

**Beyond the Metropolis. Provincial Museums, Collections and Sociabilities between Europe, Africa and the Americas during the Long Nineteenth Century**

**Veranstalter:** Irina Podgorny, La Plata/Gotha; Nathalie Richard, Le Mans; Iris Schröder, Erfurt / Gotha

**Datum, Ort:** 13.02.2019–15.02.2019, Gotha

**Bericht von:** Stefanie Klamm, Berlin

The museum as a site of knowledge production and its history have received much attention in recent years. Nevertheless, the focus of research has often been centred on metropolitan collections accumulated by Western (European) colonial powers. This workshop, convened by Irina Podgorny (La Plata/Gotha), Nathalie Richard (Le Mans), and Iris Schröder (Erfurt/Gotha), aimed at a more complex picture by looking at less central cities and institutions. It was the second workshop of the research group „Museum Networks. People, Itineraries, and Collections“ originally initiated by Irina Podgorny. Whereas the first one held in Le Mans emphasised the objects of knowledge, the meeting in Gotha, centring on natural history collections, focused on the trajectories of people and objects circulating in European and Non-European „peripheries“ through different (collecting) practices.

In his evening lecture PIETRO CORSI (Oxford) elaborated on the question of so-called centres and peripheries by looking at Italian geological science and collections assembled during the nineteenth century. Although geology had a very strong scholarly tradition in Italy, there was no geological map of the whole country due to the absence of a unified state government. Whereas in the first half of the nineteenth century geology was the „queen of science“, it did not get much support later by the newly founded Italian state. Geologists working in the Italian „peripheries“ nevertheless had intense correspondence with their colleagues in metropolises like Paris, London, Edinburgh, or Vienna, although they often received little review for their scientific work.

The first session focused on practices of collecting and connecting between so-called peripheries in Europe, South Amer-

ica and Africa. IRINA PODGORNÝ's (La Plata/Gotha) talk centred around the French mining engineer and palaeontologist Auguste Bravard who kept a well-established network while collecting fossils in two „peripheries“: French Auvergne as well as the Argentinian Paraná basin and the Pampas. He built strong ties with different metropolitan institutions like the Musée d'histoire naturelle in Paris or the British Museum in London, where he sold the fossils to he had collected. The speaker stressed that collectors like Bravard had a weighty authority as local interpreters of nature; they knew the important scientific topics in the metropolis, and as collectors and experts, they knew how to set the price for the fossil trade as well.

Collectors like Bravard or Theodor von Heuglin, the second case study of the session, were knowledge brokers of crucial importance for the building of (metropolitan as well as provincial) collections and museums, as IRIS SCHRÖDER (Erfurt/Gotha) emphasised. Heuglin was a travelling entrepreneur and self-declared naturalist. Setting out from Gotha he went on an expedition to Abyssinia in the 1860s to collect and sell data (e.g. geographical information for maps of the Perthes publisher) as well as specimen, mainly birds, and, later on, stories and books on the ornithology of northeast Africa. In the speaker's opinion Heuglin was an emblematic type of persona for the nineteenth-century global world. Moreover, he was part of a group of travellers and collectors, making it an interactional constellation.

MIRUNA ACHIM (Mexico City) highlighted Alexander von Humboldt's network of local collectors and scholars in New Granada, Peru, and New Spain, which he had used for his book *Vues des cordillères et monuments des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* (1810) that combined antiquities and topographical features from various sites in the Americas. These people whom he met in the urban centres had gathered knowledge, visual documents, and artefacts of pre-conquest antiquities from sites Humboldt had not seen. The speaker also showed that by establishing a genuine comparative approach Humboldt brought together objects from a variety of places in the Americas and likewise estab-

---

lished comparisons to antiquities of other cultures (Etruria, China, Egypt) for a global history of civilisation. By this he helped not only to form a canon of pre-conquest antiquities but also to shape the constitution of future collections e.g. in the Louvre.

