
Symposium: Repatriation and its Implications

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Papers in the symposium examine the repatriation of human remains, funerary objects and cultural property to communities and the effects and implications that such returns have had/are having on the various interest parties involved, and, particularly, the relationship between them. Topics include:

- the effect and significance of repatriation for indigenous communities
- the significance of repatriation for the relationship between and within the scientific and indigenous communities
- the significance of repatriation for relevant government organisations and their relationship with the scientific and indigenous communities
- the effect or otherwise of repatriation upon scientific research
- the implications of repatriation for the connection between archaeological theory, research methods and politics
- the relationship between the repatriation issue and identity
- indigenous community issues arising from repatriation
- the effect of past codes of ethics and other policies on the repatriation debate

Developments in the repatriation of human remains and other cultural items in Queensland

Michael Aird

In 1988 myself along with other relatives buried the remains of over 200 Aboriginal people that had been removed in the 1960s from a site called the "Broadbeach Burial Ground" in South East Queensland. In 1989 I attended the World Archaeological Inter-Congress in Vermillion, South Dakota, as a representative of one of the few Aboriginal groups in Australia at that time, that had successfully returned human remains from institutions. In 1989, I along with other Aboriginal people criticised museums, as we felt that we had little control over how our cultural heritage was being managed. Ten years later I am now curator in charge of the human remains and other cultural items held by the Queensland Museum. My presentation will discuss the changes that have occurred in Australian museums in regards to Aboriginal people taking charge of their history and the way we are represented in institutions.

Repatriation of Native Hawaiian skeletal remains: The contemporary importance of restoring the Ancestral Foundation

Edward Halealoha Ayau

The paper will examine eight years of repatriation and reburial of ancestral Native Hawaiian remains, funerary objects, and sacred objects from institutions within and outside of the Hawaiian Islands, as well as the effects of these events upon relevant Native Hawaiian communities. The paper will address the tensions created amongst certain archaeologist and anthropologist, the efforts of others to conduct archaeology in consultation with Native Hawaiians and the efforts by Native Hawaiians to forge a partnership with the archaeological community based on a recognition of mutual interests and respect.

The paper will emphasize the fundamental necessity to acquire the consent of Native Hawaiians in order to conduct any scientific research. Moreover, the paper will question past scientific research which was conducted without notice, nor consultation with Native Hawaiians. The paper will discuss the shifting of power as a result of repatriation and reburial as required by federal and state law. The paper will also briefly discuss the effect repatriation has had on museum policy relating to curation, removal of photographs of human remains, and the collecting of human remains.

Australia's Skeletal Provenancing Project: an archival researcher's point of view

Deanne Hanchant

I spent two years working on the National Skeletal Provenancing Project in Australia as the Archival Researcher. During that time I provenanced 180 previously unprovenanced remains and "unprovenanced" about 20 previously provenanced remains. The work highlighted the need for archival research to be carried out before remains are returned to communities for reburial and brought to light a number of mistakes in provenancing.

This has in turn led me to look at the issues involved in the establishment of a national keeping place for those ancestral remains we can't provenance. A number of overseas institutions have offered Australia remains for which there is either no provenance or at the least very limited information. Indigenous people want their ancestral remains back but they don't necessarily want them to sit on the shelves of a museum because no-one knows where they come from.

This is an emotive issue and will require a huge commitment on the part of the Australian Government in monetary terms. The established of a national keeping place would help the process but much work has to be done to decided the where's and how's.

A wake-up call for the Chugach people: The long-term effects of the Valdez Exxon oil spill

John Johnson

The reburial of Chugach remains stolen during the Exxon Valdez oil spill was a wake up call for the Chugach people. It brought unity and a sense of pride in taking care of our ancestors no matter how old they are or where they came from. We have also selected (been promised) over 250 prehistoric and historic sites under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971. Now in 1998, we still have to fight in federal court to protect our rights to our traditional lands that have promised. Only ten historical places have been transferred to date.

