

Re-telling the story of Selk'nam ancestors: from Karokynká/Tierra del Fuego to Austria

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Abstract

Museums are places characterised by collecting objects, displaying them for public education and also subjecting their collections to research. Yet knowledge can not only be created by using the collection for research. The history of a collection can also be reconstructed, albeit mostly in a fragmentary way. This is important when there is evidence that the collection was acquired in a colonial context, when the collection contains human remains and more so if these were taken from Indigenous peoples. Reconstructing the history of a collection can assist source communities in strengthening their identities and help to regain lost knowledge about their ancestors. This study analyses the provenance of fourteen crania and calvaria of the Selk'nam people from Tierra del Fuego, stored at the Department of Anthropology, Natural History Museum Vienna. Additionally, the significance of these results and their meaning for today's Selk'nam community Covadonga Ona will be contextualised within the framework of colonial history and museum systems.

Key words: Selk'nam, Selk'nam genocide, Tierra del Fuego, Martin Gusinde, Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, provenance

The osteological collection of the Natural History Museum, Vienna

The Department of Anthropology, Natural History Museum Vienna (DA-NHMW) curates and cares for one of the largest osteological collections in Europe.



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While the museum was officially opened in June 1889, the founding of its first collections can be dated thirty years earlier to the circumnavigation of the Austrian frigate *Novara* (1857–59). During this expedition, floral, faunal and other objects were extensively gathered for the museum's collections, which also included human remains.¹ The DA-NHMW continues to integrate human remains into its collection, although today exclusively from archaeological excavations from local Austrian contexts. However, this tradition of collecting human remains has led to more than 40,000 inventory numbers linked to human remains of international and national origin.² Of these, around 3,000 inventory numbers originate not from within Europe, specifically from Austria or the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, but from overseas, and were integrated into the collection between 1870 and 1935.³ Even though Austria formally never had colonies, there were clear colonial ambitions, desires, mindsets and actions.⁴ These inventory numbers with non-Austrian origin suggest a possible problematic background to their acquisition. As of today, requests for research about the origin and circumstances of acquisition (provenance research) from source communities in New Zealand and Hawai'i have led to advisory expert reports from the Department of Anthropology (DA) to the Austrian government that will eventually result in repatriation of these human remains to their countries of origin. At the DA, there have already been projects dealing with provenance research in the past, i.e. the department's sensitive collections originating from the Nazi era,⁵ and a project dealing with human remains from colonial contexts in 2009.⁶

In the case of the Selk'nam skeletal remains that are the focus of this article, there was active outreach to Selk'nam communities before the start of the provenance research reported here. This was the first time that such outreach occurred at DA-NHMW in the process of provenance research. The aim here is now to examine the origin of the Selk'nam human remains, how and why they came to Vienna, and to discuss the significance of these events and existence of the collection within the framework of colonial history and museum systems.

The racist origins of physical anthropology

Anthropologists have always been especially fascinated by the cranium. Craniometrics were the foundation for metric data collection. This is done using landmarks, clear standardised points on the cranium. The most popular system, using seventy-nine landmarks,⁷ was first published by Rudolf Martin (1864–1925) in 1914 and is still used in research today. German anatomist and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), considered to be the 'father' of physical anthropology, was the first to create a classification of humans into five subtypes and, as a result, ultimately created the first characterisation and hierarchisation that persisted within physical anthropology in the following two centuries. Although Blumenbach himself was against their ranking and comparison,⁸ his work resulted in categorising people into races. Consequently, it was researched not only whether humans could be classified, but also how much they diverged. During the nineteenth century, human diversity was studied under the assumption that the brain reflects the individual's cognitive and emotional abilities, seen in the

morphology of the cranium, especially the cranial vault.⁹ It was also believed that hunter-gatherer individuals, forced by harsh environmental conditions, were left little time to further develop cognitive abilities during their life. With this assumption, a so-called ‘intellectual dormancy’ was attested to various Indigenous people, including the Selk’nam, as a consequence of research results.¹⁰

The overall focus on crania left Czech anatomist Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943) frustrated that the focus on crania might have put other skeletal elements in the shade.¹¹ This ‘cranial craze’ is also directly reflected in the nature of the human remains stored at the DA-NHWM: in the first 200 years of its existence, mostly crania and calvaria (crania without mandible) were inventoried. Many of these are still kept in a corridor (*Schädelflur*) and a large hall (*Schädelsaal*) in which the individuals are arranged in ascending numerical order and according to when they were inventoried.

