

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

The World in Showcases

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and the Growth of the Ethnographic Collection, 1844–1914

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Sabine Lang

Abstract

The *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum* Hildesheim is a museum whose collections cover several disciplines: Natural History, Egyptology, Art, Hildesheim city history and prehistory, and Ethnology. Many, but by no means all ethnographic objects were collected in colonial contexts. The contribution will present results of the PAESE subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*, whose focus was on collectors' networks and collecting strategies from the beginnings of the *Roemer-Museum* 1844/45 until World War I. While the museum's directors used their international networks to increase not only the ethnographic but also the natural history holdings, the focus of this contribution is on the impact of these networks on the growth of the ethnographic collection. Two basic types of networks can be distinguished: professional, personal, and political networks of the directors themselves; and a network connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city and sometimes also with each other.

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Le monde dans des vitrines. Les réseaux de collectionneurs du musée Roemer de Hildesheim et le développement de la collection ethnographique, 1844–1914 (Résumé)

Le musée Roemer et Pelizaeus de Hildesheim est un musée dont les collections englobent plusieurs disciplines: l'histoire naturelle, l'égyptologie, l'art, l'histoire et la préhistoire de la ville de Hildesheim et l'ethnologie. De nombreux objets ethnographiques, mais pas tous, ont été collectés dans des contextes coloniaux. L'article va présenter les résultats du sous-projet PAESE au musée Roemer et Pelizaeus, qui se concentre sur les réseaux de collectionneurs et les stratégies de collecte depuis les débuts du musée Roemer 1844/45 jusqu'à la Première Guerre mondiale. Alors que les directeurs de musées ont eu recours à leurs réseaux internationaux pour enrichir non seulement les collections ethnographiques mais aussi les collections d'histoire naturelle, cette contribution porte essentiellement sur les conséquences de ces réseaux sur le développement de la collection ethnographique. Nous pouvons distinguer deux types de réseaux: les réseaux professionnels, personnels et politiques des directeurs eux-mêmes; et un réseau reliant les expatriés nés à Hildesheim à leur ville natale et parfois aussi entre eux.

The Collections of the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim

In 1844 a Museum Society (*Museumsverein*) was founded by a group of Hildesheim citizens for the purpose of “sparking more interest in nature, fostering profound knowledge of the latter, disseminating knowledge of old and new art, yet without excluding other scholarly disciplines such as history, ethnography, the study of antiquities, numismatics, etc.”¹ Under the name of City Museum (*Städtisches Museum*), the museum opened in 1845, at first in two small exhibition rooms. As the collections increased, a secularised medieval church was bought to provide more exhibition space. In the mid-1880s it was complemented by a large neo-Gothic museum building. In 1894, after the death of museum co-founder Dr. Hermann Roemer (1816–1894), the museum was renamed *Roemer-Museum*. In 1911 the *Pelizaeus-Museum*, housed in a medieval orphanage, was bought and added to the complex of buildings. It served to exhibit Egyptian and other antiquities, most of them donated by the Cairo-based merchant Wilhelm Pelizaeus. Hence today's name of the twin museums: *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*.²

From its very beginnings, the *Roemer-Museum* has been laid out as a “Mehrpartenmuseum”, that is, a multidisciplinary museum whose collections cover Natural History with more than 200,000 specimens from zoology, geology, mineralogy, palaeontology, and botany; Art with a collection of paintings and sculptures, ca. 1,000 works; as well as a graphics collection comprising about 10,000 sheets of printed graphic works; City History with a collection of ca. 50,000 objects (including prehistory and archaeology); and, last but not least, Ethnology with about 12,000 objects. The Egyptology holdings of the *Pelizaeus-Museum* comprise more than 8,000 objects.³

When the City Museum opened in 1845, the ethnographic collection consisted of 28 ethnographic objects, including “weapons and tools from the Sandwich Islands” [Hawai’i] that had been given the museum as a gift by a certain Louis Fromm.⁴ Today, there are about 12,000 objects from all parts of the world, including:

