger 2018).

Although not legally binding, the first guidelines on the handling of demands for the return of cultural goods were included in the *Code of Ethics* of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as early as 2004, and in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2007. These guidelines addressed not only museums, but also political decision-makers. According to the Declaration:

States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.⁷

In a similar manner, the *Code of Ethics* demands that museums take an active stance concerning the restitution of cultural goods. They should be 'prepared to initiate dialogue for the return of cultural property to a country or people of origin'.⁸

To initiate the active dialogue that is called for, ethnographic museums need to do more research on the circumstances of how their collections were acquired. Since the mid-2010s, these investigations are labelled as provenance research in the German context. The term was primarily used in art history. It describes the examination and documentation of the origins of collections. With the signing of the *Washington Principles*⁹ in 1998, the term became widely associated with the search for Nazi-confiscated art, which added further moral and ethical aspects (Förster 2019: 80-1). An ethnologically oriented provenance research on objects from colonial contexts extends beyond the evaluation of legal ownership. It aims for a *thick* contextualization of collections and objects, which reflects their involvement in complex social and political processes in the past and present. The following aspects are vital: the critical interrogation of European concepts of property and ownership, as well as of copy, fake and original; the consideration of the involved actors' agency; and the integration of an understanding that emphasizes the subjectivity of objects (Förster 2019: 82-3).

A step toward a systematic mode of provenance research: collection profiles

Research into the colonial background of Germany's ethnographic museums and their collections has so far mostly focused on exemplary case studies or specific objects, donors and regions (for example, Stelzig 2006; Buschmann 2008; Förster 2013). Given the extent of the collections housed in Germany's ethnographic museums and the growing attention

to the question as to how these things ended up in these museums, a research approach with a broader scope is overdue. Early examples that focused on larger collections are the surveys of the Africa collections in the Übersee-Museum Bremen (Briskorn 2000) and in the Ethnological Museum Berlin (Stelzig 2004). In a similar way, the approach pursued within the *Discomforting Heritage* project also attempted to create collection surveys as a first step toward a systematic analysis of the interrelationships between colonial history and ethnographic collections. Thus, it centred not on individual collections and objects, but rather on the people who consigned objects to the museum. This actor-centred approach asked what role the object donors played in the colonization of the areas from which their collections originated, the realization of Germany's claim to power through military subjugation, the establishment of administrative structures, and economic penetration. The question of whether the donors had stayed in these areas, and what role they had played in their colonization were essential to the research into donors' biographies, through which the collections were contextualized within Germany's colonial history and the history of European colonialism.

For the purpose of getting an overview of the development of the Linden-Museums' holdings from their establishment in the 1880s up until today, it was decided to include all objects of the collections chosen to be examined, regardless of their time of arrival at the museum, instead of looking only at those that had arrived during the time the German Empire was playing an active role as a colonial power in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. By using this approach, it was possible to determine the significance of the German colonial era for the development of the collections under scrutiny.

In order to create the collections profiles, the object donors were identified by name, information about their personal backgrounds was gathered, and it was established how many objects each had given to the museum. The research carried out throughout the project used the museum's historical documentation and its archival material, such as the museum's database, its inventory and entry books, as well as any available correspondence between object donors and museum staff. For example, the museum's archive holds many of the exchanges between Count Karl von Linden (1838-1910),¹⁰ who acted as manager of the collection at that time, and the donors. The search was then expanded to secondary literature, external archival holdings, newspapers and periodicals, and publications by the donors themselves.

To document and analyze the information that was gathered, a user-friendly database was set up. Containing information regarding biographical data and collection activities, and also suggestions for further reading and source material, it allowed its users to get an overview of the individual object donors. Those individuals were also categorized on the basis of the research results. This categorization allowed me to map out the collections' structures and characteristics in regard to acquisition time frames and backgrounds of the donors involved. The time periods in which donations to the museum were made were divided into five categories: 'before 1900', '1900-1920', '1920-1950', '1950-1990', and 'after 1990.' The donors were classified into 11 categories. The ones that were utilized most frequently are those that refer to specific fields of activity that pointed to particular colonial activities and the agents involved, such as 'military', 'colonial administration and politics', 'mission', 'research expeditions', 'colonial economy', and 'ethnographica trade and exchange'.