The collection backgrounds

The DA-NHWM houses a collection of twenty-five individuals from the region of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. This includes individuals of Selk’nam, Kawésqar and Yaghan as well as an individual with a possible Tehuelche heritage and one from Rapa Nui. In total, seventeen entries are associated with the Selk’nam people, and fourteen of these are of osteological nature (Table 1). The bioarchaeological analysis of the fourteen Selk’nam skeletal remains is provided by the authors in the same issue of this journal. Martin Gusinde and Robert Lehmann-Nitsche can

Table 1 Inventory numbers of all fourteen entries for individuals associated to be of Selk’nam heritage at the DA-NHWM, including non-osteological entries with Selk’nam heritage

<i>Inventory number: DA-NHWM</i>	<i>Inventory number: Other</i>	<i>Associated collector</i>	<i>Ethnic affiliation, by collector</i>	<i>Preservation status</i>
6035	GUS 6	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6036	GUS 11	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6037	GUS 7	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Calvarium
6038	GUS 9	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6039	GUS 10	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6040	GUS 4	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6041	GUS 8	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6042	GUS 5	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6043	GUS 15	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Calvarium
15357	L-N3	Robert Lehmann-Nitsche	Selk’nam	Cranium
15358	L-N2	Robert Lehmann-Nitsche	Selk’nam	Cranium
15359	L-N1	Robert Lehmann-Nitsche	Selk’nam	Cranium
15360	L-N4	Robert Lehmann-Nitsche	Selk’nam	Calvarium
21462	GUS 99	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cranium
6038a	No Data	Martin Gusinde	Selk’nam	Cast of cranium 6038
12420	No Data	No Data	Selk’nam	Bust based on 6037
21360	No Data	No Data	Selk’nam	Bust

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be seen as responsible for creating the collection. The first parts of the collection were integrated into the DA-NHWM in 1930.

Apart from crania and calvaria (skulls with and without the mandible present), the collection from Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego also contains postcranial elements, three casts, two busts and seven samples of pubic and scalp hair, the latter brought to Vienna by Gusinde from his expeditions.¹² The Austrian painter and sculptor Erna Engel-Baiersdorf (1889–1970) created one of the busts (Inv.-Nr. 12420) of what she thought to be the portrayal of a 'typical' Selk'nam. The reconstruction is based on the calvarium Inv.-Nr. 6037 and also on photographs selected by Gusinde.¹³ Another bust (Inv.-Nr. 21360) was constructed by the Austrian sculptor Fritz Fahrwickel (1896–?), where it is unclear if the same calvarium was used as a model. The German guidelines *Empfehlungen des deutschen Museumsbundes* on how to deal with sensitive collections in museums explicitly exclude casts from human remains in their definitions.¹⁴ Due to this, the non-osteological human remains are not included in the present study.

Martin Gusinde and Robert Lehmann-Nitsche

Two men are responsible for the creation of the collection at the DA-NHWM. The ethnographer Martin Gusinde (1886–1969) was born in Breslau, Germany and was a priest of the Catholic mission order Societas Verbi Divini (SVD) with close ties to St Gabriel, Austria.¹⁵ His vast ethnographic fieldwork observations and linguistic documentation of the Indigenous tribes from Tierra del Fuego were recognised as an outstanding and significant recording of their culture by the scientific community, directly leading to his acceptance into the Leopoldina, today's German National Academy of Sciences.¹⁶ The human remains that he brought to Vienna, and which are now curated at the DA-NHWM, are also still being incorporated into various bioarchaeological research projects.¹⁷

