



International Conference  
March 27-28, 2025

# The Scientific Potential of Anthropological Collections

Current approaches and future perspectives

PETRI Berlin  
Kleine Gertraudenstraße 8  
10179 Berlin

Berlin Society of Anthropology,  
Ethnology and Prehistory (BGAEU)  
in cooperation with  
Berlin State Museums



The colonial heritage of European nations plays a major role in current discourse. The collection history of the BGAEU is largely linked to the colonial history of the German state, which is why the question arises on an ethical-historical level as to how it should be dealt with scientifically today and in the future. The first step is to clarify what cognitive value these collection items still have today. The starting point for an approach to this topic could be the research that has been carried out on these objects in recent years. What future research questions could emerge from this?

At the planned scientific meeting, we should first clarify the fundamental positions in dealing with human remains today and their position within the larger topic of a critical examination of the colonial legacy. To this end, we should endeavour to bring together the most important voices in the post-colonial discourse and representatives of collections with comparable objects. It would then be important to ask all those colleagues who have worked scientifically with human remains from more recent historical contexts in recent years to comment on this issue. This includes all anthropological university institutes and departments, as well as the various laboratories that deal with human DNA.

The discussion should be open-ended, also in the knowledge that a negative answer to the question of the usefulness of such a collection in today's world will inevitably confront us with the problem of how to deal with it in the future.



Thursday, March 27, 2025

**Berlin's colonial heritage in the current discourse**

- 10:00 Raiko Krauß, **Historically grown anthropological collections and post-colonial debate - challenge of our time**
- 10:20 Barbara Teßmann, **The anthropological collection of the BGAEU**
- 10:30 Decolonize Berlin, **The work of the Coordination Office and the city-wide concept for coming to terms with Berlin's colonial past**
- 11:00 Bernhard Heeb & Marius Kowalak, **One Individual, two Continents: Problems and Potentials of a historical anthropological Collection**

Coffee break

**Anthropological Collections and their Historical Background**

- 12:00 Jan Novacek, **Historically grown anthropological collections from archaeological contexts. Current possibilities and challenges, even without a context of injustice**
- 12:30 Irene Hochgraf-Cameron & Maureen Devlin, **Recovering Lost Contexts: Tracing the Forgotten Histories of Osteological Teaching Collections**
- 13:00 Ana Luísa Santos, **Identified osteological collections (19th-20th cent.) from the University of Coimbra: Contributions to the field and current challenges**

Lunch break

**Thursday, March 27, 2025**

- 14:30 Karin Wiltschke-Schrotta, Margit Berner & Doris Pany-Kucera, **Human remains in Natural History Museums, chances, challenges and perspectives**
- 15:00 Sandra Lösch, **The importance of identified skeletal collections. The Swiss perspective**
- 15:30 Oleksandra Kozak, **Ancient History of the Ukrainian Steppe and Forest in anthropological collections of the Institute of Archaeology in Kyiv**

Coffee break

**Human Remains in their Context**

- 16:30 Wanda Zinger, **Bio-Anthropological Data and Holistic Approach: Toward a Comprehensive Understanding of Oceanian Anthropological Collections**
- 17:00 Caroline Polet, **The potential of anthropological collections in reconstructing the way of life of ancient populations**
- 17:30 Csilla Líbor, **Significance of Investigating Post-Medieval Human Remains in Hungary**

BGAEU reception at the PETRI Berlin premises

**Friday, March 28, 2025**

- 10:00 Johannes Krause, **The potential and challenges to use anthropological collections for archaeogenetic studies**
- 10:30 Albert Zink, **The Bavarian State Collection of Anthropology - Challenges and opportunities of collecting, conserving and interdisciplinary research**
- 11:00 Martin Friess, **Of babies, baths and skulls - the future of anthropological collections**

Coffee break

### **Current Studies on Human Remains**

- 12:00 Andreas Winkelmann, **Human Remains are ambiguous and contested traces of past lives of deceased individuals as well as scientists**
- 12:30 Stefan Exner, **A Central European anatomical collection of the industrial age reflects changing environmental conditions and health status and enables new radiological diagnoses**
- 13:00 Roman Sokiranski, **Modern procedures for the digitization and visualization of historical human remains. Examples from Egyptology and Embryology**

Lunch break

**Friday, March 28, 2025**

14:30 Cosimo Posth, **The value of interdisciplinary investigations on ancestral remains from museum archives**

15:00 Ben Krause-Kyora, **The importance of well-curated collections as archives for biomolecules**

