

Welcome

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# Claudia Andratschke

Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony,  
Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover

Dear Readers,

On behalf of the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture and the Network for Provenance Research, I would also like to welcome you to this volume.

The Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony was initiated in 2014 with the aims of pooling existing forces and competencies in the field of provenance research, raising awareness for the questions, issues and challenges of provenance research and extending systematic research to all museums in Lower Saxony that are affected by it. Since then, the Network has grown from twenty to around seventy members and partners, including museum and university collections of all types as well as libraries, archives and several associations.<sup>1</sup>

This is due, at least in part, to the fact that we have transferred the model of the so-called “First Check for Provenance Research”, which had previously only been practiced in Brandenburg, to Lower Saxony in 2016. The “First Check” is aimed particularly at medium-sized and small museums that are not able to conduct provenance research themselves – mainly for financial or staff reasons.

The Museum of the City of Alfeld was and still is such an institution, and luckily it was one of the first museums in Lower Saxony that dared to participate in our project.<sup>2</sup> As a result, numerous objects suspected of being Nazi looted cultural goods were found there and in other collections.<sup>3</sup> In Alfeld, however, researcher Christian Riemenschneider found much more besides Nazi looted cultural goods, namely human remains, a huge ethnographic collection and natural history specimens.<sup>4</sup> This highlighted the need for a follow-up project to research the animal trade companies of Charles Reiche and of Hermann Ruhe, who both operated out of Alfeld. It is most likely that the largest part of the collections that are still preserved in the Alfeld museum today were brought there through the trade networks of Reiche and Ruhe. Although the two companies delivered animals and objects to many other institutions around the world, little is known about them – which will hopefully change soon.<sup>5</sup>

This is how the idea for the project *The Global Trade Networks of the Alfeld Animal Trading Companies Reiche und Ruhe – Provenance Research on the Circulation of Animals, Humans and Ethnographica in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* was developed. Since 2021, the project was led by the late Rebekka Habermas, Chair of Modern History at the Georg August University of Göttingen, and funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. Many thanks for their help, advice and support while drafting the proposal go to her and Richard Hölzl from the University of Göttingen as well as to Jan Hüsgen from the German Lost Art Foundation.<sup>6</sup> I also thank the director of the Alfeld Museum, Ina Gravenkamp, who has always been open to provenance research and has willingly opened up her museum and archive to all our research questions since 2016.

I further want to thank Gudrun Bucher, who has supported the project with her anthropological expertise in the further cataloguing of the ethnographic collection in Alfeld.

My very special thanks, however, go to the scientific project research assistant, Charlotte Hoes, for the trustful cooperation so far and the preparation of the conference as well as for her efforts in publishing this volume. She was further assisted by Sophia Annweiler, who has supported the project in many ways. Then, I would like to thank my colleague Annekathrin Krieger for supporting the coordination of the Network and the publishing of this volume.

Furthermore, the research results of the project will be connected to the infrastructures that were created with the PAESE joint project of the five largest ethnographic collections in Lower Saxony, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation from 2018 to 2022.<sup>7</sup> The Network for Provenance Research has continued the project's website and database, which will include the ethnographic collection and animal preparations of the Museum in Alfeld in the future.<sup>8</sup>

The conference and this volume demonstrate how small municipal museums may become part of an international project in cooperation with universities – only because they took part in a “First Check” that aimed to find Nazi looted art. Finally, the example of the Museum in Alfeld also shows how provenance research can lead not only to the reappraisal of the origin of objects and animals, but also to new encounters and collaborative cooperation. In this regard, the conference was an important milestone for the “Global Animal Trade” project, as it has broadened our perspective and embedded the animal trade in Lower Saxony, Alfeld, in international research. Finally, I want to thank all the authors for preparing their contributions for this volume and wish you all an inspiring read!



- 1 See <https://www.provenienzforschung-niedersachsen.de/>; Andratschke, Claudia; Schönfuß, Florian: "Interview mit Dr. Claudia Andratschke, Koordinatorin des Netzwerks Provenienzforschung in Niedersachsen", in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection*, vol. 1, p. 9–11, on: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2022.1.91507>, both accessed 29 September 2023.
- 2 The project was initiated by the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony and carried out by the Landscape Association in Southern Lower Saxony, see <https://landschaftsverband.org/museumsberatung/provenienzforschung/forschung-und-museen.html>; for the Municipal and Animal Museum in Alfeld, see *ibid.*, <https://landschaftsverband.org/museumsfoerderung/provenienzforschung/alfeld.html>; <https://www.alfeld.de/leben-lernen/stadtmuseum-tiermuseum/stadtmuseum>, all accessed 29 September 2023.
- 3 Riemenschneider, Christian (2017): *Provenienzforschung in fünf südniedersächsischen Museen. Ein Erst-Check auf unrechtmäßige Kulturgüter*, Duderstadt; Riemenschneider, Christian (2019): "Provenienz/Geschichte erzählen. Ergebnisse der Provenienzforschung in den Museen Alfeld, Duderstadt, Einbeck und Hann. Münden", in: Claudia Andratschke, Maik Jachens (Eds): *Nach dem Erstcheck. Provenienzforschung nachhaltig vermitteln*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net (Series of the Network for Provenance Research, vol. 1), p. 26–64, on: <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.696>, accessed 29 September 2023.
- 4 Riemenschneider, Christian (2019): "Ethnografica, Naturalia und human remains in stadthistorischen Museen Südniedersachsens. Bericht einer regionalen Bestandsaufnahme", in: Landscape Association of Brandenburg (Ed.): *Museumsblätter*, p. 80–83, on: <https://landschaftsverband.org/service/publikationen/publikationen-zur-provenienzforschung.html#ethnografica>, accessed 29 September 2023.
- 5 The application was developed by the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony, namely by the author in support of Lars Müller. See also Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2021): "'Menschen, Tiere und leblose Gegenstände'. Die Alfelder Tierhändler Reiche und Ruhe als Ausstatter von Völkerschauen", in: Lars Frühsorge, Sonja Riehn, Michael Schütte (Eds): *Völkerschau-Objekte*, Lübeck, p. 131–143.
- 6 For further information about the project, see <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/659291.html>, accessed 29 September 2023.
- 7 Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars; Lembke, Katja (2023) (Eds): *Provenance Research in Collections from Colonial Contexts. Principles, Approaches, Challenges* (Publications of the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony, vol. 6), on: <https://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/arthistoricum/catalog/book/1270>, accessed 14 February 2024.
- 8 See <https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/database/?lang=en>, accessed 29 September 2023; Andratschke, Claudia; Jachens, Maik (2022): "Transparenz durch Digitalisierung. Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten in Niedersachsen", in: *museums:zeit*, p. 19–20.