During his time at the mission house in St Gabriel, Gusinde acquired a wide range of expertise in various scientific fields. Apart from his philosophic and linguistic studies, he also took interest in medical matters,¹⁸ which greatly influenced him and prepared him for his later work in physical anthropology, where he would deal with 'racial questions'.¹⁹ He was assigned a position as a biology teacher at the Liceo Alemán in Santiago de Chile in 1913,²⁰ a German-teaching school for Chilean citizens located in a region where the influence of Germans, especially in the sciences, was exceptionally high.²¹ Parallel to his teaching position, he took up a position at the ethnographic-anthropological museum in Santiago under the German archaeologist and 'father of Peruvian archaeology', Max Uhle (1856–1944).²² During his four field trips to Tierra del Fuego between 1918 and 1924, which lasted 22 months in all, he came into contact with the Indigenous tribes of Tierra del Fuego.²³ He not only witnessed several initiation rites but lived among these tribes and occasionally also as a farm worker close to their settlements or with the missionaries. Significantly, he was also responsible for taking more than 1,000 ethnographic photographs during this time.²⁴ His research approach, acting as a participant-observer ('*teilnehmende Beobachtung*'), was unusual for the time and the reason why he gained the trust of several communities.²⁵ He also saw a

responsibility in collecting anthropological data, as ‘humans are composed of body and mind, and neither body nor mind can alone exist as humans’.²⁶ Therefore, he also collected skeletal remains from burial contexts and took a vast quantity of somatometric measurements from the living Indigenous population. He even took portrait photographs of some individuals.²⁷ In his research he was frequently afflicted by a fear of the extinction of the Selk’nam, Yaghan and Kawésqar, and the need to document every little detail possible.²⁸

During the Nazi period (1938–45) in Austria, Gusinde actively collaborated with Nazi authorities in research, even though he had previously distanced himself from racial ideologies.²⁹ The background to the publication of his third monograph – a summary of the anthropological records that he had gathered during his travels through Tierra del Fuego, written in collaboration with, among others, Viktor Lebzelter (DA-NHMMW) – clearly places Gusinde in a positive, opportunistic position vis-à-vis the Nazi regime.³⁰

Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (1872–1938) was a German doctor and anthropologist who became one of the pioneers of physical anthropology in Argentina.³¹ After obtaining his doctorate in anthropology and medicine,³² he moved to Argentina in July 1897 to become the head of the Department of Anthropology at the Museo de La Plata, Buenos Aires, on the recommendation of the anthropologist Rudolf Martin.³³ He became the first professor for physical anthropology in Argentina, returning to Germany after his retirement and becoming a professor at the University of Berlin until his death in 1938. In 1902, he undertook several expeditions to conduct fieldwork in Argentina, specifically in Isla Grande to make an intensive study of the Indigenous peoples in a multidisciplinary approach. The traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Indigenous communities was of particular interest to him.³⁴

Hunter-gatherer lifestyles were something in which both Lehmann-Nitsche and Gusinde took a particular interest.³⁵ *Ursprünglichkeit*, especially found in *Naturvölkern* (‘nature peoples’, e.g. communities living as traditional hunter-gatherers), who were opposite to the *Kulturvölker* (‘culture peoples’) of western-hemisphere countries. The role of ethnology and anthropology in the SVD’s past is clearly outlined as ‘communicating and contextualizing the Gospel; . . . carrying out the social mission of the Church; . . . training for the mission’ and offering a ‘key to . . . change’.³⁶ This shows that ethnology played a crucial role in the understanding how to successfully missionise for the SVD, and also shows the awareness of the consequences which this kind of fieldwork might have or also has had, as is discussed in other studies.³⁷ Before being sent out on mission, priests were intensively educated in ethnology, which in the early 1900s was taught using the *Kulturkreislehre*, of which Father Wilhelm Schmidt, SVD (1868–54), was the head of the so-called Viennese school.³⁸ *Kulturkreislehre*, or diffusionism, was an ethnographic concept established in the late nineteenth century that aimed to analyse the history and geographic spread of a culture by the diffusion of cultural traits, so-called *Kulturkreise* (‘culture circles’). The ‘others’ – locals, sometimes even Indigenous communities who had not had much contact with Europeans before – had to be ‘understood’ to be ‘successfully’ Christianised. This

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then very prominent concept in German-speaking ethnology was heavily influenced by political streams of this time, with the diffusionist concepts of *Lebensraum* and *Paideuma* also directly serving later as Nazi propaganda. It was directly rooted in the 'combination of general social attitudes and particular political ideologies' that 'greatly influenced their [the diffusionists'] scientific work and their scientific motivation'. Among diffusionist thinkers like Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), Wilhelm Schmidt's³⁹ approach to *Kulturkreislehre* would influence German ethnology into the late 1960s.⁴⁰