- The German colonies, 1884–1914/18: Cameroon, Togo, “German East Africa”, “German Southwest Africa”, “German New Guinea” (the north-eastern part of what is today Papua New Guinea, Bismarck-Archipelago, parts of Micronesia), and Kiauchou (China).
- Collections predating the establishment of German colonial rule. These include, for example, objects collected in Oceania prior to 1879 on behalf of the Godeffroy trading company (Hamburg)⁵ and objects collected by expeditions to Africa funded by the German African Society (*Deutsche Afrikanische Gesellschaft*) of which Hermann Roemer was a member.
- Colonies of other colonial powers, such as Australia, the Dutch East Indies, India, British New Guinea, the Cape Colony, and Belgian Congo. For example, Hermann Muhlert (1816–1870), a native of Hildesheim, served in the Dutch Army as a military doctor in the Dutch East Indies (today: Indonesia) from 1840 until his retirement in 1862; when stationed on Sulawesi he compiled a collection of ethnographic objects which he presented to the *Roemer-Museum*.⁶
- Independent states, such as the United States of America, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and other nations in South America that had freed themselves from colonial rule in the early 19th (as in the case of Latin America) or late 18th century (as in the case of the U.S.A.). Examples include objects collected by Johan Adrian Jacobsen in Alaska in 1882/83 and by Karl von den Steinen in Brazil in 1887/1888.⁷

The PAESE Subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*

The focus of the PAESE subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum* (RPM), entitled “The Colonial Ethnological Collections in the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim: Reconstruction of Collection Biographies and Regional Networks”, was on networks from the founding of the *Roemer-Museum* in 1844/45 until World War I. These include the collectors’ networks of museum directors Hermann Roemer (1816–1894, director 1873–1894), Achilles Andreae (1859–1905, director 1894–1905), and Rudolf Hauthal (1854–1928, director 1905/06–1925) and the impact of these networks on the ethnographic collection, which grew significantly from the 1870s until World War I. The museum’s collecting strategy may best be summarised as “if we can get and afford it, let’s go for it”. This may seem random, but there was actually a system behind that strategy. In line with the museum founders’ vision of a “world museum”, the ethnographic collection was laid out as what might be called a “world collection”. That way, the Hildesheim Museum acquired objects from all parts of the world. In some cases they were bought from other museums, from collectors themselves, or from professional traders. In many others they were gifts. In the period between 1844 and 1914, the City Museum/*Roemer-Museum* received about 350 ethnographic gifts; most of these were presented by citizens of Hildesheim and were not large collections but consisted of one or a few objects.⁸

The role played by collectors born in Hildesheim is emphasised in a guide to the collections of the *Roemer-Museum* published in 1922: “The ethnographic collection, featuring beautiful exhibits of superb quality, is presented in showrooms 1–7. A large part of the objects were gifts by natives of Hildesheim, whose occupation or travels had taken them to countries overseas.”⁹

One of the primary goals of provenance research in the face of current debates on dealing with objects, particularly from colonial contexts, in ethnographic collections is the clarification of circumstances under which they were collected. Such clarification requires essential information, most importantly the name/identity of the collector. Other helpful information includes the place where the object was collected, and the time of collection, for example, in the context of “punitive expeditions”. While such provenance research was an essential part of the Hildesheim subproject, this contribution will focus on the collectors’ networks