The creation of collection profiles as a systematic approach to provenance research was tested on collections which originated in the territories of three former German colonies: 'German South-West Africa', 'German Cameroon', and 'German New Guinea'. The selection of these collections aimed at revealing commonalities and differences in the collections' structures with regard to the time frames of their arrival and the circumstances surrounding their acquisition. Likewise, the intent was to reveal relationships between the composition of the holdings and the particularities of German rule in each colony.

The decision to focus on collections from Namibia, the former 'German South-West Africa', was made with regard to the war against the Herero and Nama, which lasted from 1904 to 1908. The Herero and Nama who had survived the military operations were interned in concentration camps, where more than half of them died (see for example Zimmerer and Zeller 2003). In the context of these events, which today are viewed as genocide,¹¹ the examination of this collection appeared particularly urgent.

The selection of the Namibian holdings was contrasted with the inclusion of a collection from another German colony in Africa, whose primary value consisted in the extraction of natural resources. Thus, the collections from Cameroon, which comprise the largest collection from Sub-Saharan Africa in the Linden Museum with about 16,500 entries in its inventory, were chosen. In contrast to the colonial wars in 'German East Africa' and 'German South-West Africa', the violent history of the occupation of 'German Cameroon' has provoked considerably less attention among the public. To cement the German claim to power and subjugate the population, during thirty years of German colonial rule from 1884 to 1914, numerous military operations were carried out (Hoffmann 2007a).

The present-day focus on German colonial history is primarily centred on the colonies of the German Empire in Africa. The former colonial territories in Asia and the Pacific Region have received significantly less consideration. Thus, as a complement, the colony of 'German New Guinea', which has often been seen as a footnote in German colonial history, was also selected.¹² Due to the area's dimensions, spanning the north-east of the island of New Guinea ('Kaiser-Wilhelmsland'), the Bismarck Archipelago, the northern Solomon Islands, the Caroline Islands, the Northern Marianas, Palau, Nauru, and the Marshall Islands, it was decided that only a portion of the colony would be the focus of attention: the Bismarck Archipelago, where the central headquarters of the German colonial administration was located.¹³

The inventories of these collections combined about 25,300 objects, which were consigned to the museum by 310 individuals and institutions from 1884, when the collection was established by the 'Württembergischen Verein für Handelsgeographie und Förderung deutscher Interessen im Ausland',¹⁴ until today.

Research Results: The significance of Germany's Colonial Era for the Linden-Museum and its collections

The creation of collection profiles has provided important starting points for further studies of the colonial background of the Linden Museum. The following outline of the project's findings exemplifies some characteristics of the holdings that were surveyed and, thus, illustrates the usefulness of the approach chosen.

Combined overview of the collections from Namibia, Cameroon, and the Bismarck Archipelago