During his expeditions through Tierra del Fuego, Gusinde received support from political and military ranks as well as from private individuals. The title page of his extensive monograph on Tierra del Fuego refers to the 'Ministerio de Instrucción Pública' as a supporter of his work, meaning the Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, which was the Ministry of Justice at the time (today, Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos). At the beginning of Gusinde's first journey through Tierra del Fuego in 1914, there was already 'the decree ready, which gives me the commission ad honorem to study the indigenas chilenos as well as Chilean archaeology; I [Gusinde] would get free travel on every railroad and every steamer, could use the same at my own discretion'.⁴¹ The president of Chile at that time, Juan Luis Sanfuentes Andonaegui (1858–1939), was interested in what Gusinde called 'real apostolic work',⁴² which was also supported by the Salesian Order, present in Tierra del Fuego.⁴³ Gusinde's expeditions were financed and supported by private persons, mostly European families from Santiago, but also clerics like the archbishop of Santiago,⁴⁴ Crescente Errázuriz Valdivieso (1839–1931) and members of the Chilean government.⁴⁵

After his return to Europe, Gusinde tried to find publishers and financiers for his monographs about Tierra del Fuego. In 1938, he had planned to dedicate the third volume of his work to Hermann Göring (1893–1946), a popular and powerful political figure in Nazi Germany, but desisted after he failed to establish contact to him through an acquaintance.⁴⁶ Gusinde also took part in prisoner-of-war investigations in the Kaisersteinbruch and Wolfsberg camps in 1940 and 1942 conducted by the DA. Here, the main interest were 'racial' studies and the measurement of the inmates.⁴⁷ This was heavily criticised in the SVD. Based on this, the historian Peter Rohrbacher describes Gusinde and his role during the Nazi era as opportunist.⁴⁸ Gusinde was appointed a correspondent of the NHMW in 1950,⁴⁹ a status granted to dedicated friends and supporters of the museum. In Gusinde's case, it was for his work on the exhibition 'Die Menschheit – eine Familie', but also for his close connections to the DA-NHMW.⁵⁰

The Selk'nam: past and present

Home to the Selk'nam is Isla Grande in Tierra del Fuego, South America (Figure 1).⁵¹ Before the European colonisation, starting with Ferdinand Magellan's (1480–1521) arrival in Tierra del Fuego in 1520, this region was also home to the neighbouring Yaghan and Kawésqar tribes. All three tribes maintained a hunter-gatherer lifestyle; the Yaghan and Kawésqar were fisher-gatherers.



Figure 1 Map of Isla Grande by Martin Gusinde, showing the different Selk'nam tribes (harwen). The places from where the skeletal remains of individuals from the collection in the DA-NHMW originate are marked with black squares.

The Selk'nam genocide

When Isla Grande became increasingly occupied as farming land by European colonists in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was estimated that 4,000 Selk'nam still roamed the area.⁵² The territories where the communities survived were destroyed during the following years, and the Selk'nam had become almost 'extinct' by the beginning of the 1900s.⁵³

A brief gold rush starting after 1880 on the coast of Bahía San Felipe caused an influx of European colonists searching for gold in the region. Previously, the region had been unattended and colonists were indifferent to it. However, with this new surge of interest, the Selk'nam were shot as soon as they interfered with the Europeans' business. The consequences of these encounters were violent, brutal and with no legal prosecution.⁵⁴ A central figure of the gold rush was Julio Popper (1857–93), a Romanian immigrant who founded a kingdom-like settlement named Páramo and even issued his own currency. After the gold rush ended as suddenly as it had started, Popper took part in a second atrocity that resulted in the decimation of the Selk'nam. Popper, along with others such the Scotsman Alexander MacLennan (?–?) or the Englishman Sam Ishlop/Hyslop (?–?), was contracted by the farmers



Figure 2 Sculpture To the Selk'nam hunter, by Richard Yasic Israel, 1999. Porvenir, Chile.