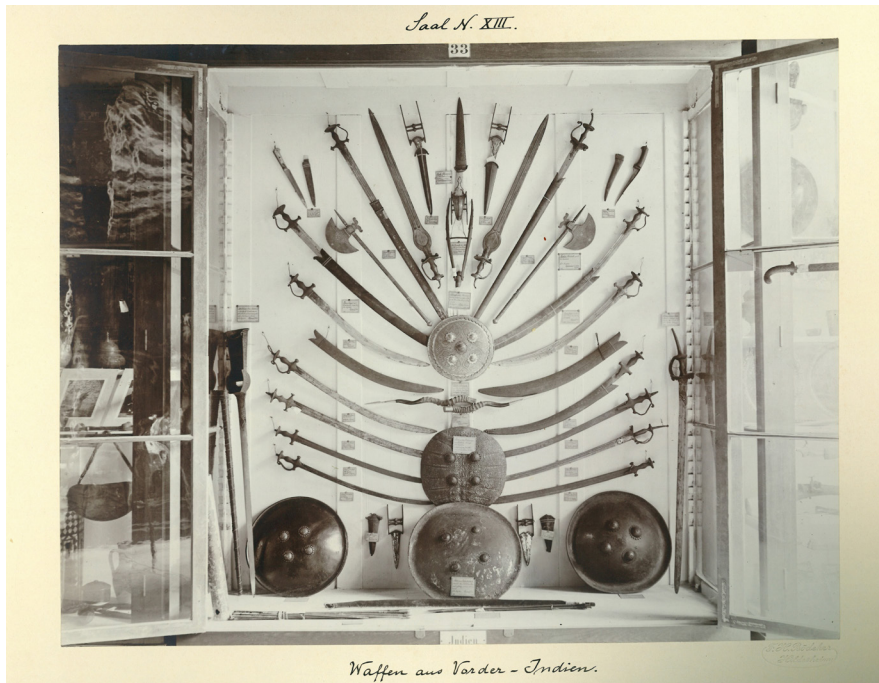


Figure 1 | The Carl Massolles collection of antique Indian weapons on display at the Roemer-Museum. Massolles was a native of Hildesheim. Photo by F. H. Boedeker, ca. 1903. © Hildesheim City Archives [Stadtarchiv Hildesheim] Best. 979-2, Nr. 3, p. 11

rather than on provenance in the sense of circumstances of acquisition. The various networks under research include dozens of collectors. The Hildesheim City Archives keep an abundance of documents relating to the ethnographic collection of the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*. In addition, comprehensive information on gifts and purchases is found in the *Annual Reports* of the Hildesheim Museum Society, 1845–1906. Two basic types of networks can be distinguished:

- Professional, personal, and political networks of the directors themselves. Hermann Roemer will be used as an example in this context.
- A network connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city: there were a considerable number of Hildesheim-born people who took up residence in foreign countries, where they collected ethnographic objects and natural history specimens and sent these to the Roemer-Museum. In some cases, there also existed small networks connecting such emigrants with each other.

The large number of collectors under study in the subproject at Hildesheim is both a challenge and a chance. Research on many collectors who lived in many parts of the world is time-consuming. On the other hand, it allows general statements on the possibilities and limitations of clarifying the circumstances of acquisition based not only on one collector or few collectors but on many collectors.

Networks Connecting Hildesheim to the World

Let us now turn to Hermann Roemer and his networks. Roemer was director of the Hildesheim City Museum from 1873 until 1894. In addition, he held influential positions in politics and in societies promoting the exploration of Africa. Particularly the latter could be used to the benefit of the ethnographic collection at the Hildesheim City Museum. From 1867 until 1890 Roemer was a member of the Reichstag (parliament) in Berlin.¹⁰ In Berlin he was acquainted with Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the director of the Royal Museum of Ethnology.

In the 1870s, Roemer became co-founder of the Berlin Society for the Exploration of Equatorial Africa (*Berliner Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des äquatorialen Afrika*) in 1873, a member of the German African Society (*Deutsche Afrikanische Gesellschaft*) founded in 1876, and a member of the successor organization African Society in Germany (*Afrikanische Gesellschaft in Deutschland*) founded in 1878.¹¹ These societies funded expeditions to Africa,¹² and thanks to Roemer's membership the Hildesheim Museum received objects collected on expeditions predating the establishment of German colonies: Richard Böhm (1854–1884, Central Africa, 1880), Eduard Robert Flegel (1852–1886, Niger region, 1880), and Johann Maria Hildebrandt (1847–1881, East Africa, 1875).¹³