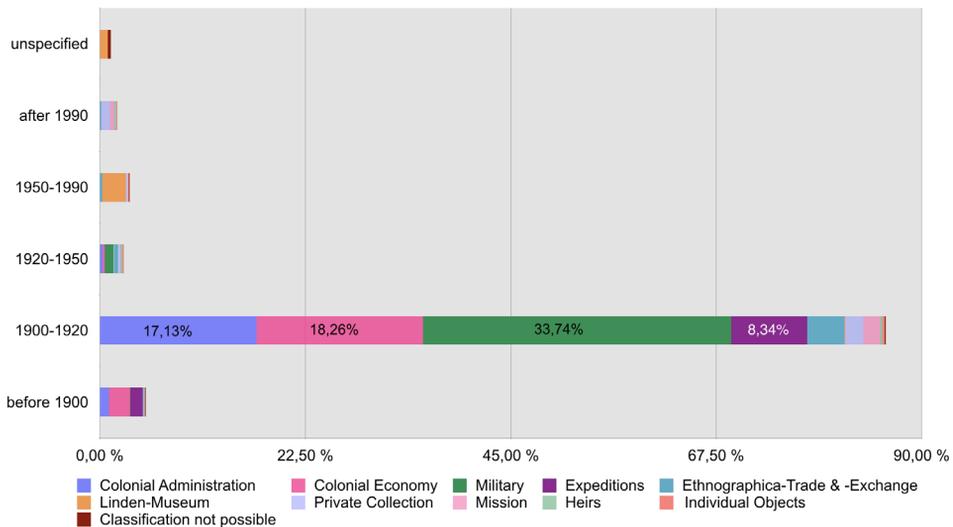


Figure 1. Combined Overview of the collections from Namibia, Cameroon, and the Bismarck Archipelago in the Linden Museum Stuttgart, as of 30 March 2018.¹⁵

The profiles clearly show the significance of the colonial era for the genesis of the three collections examined: Nearly 92 per cent, about 23,200 of the objects were incorporated into the collection during the years between 1884 and 1920. When the treaty of Versailles came into effect in 1920, Germany's colonial era came to an official end. By then, 206 individuals and institutions had participated in the collections' establishment and their expansion. Furthermore, the biographical backgrounds of the donors involved indicate the great importance of colonial structures: About 35 per cent of the objects that were studied arrived at the museum through individuals who were members of the military. Nearly 21 per cent were given to the museum by employees, owners, and shareholders of companies that played a role in colonial economies. Another 18 per cent was received through members of the colonial administration.

To address the question of how the museum used colonial structures to build up its collection, the approach also attempted to shed light on those in positions of authority at the Linden Museum and their personal networks; for example, the long-term head of the museum's association, Count Karl von Linden, who was a crucial figure in the development of the collections in the 1890s and 1900s. When he died in 1910, the collection had grown from about 300 objects in 1886 to 63,000 (Kußmaul 1975: 21-4). His network encompassed at least 130 of the 205 persons who consigned objects to the collections surveyed before 1920. Von Linden's success was, however, not only due to his skills as a networker. Object donors who had made particular valuable contributions received in return, through his intermediation, a Medal of Commendation by the Kingdom of Württemberg, which, for many, was the critical incentive for sending their collections to Stuttgart (Buschmann 2008: 54-7).

For each of the three collections, it proved to be true that the overwhelming majority of the objects came into the possession of the museum during Germany's colonial era. It was also possible to retrace differences in the way the colonial occupation proceeded in the various areas based on how the collections are structured.

The collections from former 'German South-West Africa', present-day Namibia, encompass about 2,220 inventory entries in total. Most of the objects, about 60 per cent, were given to the museum by military personnel and members of the colonial administration. At least one of these collections, 17 objects consigned to the museum by Freiherr Treusch von Buttler Brandenfels,¹⁶ can be directly linked to the war against the Herero in 1904. In addition, the comparatively large number of objects received for the Namibian holdings between 1920 and 1950, about 10 per cent of the whole collection, points to the character of 'German South-West Africa' as the only settler colony in Germany's colonial empire. That is, after the end of the First World War, many of the 12,000 Germans who had settled there, stayed (Conrad 2016: 29).