who now lived on Isla Grande and paid by them for each kill.⁵⁵ The farmers, with their sheep and cattle, took over the land that was formerly home to the nomadic Selk'nam and did everything to get rid of them. Bloodhounds were imported from Europe, and strychnine-poisoned sheep carcasses, nick-named 'white guanacos', were left behind with the intention to poison the starving Selk'nam.⁵⁶ According to Gusinde, these violent and deadly confrontations were the main factor in the killing of the Indigenous tribes all over Tierra del Fuego, and not the diseases introduced by European colonists that the Selk'nams' immune systems were suddenly confronted with.⁵⁷ The few surviving individuals were relocated to mission houses for their 'own protection'.⁵⁸ In 1918, it was estimated that 800 Selk'nam were living in Isla Grande.⁵⁹

Today, the Selk'nam are living in local communities and are not, as is commonly represented in the media and scientific literature, extinct (Figures 2–4). In a census carried out in Chile in 2017, 1.2 per cent of the 95,989 individuals identified as 'other' Indigenous people were stated to be of Selk'nam descent, which relates to 1,152 individuals.⁶⁰ Currently, the Chilean Selk'nam, gathered in the Corporación Selk'nam Chile, are not recognised as an Indigenous tribe by the government, as opposed to the Yaghan and Kawésqar. The main argument of the government is that, despite the genocide committed against them, the Selk'nam never were/are not now extinct. The government now accuses past government officials, as well



Figure 3 Hema'ny Molina wearing traditional Selk'nam clothing as part of a celebration.

as scientists such as Anne Chapman (1922–2010) and Martin Gusinde, of labelling these people as ‘extinct’ and not looking for native input into their research, or, in Chapman’s case, not looking for descendants. This has forced the Selk’nam into adjusting to a westernised lifestyle.⁶¹ Today, Selk’nam culture is constantly threatened by impostors, cultural appropriation, commerce and distortion, as is the case for example for the Selk’nam spirits and their incorrect depiction and use by the general public.⁶² There is also idealism based on prejudices that compare today’s Selk’nam with stereotyped Selk’nam traits like height, looks and clothing from the past.

As result of the genocide, the Selk’nam were forced to let go of their language, their traditions and the claim to their homeland. Yet some survivors silently passed traditions on to their descendants, probably not even realising the richness of that



Figure 4 Hema'ny Molina receiving traditional Selk'nam face painting.

didn't know the person directly, everybody knew their stories and that they – like FO's grandmother – did not openly live as Selk'nam. Besides shame, being Indigenous in Chile was dangerous at that time. Fear also haunted FO's great grandfather, caused by the massacres he had seen. It was considered as a boost to one's social status to have European blood and family. Like FO's great grandfather, many children were kidnapped and given to different powerful families at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶³ Unfortunately, there were also irregular adoptions, which makes it even harder for community members to realise that they belong to the Selk'nam people. Therefore, when Selk'nam think of the Selk'nam genocide, it is almost impossible to evaluate all the consequences and costs still being paid by the community today, almost 200 years later.

Living as a Selk'nam in the twenty-first century

During 2014, with the help of social media, first contacts were established between families that share Selk'nam heritage. Soon, the need to be legally organised in order to reclaim the Selk'nam identity was realised. Therefore, the Corporación Selk'nam Chile was founded in 2015 with the aim to strengthen the Selk'nam culture, to network with other Indigenous people and to provide a safe space for the expression of Selk'nam culture. Only a few months after the foundation of the Corporación, it was decided to name this community after Covadonga Ona. Covadonga Ona was a Selk'nam girl who, by the age of ten years, was abducted and forced to work in the household of Rudolf Stubenrauch (?-?) in Punta Arenas in 1886.⁶⁴ She used her knowledge of Spanish, English and German to gain inside information about military affairs: if she learned of operations that would affect Indigenous people, she passed on the information to chiefs of the respective tribes, like Felipe Barragán of the Aónikenk.⁶⁵

In 2019, the Corporación was able to block a law that declared the Selk'nam people to be extinct in Chile.⁶⁶ Instead, a new Bill was introduced to the Chilean Congress with the aim to add the Selk'nam people to the list of living Indigenous tribes in Chile.⁶⁷ Because of this tedious process, the Corporación had to stop most of its actual work and dedicate all its efforts to this change in the law. Therefore, the Fundación Hach Saye was founded at the beginning of 2021. It is dedicated to promoting Selk'nam culture and protecting the environments of Karokynká. Karokynká is Selk'nam for Tierra del Fuego and means 'our land'. Since then, workshops about Selk'nam culture have been conducted by Hach Saye in educational institutions for children and adults, including an official request to baptise previously unnamed geographical landmarks in Chile with Selk'nam names. By this means, Selk'nam culture can also be made visible in a passive way.

