



Introduction

Over the past thirty years considerable changes have occurred in attitudes towards the issue of repatriation and reburial. In many countries laws have been enacted to facilitate or compel the return of remains to claimant communities. These changes have also brought about new ways of working with human remains, not only when considering claims for return but also in the care of human remains more generally. These new approaches have meant a re-evaluation of working practices both for the curation of remains and in providing access to them. In the United Kingdom this has meant working within the legislative framework of the Human Tissue Act for National Museums and using the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Guidance for Human Remains document for all repositories holding remains. Similar changes have, for example, been seen in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. This volume will look at the issues and difficulties inherent in holding human remains with global origins and how diverse institutions and countries have tackled these issues. The volume has grown out of seminars, lectures and training courses I've given over the last twenty years. It is based on my own experiences of working with human remains in a wide variety of capacities from researcher and lecturer, to head of the Natural History Museum London's (NHM) Human Remains Unit. In the latter position I gained my experience of repatriation and all the issues and problems that this brings not only to museums but to the claimant communities too. Some chapters in the volume set the scene and help to give background information which can inform and enlighten the day-to-day practice of caring for human remains. Others are more practical and range from policy and procedures to provenancing human remains. The book is both how we as museum professionals and researchers got where we are both in the United Kingdom and in other parts of the Western tradition and a guide to both

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the main issues in human remains curation and the ethical and legal challenges involved. The volume is intended for those who are studying this area as part of their master's course, in both biological anthropology and disciplines such as museum studies, archaeology and anthropology, as well as those studying in disciplines in which museum practice or repatriation form a part. Museum professionals, such as curators and researchers with responsibilities in caring for human remains, particularly those beginning their career or with this responsibility as a new part of their job, may also find this volume useful. It may also be of value to indigenous communities or those advising them to gain an understanding of how museums outside their home country operate and the values and beliefs that may be prevalent in those countries. Many of the countries involved share a language but the worldview of both museum staff and the wider public may be very different to that in the claimant's home country.

The first chapter will give a historical background of why human remains are in museums in the first place and how they are currently used in research. The history of how and why remains came to be in museums is important in understanding the points of view of both the scientific and claimant communities. Many of the remains claimed for return were collected under conditions that today we would find abhorrent and unethical. It is important to understand this process, and that even when such remains seem legitimate in their acquisition in the past, those from former colonial countries have to be viewed through the unequal power dynamics at the time. Many researchers and even curators in the United Kingdom and other countries with museums that follow Western traditions have limited knowledge of the acquisition stories of the remains they care for or use in research. That knowledge can be shocking and change the perspective of the staff involved. This is most usually true for remains from outside the home country. In the United Kingdom, for example, this would mean remains from anywhere outside Europe; and in countries such as Australia, the United States and New Zealand, remains from elsewhere in the world even when these remains are from other indigenous communities. This information is often not included in the basic record of the remains or is outside the information passed from curator to curator. There is a belief from those outside museums, from researchers to indigenous communities, that the records within a museum are complete and fully accurate. The information is only as good as the original input; if anything is

missing, altered or misrepresented then errors will exist, often without the current curators being aware of this.

In Chapter 2 the importance of human remains to science will be discussed. The main areas of research which involve human remains today will be detailed and a brief history of how remains have been incorporated into osteological studies in the past will be considered. One important aspect of the research undertaken today with human remains is that it often has real-world applications. Rather than purely being driven by academic curiosity which in the past looked for similarities and differences in remains, today researchers try to answer specific scientific questions. These can range from a better understanding of how children grow and develop, the effects of disease on bones, how our activities can shape our skeleton and looking for disease vectors and parasites in the remains themselves. The chapter will also look at the many different techniques used to examine remains, ranging from the well-known traditional methods to newer, more high-tech techniques. The chapter will give examples of the real-world issues that museum collections of human remains have addressed. It will also highlight problems inherent in working with human remains and the changes in attitude to providing access for scientific research that have occurred in recent years.

