

**Practical Aspects of the Care of Human Remains in Ethnographic Collections. Using the „Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections“ by the German Museums Association**

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**Introduction**

The transfer of an anthropological and osteological collection from the Centre for Anatomy of the Charité Berlin to the Berlin Museum of Prehistory and Early History in 2011 – which included over 8,000 skeletons, skulls, and other materials – generated renewed media attention regarding human remains in German museums. Already in 2011, the repatriation of Namibian skulls from the Charité collection had triggered a large echo in the news. As a result of the mostly negative press in the years to follow, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation stated in a press release<sup>1</sup> that the Museum of Prehistory and Early History had taken the collection into custody to guarantee its preservation, because the Charité itself could not ensure the preventive conservation and a dignified accommodation. Furthermore, it was argued that this acquisition has to be seen as a temporary measure only, since dealing with human remains from a colonial context was a „matter of national responsibility“.

Resulting debates were exacerbated by the substantive discussions around the currently developing Humboldt Forum. Close to Berlin's Museum Island site, the non-European collections of the Ethnological Museum (likewise part of the Berlin National Museums) will be exhibited in the rebuilt Berlin Palace. Up until early 2016, when parts of the museum's permanent exhibition in Berlin Dahlem were closed, human remains from the South Seas had been on public display. Discussion on new ways to exhibit the ethnological collections also revolved around

<sup>1</sup>See, <https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/pressemitteilung/news/2014/03/21/zur-voruebergehenden-betreuung-der-ehemaligen-charite-sammlung-menschlicher-gebeine-im-museum-fuer-vor-und-fruehgeschichte-der-staatlichen-museen-zu-berlin-preussischer-kulturbesitz.html> (01.11.2016).

the presentation of human remains. An example is the exhibition series Humboldt Lab Dahlem – Probephühne 4, [Open] Secrets, displaying secret knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, fostered a thorough reappraisal of terms regarding their appropriate care.

Accordingly, the importance of addressing human remains in museum collections was pointed out by the recently published „position statement“<sup>3</sup> by the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. In this statement, which is fundamental for the Berlin National Museums, it is declared that human remains are an important part of the collections; they need to be preserved and treated with sensibility and the highest respect. The statement represents the attitude of the Foundation towards human remains. Even though partly based on the „Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections“ by the German Museums Association (Deutscher Museumsbund, DMB)<sup>4</sup>, there is also an emphasis on perceiving human remains as part of the Berlin collections instead of a matter of future repatriation efforts questioning their ownership. Associated museums in Berlin carefully discussed the on-going procedures and started to develop individual measures in order to improve the care of human remains in their collections. In light of the probability of future repatriation processes<sup>5</sup>, the development and implementation of respective protocols and procedures clearly needed to move forward.

These events also began to influence the practical consideration of collections within the Berlin Ethnological Museum: How should the

<sup>2</sup><http://www.humboldt-forum.de/en/humboldt-lab-dahlem/projects-probeuehnen/open-secrets/> (01.11.2016).

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/mediathek/schwerpunkte/provenienz\\_eigentum/rp/150326\\_Grundhaltung\\_Human-Remains\\_dt.pdf](https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/mediathek/schwerpunkte/provenienz_eigentum/rp/150326_Grundhaltung_Human-Remains_dt.pdf) (01.11.2016).

<sup>4</sup>Deutscher Museumsbund (DMB) / German Museums Association, Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections, [http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefte/dokumente/Leitfaeden\\_und\\_anderes/2013\\_Recommendations\\_for\\_the\\_Care\\_of\\_Human\\_Remains.pdf](http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefte/dokumente/Leitfaeden_und_anderes/2013_Recommendations_for_the_Care_of_Human_Remains.pdf) (01.11.2016).

<sup>5</sup>A comprehensive presentation of repatriation issues was deliberately excluded. Emphasis was instead given to introductory steps for the care of human remains, including accessibility of the collection and its preservation.

content of both the position statement and the DBM „recommendations“ be translated into action for everyday work with non-European collections – given the realities of storage conditions, conservation issues, and related ethical considerations?

In this paper we present the results of this ‘translation process’ based on a case study undertaken in the collection of the American Ethnology. They reflect on the experiences gained by applying the DMB „recommendations“ to the re-housing and preventive conservation measures carried out for human remains from South America, since this very specific case study offers important observations transferable to other cases of the collection.