Results: where are you from?

The skeletal remains present in the DA-NHMW are listed in Table 1. They are present either as crania or as calvaria, meaning skulls with or without the mandible. For all fourteen skeletal remains, a geographic origin could be researched in at least one of the historic sources (Table 2).

From twenty-five individuals at the DA-NHMW listed as originating from Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia, fourteen can be identified as of Selk'nam heritage, based on information provided in the Inventory Book. Nevertheless, the data regarding this affiliation must be treated with caution, as the individuals' alleged tribal affiliation was assigned by the European collectors and was also recorded in the DA-NHMW's Inventory Book by European curators. For the price of 3,800 Schilling, fifteen of the twenty-five individuals (Inv.-Nr. 6030–6044) were acquired in 1930 and inventoried after 1930 (Figure 5). Of these fifteen, nine are of Selk'nam heritage. Inv.-Nr. 21462 was gifted to the DA by an unknown donor on 30 June 1961, and inventoried in 1962.⁶⁸ The collection made by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, in total encompassing eight individuals, was inventoried by custodian Dr Mertzl in November 1935.⁶⁹ According to the Inventory Book, they were gifted to the DA.⁷⁰ Four of these individuals are of Selk'nam heritage.

The individuals' provenance was researched in various archival records, including the Inventory Book of the DA. Here, for each inventory number, further descriptions of each individual can be found in varying detail. While these mostly mention the individual's sex or age-at-death, there is sometimes information about their geographical origin, which is found in greater detail in Gusinde's anthropological monograph, where it is written that Gusinde and Lehmann-Nitsche have excavated skeletal remains by themselves. In three cases (Inv.-Nr. 6035, 6037, 6041) there are also additional publications describing the more precise find contexts. For two individuals (Inv.-Nr. 6035, 6041), which were excavated from the cemetery on the mission of Isla Dawson, the time of their exhumation can be narrowed down to a few days. They were 'lifted' ('gehoben') by Martin Gusinde at the Isla Dawson San Rafael missionary cemetery between 1 and 15 January 1919, along with forty crania and three skeletal remains.⁷¹ He excavated at least five further individuals,

Table 2 Geographical origin of Selk'nam individuals housed in the DA-NHMMW, based on historical information

<i>Inventory number:</i> DA-NHMMW	<i>Geographical origin and circumstances of acquisition: literature</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Geographical origin and circumstances of acquisition: DA-NHMMW Inventory Book (IB)</i>	<i>Source</i>
6035	Abandoned cemetery of San Rafael Mission, Isla Dawson: 'lifted' (<i>gehoben</i>) in 1919 by Martin Gusinde	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 225	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 243
6036	In the sand near Caleta Josefina, together with 6043 by Martin Gusinde	<i>Gusinde</i> , p. 45 Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 212	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 243
6037	Caleta Josefina, east of Altos de Boquerón near Bahia Inútil: excavated in 1920 by Martin Gusinde	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 208f	No data	IB 4, p. 243
6038	Excavated by Martin Gusinde on the shore of Bahia Inútil	Feuerland-Schädel Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 225f	No data	IB 4, p. 243
6039	Excavated by Martin Gusinde on the shore of Bahia Inútil	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 211	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 244
6040	Excavated by Martin Gusinde at the Caleta Josefina near Bahia Inútil	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 225	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 244
6041	Excavated by Martin Gusinde from an abandoned cemetery of San Rafael Mission, Isla Dawson, in 1919	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 225	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 244
6042	Excavated on Isla Grande by Martin Gusinde	<i>Gusinde</i> , p. 45 Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 208	Bahia Inútil	IB 4, p. 244
6043	Excavated by Martin Gusinde in the sand near Caleta Josefina, together with 6036	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 212	No data	IB 4, p. 244
15357	Excavated by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche from an unknown battlefield in north-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego, 26 March 1902	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 218	North-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego: battle field	IB 6, p. 67