The legal aspects of human remains will be addressed Chapter 3, the most significant being the legal changes in the major countries involved in repatriation requests, and for those in European countries including the United Kingdom who deal with international requests for return. It will also look at how countries such as the United States that have a legal framework for national returns deal with international requests, and how these processes differ from those internal repatriations. This chapter also examines the more general laws pertaining to human remains, from burial laws to laws dealing with very recent remains concerning donations of bodies to science and medicine, licensing of the display of recent human remains and methods of acquisition by museums of the recently dead.

Working with human remains raises a host of ethical issues. Chapter 4 explores whether there is a universal ethical approach to human remains or whether this idea is so general as to be little more than broad statements. This chapter also provides a more general introduction to ethics. It is essential to have a good understanding of what this discipline actually means if curators and researchers are to act in truly ethical ways. In the

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literature discussing human remains there are only a few examples where general ethical principles are addressed. Most gloss over this aspect as if its understanding is a given. It is not. Many people, involved in working with remains or not, have at best a sketchy understanding of ethics yet we as academics and museum professionals are expected to draw up ethical codes and statements which, if they are to be more than a box-ticking exercise, must be based on a firm understanding.

Modern best practice in caring for human remains will be explored in Chapter 5. This chapter will give the context of the various guidance documents produced in different countries. Whether the country in question has one rule for all remains or whether remains are treated differently depending on differing circumstances: for example, the age of the remains, broadly the recently dead or the ancient dead, the origin of the remains and the usage of the remains. The processes needed to consider in respect of curation for remains that are claimed for return will also be considered here.

In addition, the volume looks at whether it is possible to take account of other belief systems when caring for remains and how this might work. Chapter 6 will give examples of how this has been attempted and explore what taking account of other beliefs might mean in the future. This is important if collaborative research is to be undertaken with indigenous communities.

The history of the repatriation movements in the major claimant countries will be detailed in Chapter 7. The drivers for why communities began to ask for return of remains are discussed and similarities and differences between distinct communities examined. Some landmark repatriation claims will be examined in this context and the role of third parties and activists will be examined. Major cases of returns from former colonial powers will also be examined to see how these were originally dealt with and what lessons were learnt.

In Chapter 8 current views on repatriation will be discussed, and what type of events can lead to a change in perspective. A case study based on my experiences while working at the NHM will be detailed to show the evolution of such a change.

One aspect that most museums and claimants would agree on is that it is important that only remains associated with the claimant community are considered for return. This highlights the importance of proper

provenancing of remains, which is examined in Chapter 9. This chapter will look at the problems inherent in provenancing remains and how these problems may be overcome. It will also describe the approach taken in several major institutions in different countries to provenance and how a consensus view is beginning to emerge.

The issue of reburial versus keeping places is important, as keeping places allow for the possibility of future access to remains. These issues will be explored in Chapter 10. Many communities are now moving away from the view that they want to put remains beyond the reach of science and are beginning to understand how human remains can help both their own communities and the wider world. It also shows how the academic community has changed its views in general and is more able to respect the view of indigenous peoples when they want control of the remains.

Finally, Chapter 11 will look at collaboration between communities, museums, universities and other institutions. This collaboration is happening in many places and has roots in the beginnings of the repatriation movements. It is important that we move from indigenous people being the subject of a research project, exhibition or other activity to one in which they are full partners and in which their views hold equal weight with the others forming the team.

The book is not necessarily meant to be read in order but to be used as a beginning for understanding the issues surrounding human remains. Some parts may be better if read first. For example, to understand repatriation one needs to understand not only the current situation but also the history of how remains came to be in museums and other repositories. There is some repetition of information within the chapters and also references back to earlier and later chapters where relevant should the reader require more information. In addition each chapter has a set of questions which may help students to test their understanding, the answer to which will be found at the end of the book.

In this book I have used the term museum as a general catch-all for any institution which holds human remains. This is in keeping with Department of Culture Media and Sport in the United Kingdom (DCMS) Guidance on Human Remains which defines a museum as follows: the term refers to all museums any other institution permanently holding remains as collections.

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