Two chapters in the DMB „recommendations“ were particularly important for this course of action and thus formed the base for our engagement. Since preventive and active conservation is an important aspect of preservation, practical approaches to the care of human remains in museum collections were expected in chapter 4.2 „preserving“ (DMB 2013 p. 51-54). That chapter covers basic principles on inventory, documentation systems, storage, and access to the collection, and includes notes on loans, and advice on public relations. The other one was chapter 3.3 on the ethnological perspective by Claus Deimel and Markus Schindelbeck.

### **Conservation Issues Regarding Human Remains**

Adequate care of human remains in museum collections raises a number of complex questions which can best be addressed by forming an interdisciplinary working group with a broad range of expertise. Experts, such as anthropologists, archaeologists, medical historians, cultural and natural scientists, lawyers as well as ethicists should be involved to develop a decision making module for public institutions. On the other hand, the involvement of Indigenous communities – as for example established by the „United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples“<sup>6</sup> from 2007 stating that: „States shall

<sup>6</sup>General Assembly resolution 61/295, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (13 September 2007), available from <http://www.un.org/esa>

seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned“ – is vital for a diverse and multi-perspective discussion.

Taking this idea of diversity seriously and additionally considering the „recommendations“ authors remark on the importance of inter-disciplinarity (DMB 2013, p. 6), the question of why they not only missed the involvement of Indigenous communities, but also of conservators in chapter 4.2 (DMB 2013, p. 51-54) becomes all the more crucial. This lack of relevant expertise is captured in the „recommendations“, as the brief paragraph describing approaches for preservation and conservation is highly fragmented. The authors place great emphasis on basic documentation techniques, but disregard a necessary introduction to preventive conservation. The preventive conservation recommendations in regard to storage conditions appear in a desultory selection, which largely ignores the complexity of conservation issues and lacks both scientific references and specific examples and context to the given claims. For instance: „In order to prevent damage caused by acids, human remains should only be stored in wood-free boxes/containers.“ (DMB 2013, p. 52). There is no explanation to support this statement, although it would be useful for caretakers from different departments (e.g. conservation, collection management, curatorial staff) to understand why certain measures are needed and if these apply to all types of human remains in the same way. In this particular example, explanations about the emission of volatile organic compounds from wood (formic and acetic acids) and the usage of different age resistant and acid free packing materials for storage should have been included. Best practice examples regarding different materials (e.g. hair, bone, and skin) would contribute to a deeper understanding of occurring conservation issues. To name but one easily accessible source: the Canadian Conservation Institute provides, inter alia, guidelines and information on preventive conservation measures

/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\_en.pdf (01.11.2016).

and agents of deterioration.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, when discussing conservation approaches (DMB 2013, p. 52), human remains are equated with other collection items and ethical considerations regarding their conservation are omitted. For instance, discussions about the integrity of human remains, important in many religions and belief systems, should be a crucial part of any preservation approach. Also, discussions about different approaches in relation to the remains' origin (Indigenous, non-European, European) should introduce the reader to the complex debates surrounding any decision-making procedure. This would require at least questioning one's own moral standards by considering Indigenous views, if not consequently handing over sovereignty to affiliated Indigenous representatives. There is no one-fits-all answer, and approaches for the preservation and conservation of human remains should always include differentiated ethical considerations and be specific to the object and material in question.<sup>8</sup>

At some institutions, ethical measures for conservation treatments might only reflect a natural science perspective. However, even when using the newest methods, these standards are not necessarily adequate for the treatment of Indigenous and non-European human remains. No matter how well-meaning these conservation treatments are, all active measures might interfere with the integrity of the human remains. To give an example: At the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, all human remains are meant to be given back to the respective communities. They are stored separately and only a few staff members have access to that particular area. No active

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/resources-ressources/agentsofdeterioration-agentsdedeterioration/index-eng.aspx> (01.11.2016).

<sup>8</sup>The following sources provide an overview on necessary reconsideration regarding human remains: Miriam Clavir, *Preserving what is valued – Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*, Vancouver 2002; Lawrence Eugene Sullivan / Alison Edwards, *Stewards of the Sacred*. American Association of Museums, Washington, DC 2004; Robyn Sloggett, *Expanding the Conservation Canon – Assessing cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaborations in conservation*, in: *Studies in Conservation* 54 (2009), p. 170-183.

conservation treatments are carried out. This is crucial to understand the different approach within the Berlin case, because the SPK declared human remains as an important part of their collections. Therefore, caretakers will need to develop a conservation approach that serves this understanding – while addressing Indigenous concerns at the same time.

