

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

*Stratégies de collecte et réseaux de collectionneurs
dans les colonies européennes*

Introduction

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In the colonies, Europeans with a broad range of educational and professional backgrounds were active as collectors and thus as suppliers of objects for museums in their home countries. They included, for example, scientists, missionaries, traders, colonial officials, but also military men such as members of the German Colonial Forces (*“Schutztruppen”*). These collectors were usually well connected with each other and thus already formed networks. Museum directors also established networks of their own with possible suppliers of objects in the colonies, which enabled them to obtain the objects they coveted. Because of this multidimensional interconnectedness of collectors, collections and museums, the study of these networks of object accumulation and distribution is important across institutions.

Military personnel, as well as other types of collectors such as merchants, maintained extensive networks in various colonies where they obtained ethnographic objects as “by-products” – or such was the pretext – of their business activities and passed them on to (museum) collections. The situation was similar regarding churches and societies whose networks consisted of missionaries. Additional networks connected museums in Germany with Germans living overseas. These emigrants, in turn, were in touch with each other and supplied the museums of their native cities with ethnographic objects.

In some cases, objects of individual collectors are found scattered between various collections. In Germany this is due, among other things, to the role played by the former Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin. All objects coming from ventures funded by the former German Empire had to be offered to this museum first. These so-called “doublets” were subsequently sold or given as gifts or in exchange for other objects to museums and other institutions all over the Empire.

Other central factors in provenance research on collections from colonial contexts are the collection strategies and circumstances under which objects were obtained by the networked collectors. This is where colonial contexts of violence (such as punitive expeditions) come into focus regarding the acquisition of objects, in addition to the possibilities of purchase, exchange, or gifts. Both dimensions – collectors’ networks and collecting strategies – are important starting points for provenance research on object holdings from colonial contexts and are therefore the focus of this chapter.

The following contributions address specific issues concerning collectors, their networks and connections, as well as the methods of acquisition they employed. These include analyses of circumstances of acquisition, including punitive expeditions in colonial-era Cameroon, research on colonial world trade networks in West Africa used specifically by German merchants, the network of Lutheran missionaries in Central Australia and their methods of accumulating and distributing objects, and collectors’ networks connecting museum directors and expatriates (as well as the latter’s specific networks with each other) and their collecting strategies.