Coffee break

**Challenges and future prospects**

16:00 Tara Chapman & Patrick Semal, **Recommendations of the HOME (Human Remains Origin(s) Multidisciplinary Evaluation) project and future perspectives in Belgium**

16:30 Alexander Stößel, **The potential of bony labyrinth shape analysis for a better understanding of past global dispersal and the evolution of modern humans**

17:00 Ewa Dutkiewicz, **Anthropological collections, historical heritage and responsible handling for the future**

Convivial conclusion with small buffet



## **Affiliations of speakers and chairpersons of the sessions:**

- Gabriele Alex (BGAEU/University of Tübingen)
- Margit Berner (Natural History Museum, Vienna)
- Peter Bolz (BGAEU)
- Tara Chapman (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences & Free University of Brussels)
- Maureen Devlin (University of Michigan)
- Ewa Dutkiewicz (BGAEU/SPK – Berlin State Museums, Museum for Prehistory and Early History)
- Stefan Exner (Charité – Berlin University Medicine, Centrum für Anatomie, Institute of Cell Biology and Neurobiology)
- Martin Friess (National Museum of Natural History, Paris)
- Merel Fuchs (Decolonize Berlin)
- Bernhard Heeb (BGAEU/SPK – Berlin State Museums, Museum for Prehistory and Early History)
- Irene Hochgraf-Cameron (University of Michigan)
- Elke Kaiser (BGAEU/Free University of Berlin)
- Marius Kowalak (SPK – Berlin State Museums, Museum for Prehistory and Early History)
- Oleksandra Kozak (Institute of Archaeology National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kiev)
- Johannes Krause (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig)
- Ben Krause-Kyora (Institute of Clinical Molecular Biology, University of Kiel)
- Raiko Krauß (BGAEU/University of Tübingen)
- Doris Pany-Kucera (Natural History Museum, Vienna)
- Csilla Líbor (Hungarian National Museum, Budapest)
- Sandra Lösch (Institute of Forensic Medicine, University of Bern)
- Jan Novacek (Thuringian State Office for Monument Conservation and Archaeology, Weimar)

- Caroline Polet (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Brussels)
- Alexis von Poser (BGAEU/SPK – Berlin State Museums, Museum for Cultural Anthropology and Asian Art, Berlin)
- Cosimo Posth (Institute for Archaeological Sciences, University of Tübingen)
- Ana Luísa Santos (University of Coimbra)
- Patrick Semal (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences)
- Roman Sokiranski (Medical University Varna)
- Alexander Stößel (Jena University/MPI Leipzig)
- Barbara Teßmann (BGAEU/SPK – Berlin State Museums, Museum for Prehistory and Early History)
- Karin Wiltschke-Schrotta (Natural History Museum, Vienna)
- Andreas Winkelmann (Brandenburg Medical School, Neuruppin)
- Wanda Zinger (National Museum of Natural History, Paris)
- Albert Zink (Institute for Mummy Studies, Eurac Research, Bolzano)

## **PETRI Berlin. Discover Archaeology**

From 2007 to 2009 and again in 2015, the Petriplatz in Berlin's historic centre was the site of extensive excavations that contributed to our understanding of the city's origins. Next to traces of settlements dating from the founding of Berlin/Cölln and the remains of a Latin school's foundations, archaeologists also dug up remains of the Petrikerche (St. Peter's church), a church remodelled and rebuilt many times. The church was the nucleus of the city of Cölln. The mention of Symeon, the parish priest, in 1237 is considered the first confirmed reference to the twin cities of Berlin/Cölln.

The archaeological venue and visitors centre, PETRI Berlin. Discover Archaeology, was built on the foundations of the Latin school by a resolution from the City of Berlin to expand awareness of the capital's unique archaeological heritage and of Berlin's historical depth.

The restoration workshop of the Museum for Prehistory and Early History, as well as the museum's storage area, will also move to PETRI Berlin, making processes and work that were formerly conducted behind closed doors visible to the public in their authentic locations for the first time. The route through the space is rich in interdisciplinary discoveries that feature the individual steps of archaeological work, making them accessible in a new way – from the discovery of objects in the ground to restoration research, leading up to the exhibition of the findings.

During the excavation of the Petrikerche's former churchyard, 3.787 graves were dug up and analysed. They contained the remains of residents buried here from the beginning of the settlement until 1717. They have been returned to the original burial site in the adjacent ossuary on 29 June 2024 during a private ceremony on the lower level of PETRI Berlin. What was undertaken before the excavation began – a collective service involving representatives of the congregation and the excavation team – has now been concluded by returning the bones to their original place of rest.