The „recommendations“ note that: „The descriptive documentation of human remains and associated research using other sources are, in principle, no cause for concern“ (DMB 2013, p. 52). Thereby neither the condition of the human remains documented was considered, nor were specific ideas from Indigenous cultures for handling (e.g., male handling only, community use only), documentation, and further research taken into account. Even basic descriptive documentations (e.g. condition reports) need a thorough inspection of the object to begin with, which can only be conducted by handling the remains. However, in some cases, handling is already limited by an advanced degradation state and thus accessibility for any documentation is limited. Recommendations therefore should include solutions for object handling in these cases and material-specific introductions to possible damages.

The „recommendations“ mention consultation processes when they state: „Since documentation of this kind (= virtual and media formats, e.g., X-rays, CT scans, MRI and 3D scanning) may raise concerns in a small number of peoples of origin, it should, where appropriate, be agreed with the appropriate representatives of those communities in advance“ (DMB 2013, p. 52). However, it is not only when choosing a documentation system that specific views of Indigenous representatives should be considered. And while the „recommendations“ state that societies of origin should be involved in the working process, they do not give specific advice on how this could be done or what measures will be taken in the future. Given that the „recommendations“ focus on *ethnological* museums and collections this is unfortunate, to say the least.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> „These recommendations are primarily intended for museums and universities

The „recommendations“ are an important development for the German-speaking museum community, as they are the only German document specifically addressing the preservation of human remains in ethnographic museum collections. Other publications usually focus on archaeological materials.<sup>10</sup> However, they fall short of their actual potential to provide practical guidelines. Contrary to their listed goal<sup>11</sup>, little attention is given to a thoughtful and solution-oriented process for the care, preservation, and conservation of human remains. The omission of conservators within the working group responsible for the „recommendations“ – together with the fact that the working group Conservation / Restoration of the German Museums Association was only founded in early 2015 (after the publication of the guidelines) – sadly illustrates that the expertise of conservators as museum professionals in Germany is often underutilized.

In the future, the „recommendations“ should be adapted to include conservation insights in all relevant sections. The following suggestions might be of assistance for such an improvement.

A description of preventive conservation measures on human remains could help different collections to get their working process started. A practical approach should begin with a general introduction and a definition of terms important to the understanding of proper

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in Germany with collections of human remains, irrespective of their geographical origin and age (both European and non-European), in particular for ethnological museums/collections...“ (DMB 2013, p. 9).

<sup>10</sup>The following publications are examples of more recent editions on the topic of archaeological human remains: Bigna Ludwig, *Mumien in Museen: Ethisch korrekter Umgang bei Konservierung/Restaurierung, Lagerung und Ausstellung*, Saarbrücken 2008; Vicki Cassman / Nancy Odegaard / Joseph Powell (eds.), *Human Remains. Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions*, Lanham 2007; Nicholas Márquez-Grant / Linda Fibiger (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation. An international guide to laws and practice in the excavation and treatment of archaeological human remains*, London 2011; Barra O'Donnabhain / María Cecilia Lozda (eds.), *Archaeological Human Remains. Global Perspectives*, Heidelberg 2014.

<sup>11</sup>„These recommendations are intended for the individuals directly responsible for collections and the funding bodies of the establishments concerned both as guidance for the day-to-day handling of human remains, including those originating from outside Europe, and to address questions relating to claims for return“ (DMB 2013 p. 6).

care and include both material *and* ethical concepts. It should then collect material specific case studies, which reflect the specific needs of human remains and also include Indigenous voices and cultural objections towards certain conservation approaches. The working group Conservation / Restoration of the DMB<sup>12</sup> explicitly addresses the introduction of ethical knowledge, especially to manuals and publications of the German Museums Association, as one of its future activities. Suffice to say, a rewriting of the chapter on preservation and conservation issues will be well received by the conservation community.

### **„The Shrunken Head Display Case“: A Practical Approach**

The „recommendation“'s chapter on the ethnological perspective is full of generalizations. By using terms like „worldwide“, „every culture“ or „all communities around the globe“ the authors in fact negate one of the most important ethnological principles, which is to understand world cultures as both diverse and distinct. Instead, they repeatedly give examples of ‘global’ phenomena without supporting their claims with any case studies (see DMB 2013, p. 26). A similarly vague manner of describing complex phenomena appears when the authors speak about an aestheticization of human remains in present days (DMB 2013, p. 27f.). By including the example of a diamond-studded skull, Deimel and Schindlbeck clearly refer to Damian Hirst's artwork „For the Love of God“, without addressing that the skull itself is made of platinum and incorporates human teeth. The connection between these elaborations and a practical approach for the care of human remains in museum collections is widely missing.