In the discussion following the three papers the persona of collectors like Bravard or Heuglin was debated again: Can we really call them amateurs? Or would it be more appropriate to talk about them as travelling natural history entrepreneurs? Or isn't it the demarcations, actively making boundaries, which would be most interesting: someone being considered an amateur in one field and a professional in another one?

The entangled practices of exchange between Europe and Latin America were in the centre of the third session. It started with STEFANIE GÄNGER's (Cologne) presentation on private collections formed in the Southern Andes in the second half of the nineteenth century, that were crucial for the constitution of significance of pre-Hispanic antiquities and their visibility. Although situated „on the margins“ politically and economically, several of them were exhibited in the most prominent places – at world's fairs or in principal ethnographic museums, which very often purchased complete collections as material basis of their holdings. Thus, the collections enhanced the knowledge and reputation of the Southern Andes and vice versa the reputation of these museums. Moreover, the collections were important gathering points and provided „intellectual and infrastructural ‘hubs’“ for scholars travelling from Europe and North America as well as for other collectors of the Andean creole elites, as the speaker emphasised.

SERGE REUBI (Paris) talked about different acts of exchange of artefacts across the Atlantic Ocean in the early twentieth century. François Machon, a Swiss medical doctor who had immigrated to South America, contacted the Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel to arrange the donation (and scenography) of his collections in exchange for the restitution of a stolen dalmatic from the Asuncion cathedral in Paraguay. Later on, he requested a Swiss protohistoric axe from the museum offering another collection of artefacts from eastern

Paraguay. Both exchanges showed, as the speaker highlighted, how objects were mobilised by various decontextualizations, circulations, and recontextualisations, which questioned the distinction between „centre“ and „periphery“.

In discussing the session's two papers two pivotal points were brought up: Firstly, by pointing to the emperor Maximilian I of Mexico, who reclaimed several Aztec objects in European collections, the question arose whether repatriation started as a European idea. Secondly, it was debated to what extent we could speak of a non-European way of collecting in Latin America.

The last session was dedicated to the sociability of travelling and collecting. BÉNÉDICTE PERCHERON (Rouen) offered an intriguing overview of the politics of donating to the Natural History Museum of Rouen in the course of the nineteenth century. The first substantial collections of natural history objects, collected during the Napoleonic mission to Australia, were given to the city of Rouen by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur in 1805 and 1806. However, as the speaker emphasised, a donation became often complicated due to a lack of proper facilities, storage, and care. After its foundation in 1828 the museum tried to systematically encourage the citizens to donate specimen by offering an inscription into a list of donors and, depending on the donations' importance, a plaque installed in the institution. Donors to the museum included a socially and professionally diverse group: Freemasons, merchants, military men, local aristocratic families, clergy coming back from missions, and the hunting bourgeoisies.

The final talk by NATHALIE RICHARD (Le Mans) questioned again the attribution of so-called peripheries and centres by focusing on a small collection of prehistoric and gallo-roman artefacts situated in Carnac, a village in Brittany. The Musée Miln, opened in 1882, was the result of the donation of a private collection, gathered from local sites by James Miln, a wealthy Scottish amateur archaeologist. The speaker showed how research in the visitor books, inventories, and other documents in the archive of the museum reveals that it attracted many prominent visitors and many with scientific interests. Thus, the mu-

seum also created opportunities for local actors to make their way in the new field of pre-historic archaeology and to create an income by the emerging tourist industry in Carnac.

The discussants continued to debate about two aspects of both talks: the diversity of collections and their audiences on the one hand and the social nature of donating, the giving and taking back, on the other hand.

