

# Preface

Acknowledgements are a form of provenance: they record certain origins and influences. Sensitized by our own attention to provenance, we are acutely aware of the selective and often problematic nature of who and what is included and who and what is excluded, as well as the way that acknowledgements, like provenance, can act as markers of authenticity and quality. The cultural historian Jürgen Dinkel has analyzed how acknowledgements in academic texts have changed over time, the number and kinds of those thanked proliferating enormously since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> This, he says, is bound up with an expanded academic system in which marking distinction becomes increasingly difficult. It is, perhaps, also part of a wider cultural development that we see in the heritage field, among other places, in which more and more kinds of heritage and histories are seen as significant and worthy of recording and preserving.

Although we are aware of how contemporary acknowledgement practice tends to spread a wide net – to include things like the coffee that helped keep us going or to delve far back into individual biographies, to find the seeds in early childhood that awoke interests that we only realized decades later – we choose here to resist and just mention those who specifically deserve thanks for their direct influence on this book. We do, however, apologize to anybody we may have inadvertently missed and hope that they can feel included in our general thanks to all

[1] Jürgen Dinkel 'Dank sagen. Geschichte einer akademischen Kulturtechnik', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 19 (2022): 537–39.

of those who directly or indirectly contributed to this work. This book has taken several years, and we have had so much assistance and learned so much from so many along the way.

The book began as part of work undertaken within a project called Making Differences: Transforming Museums and Heritage in the Twenty-First Century, which was funded primarily by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. This funding, together with further resources from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU), the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, and the Natural History Museum, Berlin, also helped to establish the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH), at HU. In the years following that project and the founding of CARMAH, in 2015, the topic of provenance – linked with concerns of restitution and return, as well as the politics of collecting and display – was increasingly often part of public debate. Sometimes, provenance was seen as a solution, or at least part of a solution, to the challenges that museums were facing. At others, it was seen as part of the problem. We are grateful that we could conduct the work presented in this book in the context of CARMAH and the Institute for European Ethnology, in which it was located, and that we were able to profit from the insights of so many of our colleagues. Our work also benefited from CARMAH's wide network, which included researchers and professionals in Berlin and beyond. In particular, we wish to mention colleagues at the Humboldt Lab – the HU's exhibition space within the Humboldt Forum. Their cooperation was crucial for realizing the main instance of artistic provenance research presented in this book, as well as for helping us think through the issues raised. The Hermann von Helmholtz-Zentrum für Kulturtechnik, which manages the Humboldt Lab, has also been an enormous source of support.

We have had the opportunity to present our ongoing work to audiences of colleagues, students, and the wider public at a variety of events and locations, including the Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna; the University of Cape Town (curatorial programme); the University of the Arts, Berlin; the University of East Anglia ('Anthropological Perspectives on Global Challenges' conference); the German Lost Art Foundation; the University of Helsinki ('Voices and Practices in Research' conference); the Wereldmuseum Leiden ('Pressing Matters' conference); Musée du Quai Branly, Paris; the Museumsakademie Joanneum, Graz; the Open University of the Netherlands and Reinwardt Academy ('Taboo' conference), Amsterdam; the University of Oslo; the University of Oxford (School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography); and the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum ('Imperial Lives' conference), Cologne; as well as in various classes and talks at HU. The contributors to this

book were also, of course, vital to its realization and our thinking, and we thank them for their work and responsiveness.

Jakob Horstmann at transcript publishers deserves a big round of applause for being so enthusiastic about the book, as well as for his openness and flexibility. So, too, does Elisabeth Stern for invaluable input that went far beyond copy-editing. Working with Gila Kaplan and Avi Bohbot, the book's designers, has been an inspiring lesson in creativity and patience.

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The book was completed while we were both working at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg, Centre for Advanced Study, *inherit. heritage in transformation*, located at HU and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This was an ideal location in which to finalize the book, not least for the opportunities to discuss it with colleagues and fellows but also for considering it in relation to the centre's major agenda of promoting artistic research.

There is a convention that acknowledgements conclude with thanks to partners. We are happy to follow this here and to heartily thank Mike Beaney and Anna Szöke, who have lived with this work over these years and contributed to it, advertently and inadvertently, from their own areas of relevant expertise.

Sharon Macdonald and Tal Adler  
Berlin, January 2025