However, any culture-specific work with the remains can only take place if a basic protocol for a general background check, a basic documentation and preventive conservation measures is intact. Using a specific example, we will now elaborate how this could be achieved.

Since the storage rooms of the American Ethnology collection at the Berlin Ethnological Museum were conceived as an open storage

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<sup>12</sup>[http://www.museumsbund.de/de/fachgruppen\\_arbeitskreise/konservierung\\_restaurierung\\_ak/](http://www.museumsbund.de/de/fachgruppen_arbeitskreise/konservierung_restaurierung_ak/) (01.11.2016).

area for display, the objects in the cabinets are visible through glass panes. A prominently exposed historic display case housed shrunken heads and *Mundurucú* skulls. Due to its position opposite the main entrance (fig. 1), it always drew attention of researchers and visitors from guided tours. This made the exoticization of *Jívaro* speaking groups (*Shuar*, *Achuar*, *Aguaruna* and *Huambiza*), from which the shrunken heads originated, inevitable. Therefore, this display case was chosen as a suitable starting point to develop more ‘sensitive’ approaches for the care of human remains.



*Figure 1: Shrunken head display case in collections. As described above, the display case was positioned opposite to the collection's entrance – immediately visible for visitors entering, and also part of guided tours in collections. (All photographs/figures by Diana Gabler. The authors decided to avoid close up pictures of the display case and the shrunken heads in this publication. Photographs were made exclusively for internal documentation. Any use of documentation material of this project will be part of future discussions and consultations.)*

The main objective was to rehouse the shrunken heads and to reconsider their previously open presentation. This initiative started without any kind of caretaking protocol for human remains in place and thus also served as a guiding example through which experience could be gained and on which grounds an outline for further work on other human remains could be developed.

As a first step in reviewing the collection of shrunken heads, a basic recording and a material identification process were accomplished, the latter relevant as shrunken head forgeries for trade were also made from different animal skins. In this case the material differentiation was done by the authors, using the following characteristics: on heads of animal origin, nose, eyes and/or mouth are not closed and the seam holes are uniform. Additionally, hide from animal origin is covered with fur, even in shaved areas of the modeled face.

During these processes, the display case was covered up with Tyvek® (fig. 2) to prevent viewing.<sup>13</sup> Data recording then included the development of a more defined terminology for shrunken heads from the collection management system *MuseumPlus*. The previous terminology differentiated only between original shrunken heads and „false“ shrunken heads. A more defined terminology now differs between shrunken heads made from human skin, animal hide, or sloth heads). Shrunken heads within all three categories could have been made for trade and we cannot tell by visual inspection if they were used in a ritual context.

Preventive conservation measures included the removal of old wooden mounts on which most of the shrunken heads were presented. The previous conservation records stated former insect infestations on some of the skulls.

*Figure 2: Covered up case using Tyvek®, as part of first measures.*

<sup>13</sup>Tyvek® is a registered trademark for a spun bound, durable paper made from 100 percent high density fine white polyethylene fibers as continuous filaments bonded by heat and pressure with no binders or fillers. Manufacturer: Du Pont™, supplier: Deffner & Johann, <http://www.deffner-johann.de/tyvek-soft-pe-vlies-1622-41-g-m2-rolle-152-4-cm-x-50-m.html> (01.11.2016).



After the condition check, it was decided to use the in-house nitrogen chamber for preventive disinfestation, following the „Integrated Pest Management“ (IPM) protocol for moving objects. Archival boxes<sup>14</sup> from aging-resistant, acid-free card board were prepared for each individual item. Due to limited space, in some cases two individuals were packed in one box, but were separated with an *Ethafoam*® barrier. A mount prototype was developed in order to allow handling of the remains without touching them. Rare earth magnets<sup>15</sup> and paper tape<sup>16</sup> were used to model a customized mount, which can easily be removed from the box (fig. 3).

<sup>14</sup>Supplier: KLUG Conservation, <http://www.klug-conservation.com/Products/Boxes/Two-piece-boxes/KS-16> (01.11.2016).

<sup>15</sup>Strong high-quality neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets available in different sizes.

<sup>16</sup>The paper tape adhesive was made on the basis of potato starch. The tape was manufactured without the usage of softeners or plasticizers and is free of acidic substances, supplier: KLUG Conservation, <http://www.klug-conservation.com/Products/Glues-Tapes/Tape/Paper-tape> (01.11.2016).