Table 2 Continued

<i>Inventory number: DA-NHMMW</i>	<i>Geographical origin and circumstances of acquisition: literature</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Geographical origin and circumstances of acquisition: DA-NHMMW Inventory Book (IB)</i>	<i>Source</i>
15358	Excavated by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche from an unknown battlefield in north-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego, 26 March 1902	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 218	North-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego: battle field	IB 6, p. 68
15359	Excavated by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche from an unknown battlefield in north-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego, 26 March 1902	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 218	North-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego: battle field	IB 6, p. 68
15360	Excavated by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche from an unknown battlefield in north-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego, 26 March 1902	Gusinde, <i>Anthropologie</i> , p. 218f	North-eastern inner Tierra del Fuego: battle field	IB 6, p. 68
21462	No data	No data	Isla Grande	IB 5, p. 30

Sources: F. Bornemann, *P. Martin Gusinde (1886–1969)* (Rome, Collegium Verbi Divini, 1971).
M. Gusinde, *Anthropologie der Feuerlandindianer*, III/2 (Wien Mödling, Verlag Anthropos, 1939).
M. Gusinde, 'Ein Feuerland-Schädel neu interpretiert', *Annalen des Naturhistorischen Museums Wien*, 79 (1975), 665–7.

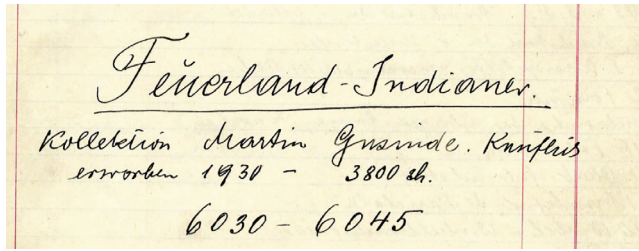


Figure 5 Entry for the first fifteen individuals from Tierra del Fuego in the Inventory Book of the DA-NHMW, here named as ‘Fireland Indians’ (‘Feuerlandindianer’).

but from different places.⁷² In 1920, Gusinde also excavated Inv.-Nr. 6037 near the Caleta Josefina at Bahía Inútil, an individual that he estimated to have died 200 years previously.⁷³

Common to all skeletal remains, however, is that no information about the burial context has survived. This means that there are no details about the type and condition of the grave(s), or the presence of grave goods.

Discussion: explaining the problematic provenance

For three individuals (Inv.-Nr. 6035, 6036, 6041), there are clear discrepancies in the Inventory Book and Gusinde’s monograph regarding their geographical origin. In all cases, ‘Bahía Inútil’ is entered in the Inventory Book as the place of origin. In Gusinde’s monograph, however, it is always explicitly stated which skeletal remain is in Vienna and under which new DA inventory number. These discrepancies can be explained by the fact that especially Inv.-Nr. 6035 and 6041 originate from the Isla Dawson, San Rafael mission cemetery. This misrepresentation would mean that the unknown person doing the inventoring was aware of the problematic provenance of the two individuals. It is also unknown which source was used by the person doing the inventoring to provide the information on the individuals’ geographical origin. However, it is possible that the new information prepared for Gusinde’s monograph and published in 1939 was simply not updated for those individuals inventoried earlier, in 1930.

Gusinde, who described himself as a friend to the Selk’nam and was called a ‘good European’ by them,⁷⁴ extensively studied the Selk’nam traditions and beliefs. It is therefore surprising that Gusinde, knowing that he would not be able to make ethnographic observations in San Rafael on Isla Dawson, went there anyway to collect human remains.⁷⁵ Additionally, he knew about the Selk’nam burial practices, yet choose to ignore them so as to gain access to the skeletal remains for his own purposes.⁷⁶ Consequently, there are numerous osteological collections in different countries⁷⁷ donated by him, which is the reason why the spirituality of the Selk’nam continues to be disrespected. In Selk’nam belief, the human body is emptied and

no longer contains the human soul after death. This is why it is important that the body is buried quickly. Excavating skeletal remains from cemeteries, as Gusinde did from San Rafael on Isla Dawson, or at other sacred places where a Selk'nam was buried, is a message of disrespect to both living and dead Selk'nam. There are many Selk'nam human remains in different institutions around the world,⁷⁸ and it is therefore important to establish respectful agreements between researchers and Selk'nam regarding these collections.