Ludwig "Louis" Gottfried Dyes (1831–1903), a native of Hildesheim and cousin of Hermann Roemer's, became a key figure in Roemer's network due to his extensive business contacts. Dyes was Imperial and Royal Consul General of Austria in Bremen, and a merchant with business connections to various parts of the world such as the Cape, Transvaal, Mexico, Japan, and Burma.¹⁴ These he used for acquiring collections for the Hildesheim Museum, which he presented with objects collected by various people from

his network. Examples include ethnographic objects from Oceania (Otto Zembsch, 1841–1911,¹⁵ Otto von dem Busch, b. 1856), Namibia (Carl Höpfner, 1857–1900), and South Africa (Zulu, collector unknown). Like Roemer, Dyes was acquainted with Adolf Bastian,¹⁶ and he also had political contacts up to the highest levels.¹⁷ His business acquaintances included Adolf Lüderitz (1834–1886),¹⁸ which explains how Dyes obtained objects collected by Carl Höpfner on his expeditions in southern Africa in the early 1880s prior to the establishment of the German colony of “German Southwest Africa”. Due to their acquaintance with Bastian, either Dyes or Roemer may also have arranged the transfer of objects from the prestigious Jacobsen (Alaska) and von den Steinen (Brazil) collections, which came from the Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin to the Hildesheim City Museum in the 1880s.

Apart from these networks of Roemer and his successors, there existed networks connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city and sometimes also with each other. Many people who had settled down or travelled overseas remained faithful both to their native city and to its museum that they had known from childhood. They collected natural history specimens and ethnographic objects, which they gave or sold to the City Museum. Some of these collections were small while others might consist of hundreds of objects.

The network connecting Hildesheim-born collectors with the *Roemer-Museum* may be illustrated by some prominent cases. Ernst Ohlmer (1847–1927) was born in Betheln near Hildesheim. He went to sea as a young man, was cast up on the Chinese coast, and entered service with Maritime Customs in the Chinese Empire in 1868. He eventually became Maritime Customs Director and compiled an exquisite collection of Chinese porcelain for the *Roemer-Museum*.¹⁹

Another Hildesheim-born collector was merchant Ludwig August Stelling whose Amsterdam-based business had a branch in Sulawesi, from where he sent ethnographic objects and zoological specimens to the *Roemer-Museum*.²⁰ Mining engineer Albert Götting, in turn, moved from Hildesheim to Bolivia, then to Chile, and provided the museum with archaeological, mineralogical, and ethnographic objects.²¹ The merchant Conrad Machens compiled a large ethnographic collection in Fiji.²² Carl Massolles, the son of a Hildesheim plumber, established himself as a piano and organ builder in Belgaum, India, where he bought old weapons from local *rajahs* and *nawabs* and sold that collection to the *Roemer-Museum* in 1895.²³ Physician Dr Marheinecke had moved to St. Louis on the Mississippi River, where he gathered ancient Native American stone tools in his vineyard and sent them to Hildesheim in the late

1870s, together with a letter in which he expressed his homesickness for his beloved native city.²⁴ Early collections are represented by ethnographic objects acquired in Texas by Hermann Roemer's brother, Ferdinand, in the late 1840s,²⁵ and the abovementioned collection compiled by Hermann Muhlert in Sulawesi in the mid-1850s.

The importance of the ethnographic collections of the *Roemer-Museum* decreased during Hauthal's term as director. With regard to non-European cultures, he was mainly interested in Peruvian "antiquities", and he used his network in the Andes to compile an outstanding collection for the *Roemer-Museum*.²⁶ Hauthal believed that the "world museum" as designed by Hermann Roemer, Achilles Andreae, and Edgar Walden,²⁷ was outdated. He decided to make local history (*Heimatkunde*) the new focus of the museum: "The programmatic expression of this reorientation was the establishment of a 'patriotic collection', a hodgepodge consisting mainly of weapons and flags of the former Hannover army [...] and historical clothing from the region. [...] That way, Hauthal brought the formerly open-minded *Roemer-Museum* a provincial attitude that was to leave its imprint on the museum's further development."²⁸ Nevertheless there was still an influx of ethnographic objects. Until his death in World War I, Edgar Walden continued to provide the museum with doublets from the Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin where he was employed.²⁹ Hauthal himself occasionally acquired ethnographic objects or collections. And people continued to give objects to the *Roemer-Museum* whose renown still reached far beyond Hildesheim and Lower Saxony.