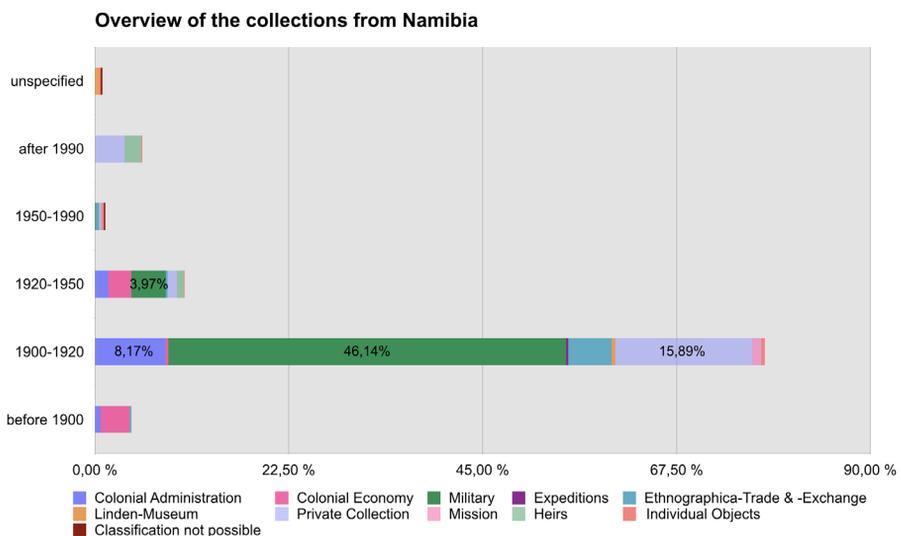
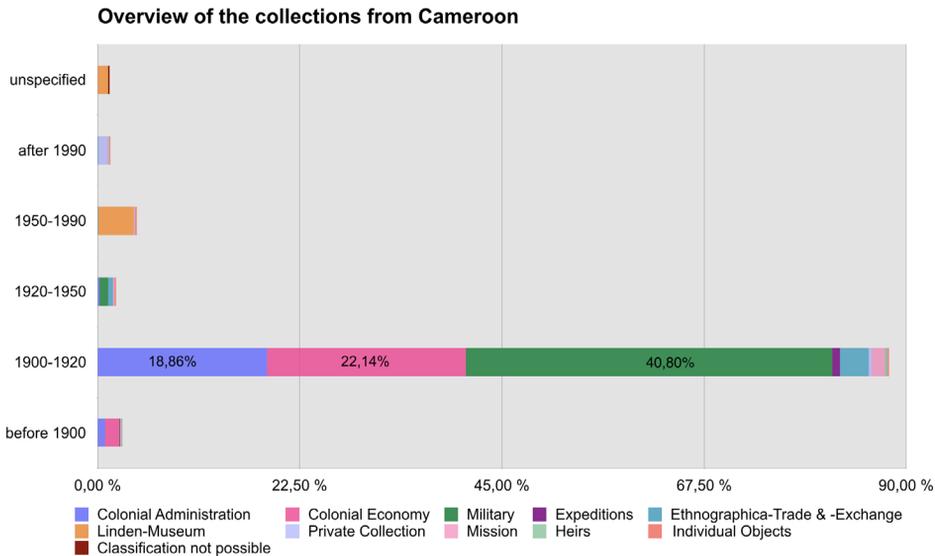


Figure 2. Profile of the Namibia collection in the Linden Museum Stuttgart, as of 30 March 2018.¹⁷

With about 16,500 inventory entries, the holdings from Cameroon are the largest of the regional collections surveyed within the framework of the project. Von Linden took a special interest in expanding these holdings. For this purpose, he corresponded with at least 68 individuals and institutions. The museum received most of the objects, about 80 per cent, from military personnel, members of the colonial administration, and stakeholders in the colonial economy. Overall, the development of the Cameroon collection in the Linden Museum reflects the expansion of the German area of influence through the successive military occupation of the Cameroonian interior and the increasing economic exploitation of these areas. Furthermore, archival material on these collections shows that, not just the acquisition of objects but also their transportation was linked to the exercise of colonial power. In Cameroon, porters apparently played a key role in the movement of products and goods, as well as in the transport of ethnographic objects (Sprute 2018: 142-3).