When we (FO, HM) think of Martin Gusinde and Robert Lehmann-Nitsche today, we do not see scientific pioneers, but cultural appropriators. They came to Karokynká and took back with them to Europe what they were interested in for their research. Both of them arrived after the Selk'nam people had to start to adapt to the *kolleot* (white people), meaning that the authenticity of their ethnographic observations is also doubtful. Today, we have the opportunity and responsibility of changing paradigms. From an Indigenous perspective (FO), the Selk'nam skeletal remains must be returned to the earth, if possible at the exact same place as their first burial, or a different place which is to be decided by members of Selk'nam communities. Until that happens, the best way of dealing with these collections is exactly what we are doing here: (Indigenous) representatives and researchers should be in contact to ensure that research will not damage the remains and the representatives' spirituality. We were able to show that it is possible to follow an active joint research path, both for provenance and bioanthropology (see article by the same authors in this issue).

There are currently no official requests for restitution of the Selk'nam human remains stored at the DA-NHMW. There are also no requests from external researchers to research the human remains. As there are no written internal guidelines yet at the DA-NHMW on how to deal with sensitive osteological collections, and prior decisions and research need to be made on a case by case basis, it was agreed with the Selk'nam community Covadonga Ona to inform them about and discuss possible future requests. It is extremely important that community members and scientists continue to engage in dialogue on an equal level about what is to happen with collections of sensitive human remains. Only in this way can a new bioanthropology emerge, renounce its past and help Indigenous communities to sharpen and clarify theirs.

Conclusion and outlook

In spring 2020, the Austrian Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport (BMKÖS) sent out a call to federal museums in Vienna to develop projects that would examine the colonial contexts of selected collections. The NHMW was awarded one of the grants lasting a year, and was involved in research with the Department of Anthropology and the Archive for the History of Science, starting in spring 2021.⁷⁹

In general, the provenance and course of acquisition of collections – whether in museums, universities or other institutions – are often both either unknown or badly documented. In some cases, it is possible to determine when something was

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collected, integrated into the collection and by whom. The exact routes or intermediaries that held the collection before its arrival at the museum are even harder to trace. This also concerns osteological collections. An unclear provenance is especially troublesome when it is apparent that the collection originated in a colonial context or consists of the remains of members of Indigenous populations. Therefore, bioarchaeologists, who are trained to study human remains, should also be involved when it comes to researching the provenance of osteological collections. Here, the value of the bioanthropological analyses emerged especially in the re-individualisation of the collection. Especially in the case of two individuals from San Rafael Mission Cemetery, the bioarchaeological evidence helped to verify historical data on their exhumation. This was also the case for two other exhumed individuals, which goes strongly against Selk'nam beliefs expressed by members of the Covadonga Ona community in Chile. While an equally clear status could not be established for the other individuals, the cultural significance and history of the collection should still be recognised and contextualised in the Selk'nam beliefs. We were able to show that through the joint research of scientists and representatives, the collection has undergone a new evaluation. In the early 1900s, the individuals suffered a fate to which many remains of Indigenous individuals were subjected. The measurements taken from the individuals were abused to play further into the artificial creation of human races, discriminating against people of various backgrounds and heritage worldwide. The consequences of this are present to this day.

The project at the NHMW ran under the name KolText and was completed in early 2022. In 2020, one of the authors (CS) had already tried to establish contact with Indigenous communities in Tierra del Fuego in the course of provenance research on a collection from Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. The goal was to inform the community members about the existence of the collection. From the response of authors FO and HM, a lively exchange developed. Therefore, during the process of application to the BMKÖS, it was decided to include provenance research on the Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego collection as one of the aims for the KolText project.

In the course of this project, both researchers and representatives discussed the limitations and possibilities of their research and the implications that might arise. The results and implications are now presented from both sides – Indigenous members and researchers – in this article. The aim is to help both sides to understand their objectives better, to strengthen understanding – especially, on the part of the researcher, of the descendants' point of view – and to find new joint approaches on how to deal with sensitive osteological collections.

Acknowledgements

CS, SE and MB would like to thank Pia Schölnberger, Austrian Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, for supporting and funding parts of this work (grant project title 'Postkoloniale Provenienzforschung'). CS would like to thank Wolfgang Reichmann for his help in digitising Figure 1. The authors would also

like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose comments helped to improve earlier versions of the manuscript.

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