The Chugach people are currently seeking over 2 million dollars from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council fund to build a regional cultural centre and repository in our region. Here we plan to celebrate our culture and store artefacts that have been removed during the oil spill and from repatriation from around the world.

Bone reburial in Israel: the law restriction and methodological applications

Yossi Nagar

With its 25,000 archaeological sites and 1.5 millions years of human history, hundreds of excavations are held in Israel each year. Human bones are found in the majority of them. The Jewish orthodox leadership in Israel opposes disturbing the dead from their peaceful rest in the ground, and have managed to prevent excavations at many ancient burial sites. Israeli law demands immediate reburial of all excavation human bones, both recent and more ancient, whatever their supposed ethnicity. This situation poses great limits on archaeology in general and on the anthropological study specifically. In search of a solution, the Israel Antiquities Authority's anthropological laboratory shifted into field rather than laboratory data collection. This implies uniform data collection from sites and the use of computerised database for skeletal measurements and discrete traits, which are routinely recorded in the field. The only fortunate outcome is that we have managed to shorten by far the time needed for the physical examination of skeletal remains. If the present situation continues, future anthropological research in Israel is doubtful.

A case study on the reburial of human remains at Thulamela in the far northern part of the Kruger National Park

Israel Nemaheni

My introduction will locate the Thulamela Heritage Site within the Kruger National Park. Aspects of Thulamela as a site will be mentioned, such as its age and people who settled there. I shall discuss the discovery of the site, archaeological reconnaissance, community involvement through the formation of the project committee and sponsorship. I will also discuss the events that led to the discovery and the reburial of human remains at Thulamela. The reburial of the remains will be discussed in detail how the decision was reached to re-bury the remains and the importance of performing reburial rites among the local communities. I will also explain on the decision taken by the project committee to allow a specific group from the local communities to perform the reburial rites - and the reasons thereof. A few problems experienced from the date of discovery to the reburial date will be discussed. I will conclude by explaining the significance of re-burying human remains from a cultural perspective and the challenges we are facing to uphold this cultural practice.

Repatriation as healing the trauma of history

Russell Thornton

Most North American Indian tribes suffered degradations from the European colonisation of North America. Native American human remains and cultural objects from wars, massacres, relocations, epidemics of European disease and starvation resulting from the destruction of native economies are held by museums and educational

and other institutions in the United States. This has often prevented Native American tribes from a healing process whereby they are able to come to terms with such atrocities. The repatriation of Native American human remains, funerary objects, objects of cultural patrimony and sacred objects has helped North American Indian tribes deal with the atrocities they suffered. Drawing upon specific repatriations, e.g., the return of human remains from the Sand Creek Massacre of Southern Cheyenne and the Fort Robinson Massacre of Northern Cheyenne, the return of Ghost Dance shirts from the Wounded Knee Massacre of Lakota Sioux, it is shown how these repatriations over 100 years later have brought some closure to the atrocities and helped heal the wounds of "traumas of history" for Indian tribes.

The Thulamela reburial: New respect for the communities archaeological property? Fact or Fiction?

Sidney Miller

The Gold Fields Thulemele Project ran between 1993 and 1997. It was planned to be a politically correct archaeological project, owing to specifications by the sponsors, Gold Fields South Africa.

Extensive restoration of the dry stone walls of the site was undertaken and limited excavations revealed two royal graves. These contained some gold artefacts. This process was undertaken with "extensive community participation". Wide media coverage brought about the belief that a new era has dawned on the dissemination of heritage information to the public and specifically the participation of disadvantaged people in the archaeological process. After negotiations with "communities" the ancient ancestral bones were reburied during a moving ceremony by a modern "community" in a national park. Looking in retrospect, the question that arises is that if this action on its own was sufficient, or is there more to be done? This paper hopes to address some facts surrounding the Thulemele Reburial. It is not meant to be read as criticism, but rather as an evaluation of archaeological administration and ethics:- do archaeologists really care, or was the Thulemele Reburial only another piece of window dressing?