Conclusion

In order to get a full picture, and thus a deeper understanding, of the collecting strategies and practices of European museums, it is necessary to go beyond research on selected case examples. We need to find out what broader networks existed, how they were established, and how they worked. If we may generalise from the example of the Hildesheim City Museum/*Roemer-Museum*, we can assume that many if not most ethnographic objects were not given or sold by "big-name collectors" such as the more or less prominent members of the German Colonial Force who sent huge quantities not

only of ethnographic objects but also of natural history specimens from the German colonies to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin.

We can assume that museums outside the imperial capital received most of their ethnographic objects in the context of local and translocal networks such as those described in the present contribution. To be sure, Hermann Roemer used his political network (and the networks of Louis Dyes) to provide the museum with significant contributions by prominent figures such as Höpfner, Böhm, Flegel, Hildebrandt, and Zembsch. However, these objects make up only a small fraction of the ethnographic collection as a whole. A substantial number of objects and collections, some of them outstanding, came from citizens of Hildesheim or natives of Hildesheim living abroad, such as Stelling, Massolles, Ohlmer, Machens, and Muhlert.

Others were offered the museum by people living in other parts first of the German Confederation (1815–1866), then of the German Empire (1871–1918), due to the renown enjoyed by the City Museum/*Roemer-Museum* far beyond the boundaries of Hildesheim. These connections between the museum and collectors, spanning many parts of the globe like a spider's web with the *Roemer-Museum* at its centre, constitute another type of network. The collecting strategies and practices of the museum become apparent from the interplay between these formal and less formal networks made up of a multitude of diverse actors.

- 1 Quoted in Alpei, Cord (1998): "Der Hildesheimer Museumsverein 1844–1911", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 417–448, p. 423.
- 2 For outlines of the museum's history see Alpei, 1998), "Der Hildesheimer Museumsverein"; Boetzkes, Manfred (1998): "Welten in Vitrinen. 150 Jahre Roemer-Museum. Texte und Bilder einer Ausstellung", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 465–508.
- 3 Brief overviews of the collections at the RPM are provided on its homepage <http://www.rpmuseum.de/ueber-uns/sammlungen.html>, accessed 20 May 2023.
- 4 *Erster Jahres-Bericht über den Verein für Kunde der Natur und der Kunst im Fürstenthum Hildesheim und in der Stadt Goslar (1845)*, Hildesheim, p. 9.
- 5 On the Godeffroy trading company and its collecting activities see Scheps, Birgit (2005): *Das verkaufte Museum. Die Südsee-Unternehmungen des Handelshauses Joh. Ces. Godeffroy & Sohn, Hamburg, und die Sammlungen "Museum Godeffroy"*, Keltern-Weiler.
- 6 For a biographical sketch of Muhlert's see Lang, Sabine; Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur. Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 2017/18*, (Veröffentlichungen des Netzwerks Provenienzforschung in Niedersachsen, Vol. 2), Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.742>, accessed 10 May 2023, pp. 114–116.
- 7 The Jacobsen and von den Steinen objects at the Roemer-Museum are discussed in Lang and Nicklisch 2021, *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 80–97 and 98–109.
- 8 This becomes evident from the reports of the Museumsverein (*Verein für Kunde der Natur und der Kunst im Fürstenthum Hildesheim und in der Stadt Goslar*) that were published from 1845 until 1906. They list objects given to the museum.
- 9 Anonymous (1922): *Führer durch die Sammlungen des Roemer-Museums in Hildesheim*, Hildesheim, p. 6.
- 10 See Raffert, Joachim (1998): "Hermann Roemer als Parlamentarier. Hildesheims erster Abgeordneter im Deutschen Reichstag", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 203–242.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 12 On these expeditions funded by the "Afrikanische Gesellschaft" see Schnee, Heinrich (1920) (Ed.): *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, Vol. 2, Leipzig, pp. 21–22, on http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Bildprojekt/Lexikon/php/suche_db.php?suchname=Afrikanische_Gesellschaft_und_Afrikafonds, accessed 12 May 2023.
- 13 Objects are attributed to these collectors in the inventory books of the Roemer-Museum. In addition, Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 462, "Erwerbungen für die Afrika-Sammlung, 1882–1900", contains a list entitled "Doublets from the Flegel Collection" (1883) as well as a list "For Hildesheim: Doublets Afrikanische Gesellschaft, Afrikanische Expedition Dr. Böhm" (1883).
- 14 For these business connections see, for example, letters by Dyes to Roemer in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 408, "Schenkung von ethnographischen Gegenständen durch den Generalkonsul Louis Dyes aus Bremen, 1872–1899".
- 15 Dyes' acquaintance with Zemsch may have been due to the fact that both were consuls. At the time he collected the ethnographic objects, Zemsch was Consul of the German Empire in Samoa, cf. https://sammlung-digital.lindenmuseum.de/de/objekt/trinkschale_351, accessed 10 May 2023.
- 16 The role played by Dyes' business and diplomatic connections in the acquisition of ethnographic objects, as well as the acquaintance of both Dyes and Roemer with Bastian, become apparent from letters in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 408, "Schenkung von ethnographischen Gegenständen durch den Generalkonsul Louis Dyes aus Bremen, 1873–1899".