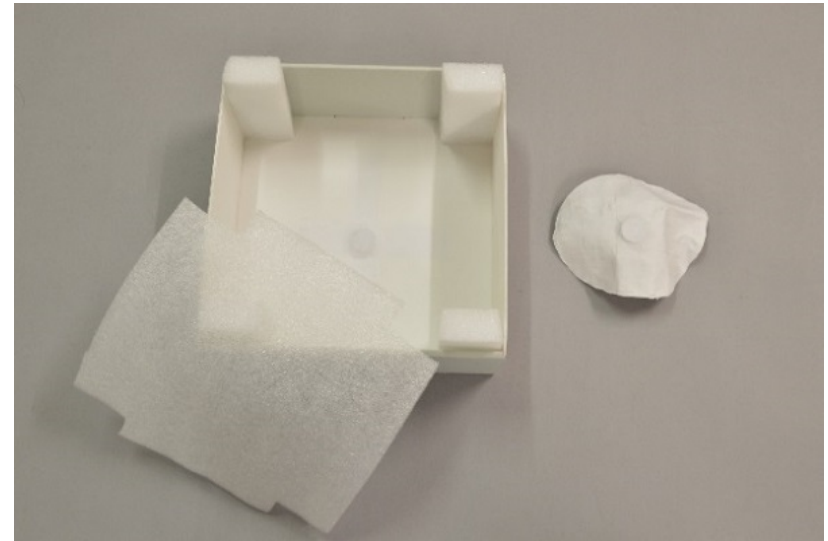


Figure 3: Prototype of mount system.

Finally, the relocation of the remains to a separate storage area was prepared. Due to limited space, a room next to the main collection area at the American Ethnology was chosen for this purpose. A separate cabinet unit was carefully labelled with the note that the cabinets should only be opened after instruction (fig. 4). In the future, such instruction will be offered by both curators and conservators of the collection. Telephone numbers of responsible staff members were added in case of questions or need of access. Two reasons can be given for regulating access: Employees need special instructions before handling and working with human remains, both from an ethical and from a conservator's viewpoint. Secondly, employees and in particular guests should be protected from any unprepared confrontation.

Figure 4: Label for cabinets.

Consultations with Indigenous representatives on human remains issues have hitherto not taken place at the Berlin Ethnological Museum. A lack of basic inventory measures, staff shortages and missing finan-



**Schrank / cabinet 169**  
**Schrank nur nach Unterweisung öffnen!**  
**Do not open cabinet until instruction is given!**

**Ansprechpartner / contact person:**  
**Tel. / phone:**

cial support are some of the main reasons for this. To name but one example, existing IT services and the collection management system in use, impede rather than help everyday work and should be complemented by up-to-date communication media. However, establishing the relevant infrastructure needs to be done on a national level and should not remain an institutional responsibility.

### **Practical Aspects for the Care of Human Remains**

Based on the experience of this project, basic steps were defined on how to develop a more systematic approach for the rest of the collection. They will provide the basis for customized protocols regarding the care of human remains in the collection of the American Ethnology. Considering that future protocols must include strategies for consultation processes with Indigenous representatives – which might lead to repatriation requests – the focus of the general steps presented below is first and foremost on the accessibility of the collection and its preser-

vation. While some of these might seem obvious at first, they are in fact elementary: without them, no further developments are possible. Before consensus-oriented research on human remains can take place, certain steps and protocols have to be created and implemented, and such steps should apply to human remains as well as to related sacred and ritual objects. Throughout every step it is strongly recommended to consult corresponding experts. In the practical implementation of any protocol, not only the curatorial staff involved, but also the conservators need to be consulted for all actions regarding preventive and active conservation measures.

### **1. Reviewing Collections**

Maintaining a complete inventory list of all objects, artefacts, and human remains in a museum's collection appears to be a rudimentary task. Yet it is still a major challenge, especially for museums with large collections containing hundreds of thousands of individual pieces. However, in order to develop a truly holistic concept for the care of human remains, it is essential to know the potential material within the collections. This includes material from different Indigenous groups known for their use of human remains and related materials from thus far unknown sources, which could be either of human or animal origin. In case materials have to be identified (e.g. animal origin versus human hair and bones), apart from conservators, anthropologists and material scientists – for example specialized in fibre analysis – might have to be consulted as well. Any uncertainties regarding the material should lead to a separation of the object from the main collection area until the origin can be clarified.