*Figure 3. Profile of the Cameroon collection in the Linden Museum Stuttgart, as of 30 March 2018.*¹⁸

The collections from the Bismarck Archipelago include about 6,600 inventory entries. In comparison with the other holdings surveyed, differences can be discerned with regard to the professional and personal backgrounds of the donors. The museum received about 35 per cent of the objects from individuals who were classified under the category 'research expedition'; a category that was neither of relevance in the genesis of the collections from Namibia, nor in those from Cameroon. Another difference can be seen in the lower share of objects, about 12 per cent, that were consigned to the museum by members of the military. This composition points to differences in the administration of 'German New Guinea'. Here, due to a more limited budget in comparison to the administration of Germany's colonies in Africa, and the absence of a permanent military presence, establishing and extending Germany's claim to power relied more on scientific appropriation (Buschmann 2003; Buschmann 2008: 97-100).

Objects that were donated to the museum by military personnel, in particular, implicate a violent acquisition context as their donors were often actively involved in the subjugation of the regions that would become German colonies. In the case of the holdings surveyed, it became evident that each contains collections that were acquired during military operations. The circumstances surrounding these acquisitions were often openly discussed by the donors and, sometimes, used to promote the collections as especially worthwhile. For example, Hermann Bertram,²⁰ an officer in the so-called 'Schutztruppe für Kamerun,' titled the first section of his collection inventory 'war loot'²¹ and told von Linden that he had 'put

[the collection] together with great effort over the course of 2-1/2 years of war'.²² As for the holdings from the Bismarck Archipelago, the description of the first objects in the inventory of a collection from navy physician Johannes Müller²³ reads '6 clay idols from a temple that we plundered at Nusah (New Mecklenburg), with whose inhabitants we are at war.'²⁴ They were probably taken during a so-called punitive expedition carried out by the imperial navy ship *Habicht* 'against the Tubtub tribe (Nusa New Mecklenburg)' in July 1881 (Hünemörder 1903: 187, translated from the German original).

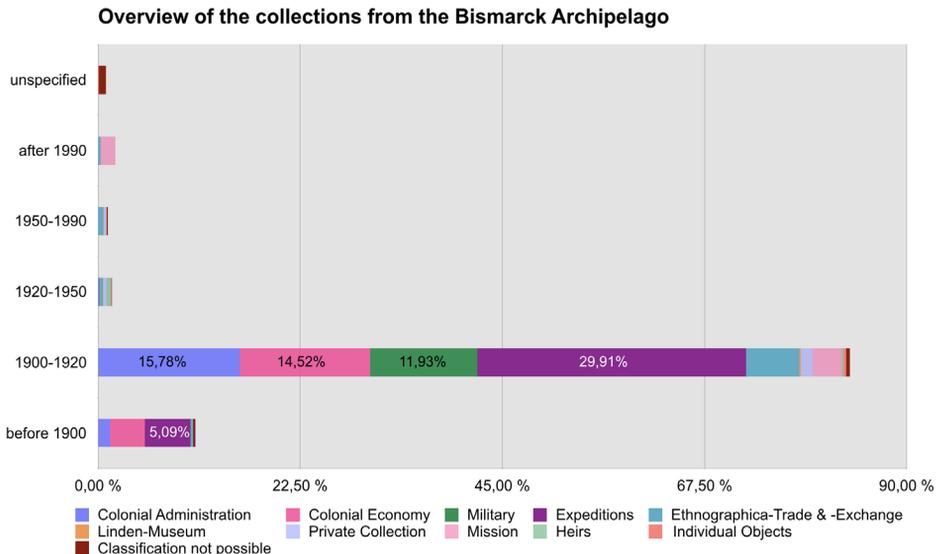


Figure 4. Profile of the Bismarck Archipelago collection in the Linden Museum Stuttgart, as of 30 March 2018.¹⁹