- 17 In April 1884 Dyes, together with businessmen Adolf Lüderitz and Adolf Woermann, had a conversation with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck about German colonial ambitions; see Zimmermann, Alfred (1914): *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonialpolitik*, Berlin, pp. 68–69.
- 18 Like Lüderitz, Dyes had business interests in Southern Africa. He imported raw wool from the Cape and Transvaal; cf. Anonymous: "Reicher Kaufmann verwirklicht sich prunkvollen Traum vom Sommersitz", in: *Hildesheimer Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 August 1994, no pag. We can assume that Dyes, like Lüderitz, expected to profit from the exploitation of resources in Southwest Africa.
- 19 For a biographical sketch see Schulz, Regine (2015): "Ernst Ohlmer und seine Sammlung. Von China nach Hildesheim", in: Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum (Ed.): *Drache, Phönix, Fledermaus. Meisterwerke chinesischer Kunst aus dem Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim* (exhibition catalogue), Hildesheim, pp. 22–29.
- 20 See documents in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 241, "Völkerkunde: Geschenke an die Völkerkundeabteilung, 1882–1929".
- 21 See Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741 Nr. 415, "Briefe von Albert Götting und Julio Braun aus Bolivien und Chile an das Roemer-Museum, 1895–1897".
- 22 Machens and his collection were the subject of a special exhibition at the City Museum (*Stadtmuseum*) Hildesheim, "Fidschi-Machens: Ein Hildesheimer in der Südsee" (3 October 2008–3 May 2009); see also Lütgert, Stephan A. (2009): *Conrad Machens – ein Kaufmannsleben zwischen Deutschland und Fidschi*, Husum.
- 23 Letters, lists and descriptions of objects, etc., are found in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 195, "Erwerbung der Waffensammlung des Piano- und Orgelbauers Carl Masolles für die Völkerkundesammlung, 1893–1895".
- 24 Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 419, "Erwerb von nordamerikanischen Steinwaffen von Herrn E. Marheineke aus den USA, einer südamerikanischen Sammlung von Alwine Wallis aus Detmold und einer Indianersammlung aus Bolivien und Paraguay von Siegfried Bauer aus Bonn, 1879–1888".
- 25 On Ferdinand Roemer's travels in Texas and his encounters with the local Native Americans – the Comanches – see Roemer, Ferdinand (1849): *Texas. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf deutsche Auswanderung und die physischen Verhältnisse des Landes*, Bonn. (English translation 1995: *Roemer's Texas 1845 to 1847. With Particular Reference to German Immigration and the Physical Appearance of the Country: Described Through Personal Observation*. Translated from the German by Oswald Mueller, Fort Worth, Texas.)
- 26 Boetzkes, 1998, *Welten in Vitrinen*, p. 480.
- 27 Edgar Walden, a cultural anthropologist, had been interim director of the Roemer-Museum in 1905/06. For his biography see Lang and Nicklisch (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 53–74.
- 28 Boetzkes, 1998, *Welten in Vitrinen*, p. 482.
- 29 Lang and Nicklisch, 2021, *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 61, 69.