### **2. Recording the Collection**

Without going into too much detail – mentioned in the DMB „recommendations“ and exhaustively addressed in the DMB „Guidelines for the documentation of museum objects“<sup>17</sup> – a basic documenta-

<sup>17</sup>[http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefts/dokumente/Leitfaeden\\_und\\_anderes/LeitfadenDokumentation.pdf](http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefts/dokumente/Leitfaeden_und_anderes/LeitfadenDokumentation.pdf) (01.11.2016).

tion should be a standard procedure in every collection. In order to guarantee full access, the data capture of each human remain in a collection is useful, especially if a full inventory has preceded those recordings. Most importantly, a documentation of human remains should include the following basic information: location within collections, physical characteristics like dimensions, weights, materials, photo documentation, and condition reports.

However, specific views of respective representatives of originating societies need to be considered, since they do not (and will not) consistently align with general research standards at German institutions (e.g. chosen documentary techniques). Future research and consultations with Indigenous representatives should thus include discussions about the documentation system itself: How should human remains be recorded in the collection management system? How should access to the documentation and the human remains itself be regulated? For example limited access for certain staff members, departments, institutions and reduced information for other users (i.e. only short information but no details or images). Also, it should be kept in mind that during a repatriation process, the museum might be asked to hand over the documentation files because the respective community might not want the museum to keep specific records (such as images of the remains).

### **3. Conserving**

Preventive conservation is the mitigation of deterioration and damage by controlling environmental conditions and implementing policies for, inter alia, maintenance, handling, and integrated pest management, whereas the term active conservations measures refers to actual treatments on objects.

Active conservation treatments should only be carried out – if at all – as part of corresponding conservation consultations with respective Indigenous representatives. First of all, the focus should be on preventive conservation measures, including appropriate storage conditions, climate, light and implementing Integrated Pest Management. The

storage of individuals into single boxes represents an ‘ideal’ situation, considering a ‘European perspective’ of a ‘dignified’ storage, preventing the subjective appearance of a ‘mass grave’. For this purpose, individual unassigned remains should also be stored in separate units. Unfortunately, collections might struggle with low storage capacities and need to adapt their storage solutions.

### **4. Separating Human Remains from the Collection Area**

Categorizing human remains based on the state of processing is widespread and usually culminates in 1) unprocessed, 2) processed human remains and 3) objects to which human remains are attached. Human remains of all these categories should be separated from the main collection area to regulate access and to guarantee a purposive research on the material for further analysis and investigation. Accompanying dialogues with respective Indigenous representatives could, amongst other topics, revolve around an incorporation of human remains of the third category (e.g., processed human remains of unrecognizable individuals) into the main collection. This could be conceivable for spears tipped with human bones or clothing decorated with human hair.

In the past, consultations with Indigenous representatives have irregularly taken place at the Berlin Ethnological Museum, but not in a setting of equal responsibility and ownership. Establishing an infrastructure for this important part of the process should not remain an institutional responsibility but needs to be shared on a national level instead.

### **5. Provenance Research / Consultations with Active Conservation Measures**

After the aforementioned steps, background research including provenance research can begin. The future of the human remains should be agreed on consensually with Indigenous communities. This might also include discussions on active conservation treatments and their implications, if appropriate.



## Conclusions

The DMB „recommendations“ certainly lay the foundation for a more comprehensive decision making process on the care of human remains of international origin in Germany. Yet, while addressing human remains in museum collections, they do not describe practical aspects in sufficient detail. In particular when it comes to conservation issues and the inclusion of Indigenous voices, they lack structured step-by-step instructions and specific case studies, on which a basic practical approach could have (and should have) been developed.

For the purpose of a contemporary museology, general recommendations concerning the care for human remains and other material with cultural significance in museum collections certainly need to include basic documentation guidelines and an introduction to preventive conservation. Scientifically speaking, this also means considering human remains as a variety of organic materials with specific requirements. Case studies on conservation issues could, inter alia, introduce the reader to acid-induced damages on bone material, issues relating to rigidity of unprocessed skin, or handling instructions for fragile hair assemblies.

Elaborations on the care of human remains should also leave the attentive reader with an awareness of current ethical discussions related to *specific* Indigenous groups internationally. Long-term relationships with Indigenous communities associated to the respective collections built on mutual trust are necessary to discuss further proceedings. Museum professionals in Germany need to move forward by developing holistic concepts for the care of human remains. Experienced institutions could support the process and provide examples and protocols from previous cases, based on international standards.

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