Freiherr Treusch von Buttlar Brandenfels, a military officer who took part in the war against the Herero in early 1904, was especially explicit about the violent background of his collection. In 1907, he consigned 17 objects to the museum. Regarding their acquisition, he informed von Linden: 'During the campaign against the Herero, [...] I was able to collect, upon the occasion of various attacks on Herero villages, a great number of the basic artifacts of this people!'²⁵ The inventory of his collection gives even more details, down to the exact date, on how the objects were 'collected'. For example, neck and leg ornaments that today bear the inventory numbers 054061 and 054065 'were taken from a woman who was killed by a grenade during the battle of Otjihinamaparero on 25 February 04'.²⁶ Another leg ornament (Inv.-No. 054066) was removed from a 'woman who was captured and wounded'²⁷ in the same battle. Other objects were left behind by their previous owners as they fled, and were later 'found',²⁸ in the words of von Buttlar-Brandenfels, by members of the German military. For his contribution to the museum's collection, von Buttlar-Brandenfels received, through the intermediation of von Linden, who was impressed by the collection and its provenance, a medal of commendation.²⁹

Reflection

The work that was done in the course of the *Discomforting Heritage* project has provided a number of starting points for further research on the colonial past of the Linden Museum. The approach toward developing a systematic method for provenance research on collections from colonial contexts tested during the project serves as an *initial check*, as a first step toward comprehensive contextualization within Germany's colonial history and the history

of European colonialism. Focusing on the question of what role the persons who consigned objects to the museum played in the occupation and administration of the colonies, and locating them in the colonial situation, makes it possible to work out connections between the establishment and extension of collections and colonial structures. Thus, a first overview with respect to the colonial backgrounds of the collections surveyed can be gained through which collections, groups of objects, participants, and issues that urgently require further research can be identified. In the case of the Linden Museum, this research approach revealed multiple structural interconnections between the growth of its collections and the colonial history of Germany, making it clear how heavily the museum relied on colonial power relations and infrastructures to obtain its collections.

The information found in the museum's archives, historical publications, and the research literature provided ample clues on the contexts surrounding the acquisition of objects and allowed for a first, preliminary, assessment. Apprehensions concerning the source material proved to be justified only insofar as it was rarely possible to establish the exact provenance of individual objects on the basis of the available material – the notes from Buttlar-Brandenfels with precise dates for the seizure of the objects in his collection remain an exception. With regard to the scale of the ethnographic holdings in the museum, the actor-centred approach that was selected proved its worth. It was thus possible to survey even large-scale collections, as with the Cameroon holdings consisting of roughly 16,500 objects, in a relatively short time frame. Regarding the moral-ethical evaluation of the contexts in which the objects were acquired, the research provides an important foundation, not just by identifying explicit violent contexts and surveying the collections concerning the legality or illegality of their acquisition, but also by revealing the spectrum of colonial violence that the objects are tainted with.

The creation of collection profiles, as the approach to provenance research on collections from colonial contexts presented here, lays the groundwork for a more systematic and pro-active handling of these collections. It is meant as a first step towards an in-depth contextualization of the objects, which reflects their integration into multilayered social and political negotiation processes in the past and in the present.³⁰ Provenance research on collections from colonial contexts provides, in this sense, a reflection of the social conditions under which the things that are found in ethnographic museums arrived in Europe. Its purpose is not merely to clarify the circumstances of acquisition. Rather, it traces the processes by which things became the objects that are found today in ethnographic museums and collections. By examining linkages between colonized and colonizing societies, between a colonial past and a globalized present, and by including both material and discursive interrelationships between collections and colonial power structures, provenance research also allows us to question past and present practices in ethnographic museums, and the principles upon which these are based, thus exposing the institutions' colonial entanglements.

In general, research into the acquisition contexts of collections and objects should be approached by using multiple perspectives, which take into account the divergent (post) colonial experiences of the societies involved, and call into question Eurocentric perspectives on colonial history and colonialism. Especially for further research aiming at an in-depth contextualization of objects and collections, collaborations with institutions and representatives of those countries, regions, and societies from which objects were taken to Europe are of central importance in this process (Förster 2016a, 2016b). In doing so, museums have the opportunity to undertake a comprehensive critical evaluation of their own colonial entanglements and their continuing impact. For this, the creation of collection profiles provides an important first basis.

