



Berlin, 7. February 2022

PRESS RELEASE

SPK returns ancestral remains from Hawai'i

On February 11, 2021, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) will hand over 32 ancestral remains to a representative of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). The ancestral remains have been in the keeping of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin since 2011.

At the end of 2021, the SPK Board of Trustees decided that ancestral remains from the collection of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Museum of Prehistory and Early History) and funerary items currently in the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) should be returned to Hawai'i. Now, as the first step, the ancestral remains, known as *iwi kūpuna*, are being repatriated.

Edward Halealoha Ayau, the OHA representative who will receive the ancestral remains at a ceremony in Berlin, remarked: "We acknowledge the anguish experienced by our ancestors, and take responsibility for their well-being (and thereby our own), by transporting them home for reburial. In doing this important work, we also acknowledge and celebrate our respective humanity--- Germans and Hawaiians --- together in aloha, as we write a new chapter in our historic relationship as human beings. We wish to thank all those who helped including the Consular of Cultural Affairs David Mees of the U.S. Embassy Berlin and Dr Robert Peters of the German Federal Foreign Office."

Hermann Parzinger, the President of the SPK, stated: "I am happy that these *iwi kūpuna* are now returning to their place of origin and can be buried there. I would like to thank the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and their representative Mr. Ayau, for their positive and professional work with us on identification and return. At its meeting on December 2, 2021, the SPK Foundation Board approved my proposal for repatriation. We are currently systematically examining the entire Luschan collection, which was taken over from the Charité in 2011, with a view to making possible the repatriation of further remains to other communities. I am pleased that we have already achieved this goal with regard to Hawai'i and have found a good solution."

Claudia Roth, Ministry of State, said: "Human remains from colonial contexts have no place in our museums and universities; their return must be

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a priority. I am therefore very pleased that, in addition to the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), other German museums and universities are returning *iwi kūpuna* to Hawaii. Colonial history has left many wounds. We must do our part to help close these wounds - through restitution, through a consistent examination of our colonial past, and through greater international cultural exchange. We need a decolonizing of our thinking in all areas."

The ancestral remains from Hawai'i are part of the anthropological collections that SPK took over from the Charité in 2011 and whose provenance it is researching step by step. The bones were acquired by the collector and naturalist Hermann Otto Finsch (1839–1917) around 1880, during his first voyage to the South Pacific (1879–1882), and sent to Berlin, where they became part of the Luschan collection. Most of them are probably several hundred years old. They have been traced to a site called Waimānalo on the island of O'ahu, where Finsch collected them on the beach. This is thought to have been an old burial site even at that time, where the bones had been partly exposed by the wind and the sea. Two further skulls come from a place that can no longer be identified exactly, but they are definitely from Hawaii. The SPK and OHA have held discussions about the repatriation of the ancestral remains since the end of 2017. The United States government supports OHA's request. The SPK has stated that it will return human remains from colonial contexts that it has in its custody if the relevant states and societies of origin are known and desire repatriation. These requirements have been satisfied for the *iwi kūpuna*, which are now due to be returned.

The circumstances of acquisition also spoke in favor of repatriating the funerary items kept by the Ethnologisches Museum, which the SPK has also decided to return. They come from the collection of Eduard Arning, according to whom they were removed from burial caves in Hawai'i around 1885. In his diary, Arning records that he entered the caves secretly, taking special care to avoid being seen by Hawaiians, who would evidently have disapproved of his actions. These funerary items, too, shall be returned to Hawai'i in the course of 2022.



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Researching the anthropological collection in the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte

In 2011, the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) took over the old anthropological collections from the Charité. These comprise around 7,700 human remains, from almost every part of the world, and were assembled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. About 40% of them were acquired in colonial contexts, in what were then German overseas territories in Africa and the Pacific region.

From 2017 to 2019, the origins of around a thousand ancestral skulls from the former colony of German East Africa were investigated in a pilot project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. Efforts are being made to return these mortal remains as soon as possible. A further 477 ancestral skulls, brought to Germany from West Africa during the colonial era, are the subject of a three-year research project that began in July 2021, which is funded from the German federal culture budget. The SPK's objective is to research the exact origin of all the ancestral remains in its keeping step by step, in order that they can be returned.

Repatriations

The first return of ancestral remains from the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin took place in 2020. This concerned two *toi moko* (mummified and tattooed Māori heads) in the keeping of the Ethnologisches Museum. They were presented to Te Arikirangi Mamaku, a representative of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, which the New Zealand government placed in charge of the repatriation of the mortal remains of Māori ancestors in 2003. In 2020, the SPK also decided to return the mortal remains of three people (likewise in the keeping of the Ethnologisches Museum) to Australia. Their repatriation has been delayed as a consequence of the pandemic.

General policy of the SPK on dealing with ancestral remains in its collections

<https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/priorities/provenance-research-and-issues-of-ownership/guidelines-for-the-treatment-of-human-remains.html>



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Participation in the return ceremony in Berlin

Due to space limitations, only few media representatives will be able to attend the *iwi kūpuna* return ceremony on Feb. 11, 2022, 5 p.m., Please also note that the event will be held under 2G+ conditions (vaccinated / recovered, with booster or test) and wearing an FFP2 mask is mandatory.

If you are interested in attending, please register at pressestelle@hv.spk-berlin.de by Feb. 9, 2022, 12 p.m. Participation is only possible if you have received a confirmation of accreditation from us.