

Statement of the Senate of the University of Göttingen of March 15, 2023, on the return of human remains from colonial appropriation

At the latest since the return of *iwi kupuna* or ancestors to a delegation from Hawai'i in February 2022, awareness has also grown at the University of Göttingen that the university has two collections of human remains, that among the bones contained therein many originate from colonial contexts, and that in Göttingen - as at many other universities and museums - claims for restitution from societies of origin will increase.

As part of the three-year project "Sensitive Provenances" (<https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/629688.html>) funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, an interdisciplinary team from history, anatomy, historical anthropology, and cultural anthropology, coordinated by the Centre for Collection Development, has begun processing and identifying the human remains in the Blumenbach Collection at the Centre for Anatomy and the collection in the department of Historical Anthropology since summer 2020. Together, the two Göttingen collections contain, in addition to many remains from Europe, remains of approximately 1,300 individuals from colonial contexts in Africa, Oceania, Asia, and the Americas.

In the „Key Points on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts by the Federal Minister of State for Culture and the Media, the Federal Foreign Office, the Ministers of Culture of the Länder, and the Central Municipal Associations“ of March 13, 2019, it is explicitly stated that "the general willingness to return collection items from colonial contexts, in particular human remains, to the states and societies of origin" is important "for the dialogue based on partnership and sincere understanding that we are striving for."¹

In accordance with these "key points" and the corresponding verbal commitment by University President Tolan during the restitution ceremony with Hawai'i, the Senate of the University of Göttingen underscores the responsibility of the Georg-August-University for coming to terms with colonial history and for productive, future-oriented contacts with postcolonial societies. We call upon the Presidential Board to maintain professional competence to fulfill pending and future restitution demands and to handle each of these in a speedy and dignified manner.

We thank the Sensitive Provenances project team for their work.

¹ The statement appeared in German under the title "Eckpunkte zum Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten der Staatsministerin des Bundes für Kultur und Medien, dem Auswärtigen Amt, der Kulturministerinnen und Kulturministerinnen der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände" and is available here: https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-03-25_Erste-Eckpunkte-Sammlungsgut-koloniale-Kontexte_final.pdf (checked April 21, 2023).