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Notes

- 1 The final report on the provenance research that was carried out in the project is accessible on the museum's website: Gesa Grimme, *Provenienzforschung im Projekt Schwieriges Erbe: Zum Umgang mit kolonialzeitlichen Objekten in ethnologischen Museen* 2018. https://www.lindenmuseum.de/fileadmin/user_upload/images/fotogalerie/Presse_Veranstaltungskalender/SchwierigesErbe_Provenienzforschung_Abschlussbericht.pdf, accessed 20 February 2020. An English translation by Katharine A. Schmidt is forthcoming.
- 2 An extensive review of the debate is provided by the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) in Berlin: <http://www.carmah.berlin/media-review-on-museums/>, accessed 20 August 2019.
- 3 The project was funded by the Exploration Fund of Platform IV of the Excellence Initiative of the University of Tübingen. Applicants were Prof Dr Gabriele Alex (University of Tübingen, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology), Prof Dr Thomas Thiemeyer (University of Tübingen, Institute of Historical and Cultural Anthropology), and Prof Dr Inés de Castro (Linden Museum Stuttgart).
- 4 Linden Museum Stuttgart (2015) 'Schwieriges Erbe: Zum museologischen und wissenschaftlichen Umgang mit kolonialzeitlichen Objekten in ethnologischen Museen', research proposal: 5.
- 5 According to the museum database *lmdas*, the Linden Museum's collections include nearly 173,000 objects, of which about 91,000 were incorporated into its holdings before 1920 (Query to *lmdas*, 08 June 2018).
- 6 The Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) encompasses several cultural institutions, including museums, archives, libraries and research centres, in Berlin. The foundation is also heavily involved in the planning of the Humboldt Forum where collections from the Ethnological Museum Berlin and the Museum for Asian Art will be shown.
- 7 United Nations, *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 11 (2)*, 6 2007. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf, accessed 10 February 2020.
- 8 Section VI 'Museums work In close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve', International Council of Museums Code of Ethics 2017. <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>, accessed 10 February 2020.
- 9 In 1998, the *Washington Principles*, a set of recommendations for dealing with cultural property that had been confiscated by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945, were adopted. 44 states, including the Federal Republic of Germany, committed themselves to look for Nazi-confiscated art in their cultural institutions and to find 'fair and just solutions' with regard to its restitution. <https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Webs/DE/Stiftung/Grundlagen/Washingtoner-Prinzipien/Index.html>, accessed 10 February 2020.
- 10 Count Karl von Linden (1838-1910), an attorney and former head chamberlain at the Württemberg royal court, was the driving force behind the creation of the collection of the 'Württembergischen Verein für Handelsgeographie'. In 1889, following his retirement, he assumed the chairmanship of the association, which had been established in 1882. After his death in 1910, the museum was named Linden Museum in his honour (Kußmaul 1975: 18-28).

