



Berlin, April 11th, 2023

PRESS RELEASE

SPK returns human remains and funerary items to Hawai'i

Recently, the SPK handed over four iwi kūpuna (Hawaiian ancestral remains), as well as seven moepū (funerary items) to Hui Iwi Kuamo'o, a Native Hawaiian organization representing the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). The ancestral human remains had been in the custody of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte of the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin since 2011, while the funerary items had been part of the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum for about 135 years.

At the end of 2021, the SPK Foundation Board had decided to repatriate the human remains as well as the funerary items to Hawai'i. In a first step, human remains of 32 iwi kūpuna were restituted on February 11th, 2022 to Hui Iwi Kuamo'o whose members travelled to Berlin to escort the ancestors home for reburial. Following a private ceremony, a solemn public handover ceremony was conducted at the museum. In a second transfer, additional human remains and the funerary items, including a spear, two calabashes and a stone slice, will now follow from the holdings of Ethnologisches Museum.

Hermann Parzinger: "We are willing to return human remains from colonial contexts if the respective states and societies of origin are known and wish to have them returned. And of course, this also applies to funerary items if there is a context of injustice for them, such as clandestine removal. I am pleased that with the representatives of the OHA the cooperation for the restitution worked out so excellently."

"Today's repatriation effort is the result of many years of cooperative communication and coordination between Staatliche Museum of Berlin, Hui Iwi Kuamo'o and OHA. It is the embodiment of the power of laulima (working together)," said OHA Board Chair Carmen "Hulu" Lindsey.

Due to the inscriptions "Sandwich Islands" and "Hawaii", the three skulls and the skull calotte can be clearly assigned to the Pacific archipelago and can now be returned. However, despite thorough provenance research, the iwi kūpuna could not be assigned to a specific site or burial cave.

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In the case of the funerary items, which were part of the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum, the circumstances of the appropriation also justify the return. They originated from the collection of Eduard Arning and, according to his information, were taken from burial caves in Hawai'i around 1885. Arning reports in his documentation that he entered the caves secretly and specifically avoided being seen by Hawaiians, who would surely have disapproved of his actions.

Burial sites are specially protected places everywhere and at all times, and they hold great significance, especially for the relatives of the buried. With the clandestine removal of the objects from these burial contexts, there is a context of injustice that dictates that the objects be returned to Hawai'i.

“The world inches closer to a higher level of understanding when mutual humanity is respected resulting in the return of ancestral remains and their funerary possessions stolen in colonial times from their original places of interment,” said Edward Halealoha Ayau, Executive Director of Hui Iwi Kuamo'o. “Today, humanity prevails, thanks largely to the forward leadership of Prof. Parzinger and the SPK board.”

The return of the iwi kupuna and the grave goods from the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is a part of larger initiative of the Office of Hawaiian affairs to repatriate iwi kūpuna (ancestral remains) from collections internationally. Led by Halealoha Ayau of Hui Iwi Kuamo'o, two small teams are being deployed to retrieve 53 iwi and seven moepū on behalf of OHA.

Ayau, Ulu Cashman, Dane Maxwell and Kona Wong were designated to return the ancestors and moepū from two institutions in Berlin: Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie Ethnologie und Urgeschichte and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. While Mana Caceres, Kalehua Caceres, Starr Kalāhiki, Nicole Nāone and Kaipō Torco will bring home the iwi kūpuna from Stuttgart, Freiburg, and Bremen.

The community funded repatriations represent an opportunity to train the next generation of Native Hawaiians on the protocols involved in international repatriations.



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Upon their return from Europe, Hui Iwi Kuamo'o will work with cultural practitioners to return the iwi kūpuna and moepū to their final resting places after more than a century of being removed.

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Press Release on the restitution on February 11th, 2022:

https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/fileadmin/user_upload_SPK/documents/presse/pressemitteilungen/2022/220207_Human_Remains_Hawaii_ENG.pdf