In her wrap-up commentary SYBILLA NIKOLOW (Berlin) identified three important intersections regarding the papers of the workshop. The first one concerned chronology: if we would no longer look at the nineteenth century as an exclusively European century based on nation states – what would this mean in terms of chronology? Can one identify an „Eigenzeit“ of the province? The second one circled around the persona of the collector: Many collectors were trained in one specific practice but collected various objects and took on different interests. This would require a fresh look at who is defined as professional for what area and who is the amateur in relation to these changing distinctions. The speaker pointed out that there were very different actors in place and proposed to add the professional traveller or collector to the portfolio of professions. The third intersection, collecting practices, would add an epistemological dimension to the relation of centre and periphery. Field sciences like ethnology, botany, zoology, and geology gathered different disciplinary objects from the mixture of the field, which in turn had to be decontextualised from their locality and subsequently recontextualised in order to become epistemic objects. Transformation, as the speaker concluded, was the crucial factor: people and objects transformed through mobilisation.

The final discussion resumed these arguments by challenging again the use of the categories „center“ and „periphery“ in favor of a more entangled view of people and places. However, as was mentioned during the discussion, one also has to take into account that these could be analysed as actors' categories as well, like in the very centralized country of France. Moreover, in further debate one would have to consider that museums were mostly part of urban life (in the nineteenth century as the century of the cities), whereas

the site of collecting was very often the countryside.

The workshop has certainly made the landscape of nineteenth-century museums and collections appear much wider and more nuanced. By changing the perspective from the metropolis to the provinces and from the centre to the periphery, a different geography of knowledge production and circulation comes to the fore. Looking at places and people, which had not yet been put in the centre of analysis, also provided the major advantage of showing new entanglements and flows of data as well as formerly unknown global itineraries of humans and things.

#### Conference Overview:

Iris Schröder / Irina Podgorny / Nathalie Richard (Erfurt / Gotha): Welcome

Collections, Science and the Politics of Representation: The Gotha Case – A Guided Tour to Friedenstein Castle and its Collection (Ute Däberitz, Tom Hübner, Carsten Eckert, Anna Maria Hünnes)

Pietro Corsi (Oxford): Fossils and Reputations. Geological Collections and Collectors in 19th Century Italy

Guided Tour to the Perthes Collection (Sven Ballentin)

General Introduction

*Session 1: Provincial Museums and the Many Geographies of 19th Century Natural History and Anthropology*

Irina Podgorny (La Plata / Gotha): From Auvergne to the Pampas. Auguste Bravard and the Collection of Tertiary Fossil Mammals

Iris Schröder (Erfurt / Gotha): Collecting Birds, Making Maps: Theodor von Heuglin's itineraries between Adua, Gotha and Vienna and the Economies of Collecting Data and Natural History Specimen

Miruna Achim (Mexico City): Networking Latin American Antiquities: Humboldt and Enlightened Amateurs in New Spain

*Session 2: Collections, Practices of Exchange and the Politics of Attention*

Stefanie Gänger (Cologne): Collecting pre-

---

Hispanic Antiquities in the Southern Andes,  
c. 1850–1911

Serge Reubi (Paris): Of Guayaki Artefacts, a  
Dalmatic, and a La Tène Axe. François Ma-  
chon, his Son, and the Musée d' Ethnographie  
de Neuchâtel, 1920–1940

Guided Tour to Gotha Research Library  
(Thomas Runschke)

*Session 3: A World of Knowledge and Socia-  
bilities*

Bénédicte Percheron (Rouen): The Politics of  
Giving: Donors and the Natural History Mu-  
seum in 19th Century Rouen

Nathalie Richard (Le Mans): Visiting the Miln  
Museum of Carnac: Archaeological Collec-  
tions and Sociability in Rural France before  
1914

*Final Discussion*

Sybilla Nikolow (Berlin): Introductory State-  
ment

Tagungsbericht *Beyond the Metropolis. Pro-  
vincial Museums, Collections and Sociabili-  
ties between Europe, Africa and the Ame-  
ricas during the Long Nineteenth Century.*  
13.02.2019–15.02.2019, Gotha, in: H-Soz-Kult  
01.07.2019.