- ¹¹ Since the 100th anniversary of its beginning in 2004, the Namibian government, representatives of the Herero and Nama and activist groups in Germany have pressed constantly for the recognition of the war against the Herero and Nama as genocide (Conrad 2016: 121-2). In 2015, the German government officially used the term for the first time and, since then, has been negotiating the terms of an apology with Namibia. These negotiations, however, do not include representatives of the Herero and Nama. They filed a lawsuit against Germany demanding reparations in New York in 2017, which was dismissed in 2019 (K. S. Todzi, 'Presseschau: Anerkennung des Genozids an den Herero und Nama', Forschungsstelle Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe/Hamburg und die frühe Globalisierung' 2015. <https://www.kolonialismus.uni-hamburg.de/2015/07/20/presseschau-erkennung-des-genozids-an-den-herero-und-nama/>, accessed 20 August 2019; J. Zimmerer, 'Völkermord? Nicht zuständig', taz 24 January 2018. <https://taz.de/Klage-der-Herero-gegen-Deutschland/!5476165/2018>, accessed 20 August 2019; 'US-Gericht weist Klage zu deutschen Kolonialverbrechen ab,' Süddeutsche Zeitung 7 March 2019. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/herero-nama-namibia-deutschland-voelkermord-1.4359508>, accessed 20 August 2019).
- ¹² Thus, for example, in Sebastian Conrad's overview on German colonial history, the Pacific colonies of the German Empire, 'German New Guinea' and the 'German Samoa Islands', are presented on one page, with the development of New Guinea being summarized in two short sentences (Conrad 2016: 32-3).
- ¹³ From 1885 on, the colony was under the administration of the 'Neuguinea-Kompanie', which concentrated in particular on the economic exploitation of the region. Since the company was not able to carry out its administrative obligations, the territory was placed under the authority of the German imperial administration in 1899 (Griffen *et al.* 1979: 34-45; regarding the colonial history of the region, see Firth 1983 and Hiery 2001).
- ¹⁴ The association, in English 'Württemberg Association for the Geography of Trade and the Promotion of German Interests Abroad', provided businesses in the region with information on new fields of activity, markets, and possible locations for subsidiaries outside of Europe. In 1884, the association began setting up a museum focusing on trade-related geography, in which natural and cultural products from these regions were to be displayed (Kußmaul 1975: 18-21).
- ¹⁵ Grimme, *Provenienzforschung im Projekt Schwieriges Erbe*.
- ¹⁶ Treusch von Buttler-Brandenfels took part in the war against the Nama and Herero as adjutant to Commander Ludwig von Erstorff. From the correspondence, it is also clear that he had already taken part in the war against the 'Boxer Movement' in China between 1900 and 1901. It was not possible to determine his first name during the project. (Linden Museum Stuttgart, correspondence file Buttler-Brandenfels).
- ¹⁷ Grimme, *Provenienzforschung im Projekt Schwieriges Erbe*.
- ¹⁸ Grimme, *Provenienzforschung im Projekt Schwieriges Erbe*.
- ¹⁹ Grimme, *Provenienzforschung im Projekt Schwieriges Erbe*.
- ²⁰ Hermann Bertram (1872-1914) was a first lieutenant in the 'Schutztruppe für Kamerun'. From 1905 to 1907, he took part in the 'Southern Expedition' of the German military stationed in Cameroon ('German Cameroon') and even led the expedition for a short time in July 1906 (Hoffmann 2007b: 69). The aim of the operation was to subjugate the population who had settled between the upper Njong and upper Dja, and, at the same time, to protect the interests of the trading companies newly established in the region (Hoffmann 2007a: 155-8).

- ²¹ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, object list for lot 0846.
- ²² Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, correspondence file Bertram, Bertram to von Linden, 7 February 1908.
- ²³ Johannes Müller (1855–1903) studied medicine from 1876 to 1880. In 1881, he was an assistant physician in the navy (probably stationed on the SMS *Habicht*). After 1894, he became a general practitioner in Neumünster (Wätzold 1910: 215). Through the intermediation of August Krämer, his collection consisting of 401 objects arrived at the museum in 1903 (Linden Museum Stuttgart, correspondence file Krämer).
- ²⁴ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, object list for lot 0574 (entries 1-6), in correspondence file Krämer.
- ²⁵ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, correspondence file Buttler-Brandfels, Buttler-Brandenfels to von Linden, 5 September 1907.
- ²⁶ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, object list for lot 0822, entry 3.
- ²⁷ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, object list for lot 0822, entry 8.
- ²⁸ Translated from the German original. Linden Museum Stuttgart, object list for lot 0822, entry 6.
- ²⁹ Linden Museum Stuttgart, correspondence file Buttler-Brandfels, von Linden to Buttler-Brandenfels.
- ³⁰ Examples are Nicolas Thomas's notion of *entangled objects* and Arjun Appadurai's *of the social life of things* (Thomas 1991; Appadurai 1988).

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Biography

After working at the Ethnological Museum Hamburg, Germany, for three years, **Gesa Grimme** was responsible for the provenance research in the project *Discomforting Heritage: Objects from Colonial Contexts in Ethnological Museums* at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart from October 2016 to March 2017. At the moment, she works as a freelance provenance researcher for various museums.