





Editorial 4/2025

Felicity Bodenstein  / Ulrike Saß  / Florian Schönfuß  / Christoph Zuschlag 

I Am Number Four! Like the correspondent science-fiction film's title, it seems as if the annual issue at hand could speak proudly and confidently for itself. Glancing over its table of contents, perhaps even a spacefarer entering orbit would realize that on Mother earth provenance research is making good progress, is reaching out, is diving deeper – into newly assessed and even overlapping 'contexts of injustice', into new categories of sources and digital techniques of research, into further subjects, institutions and whole countries hitherto reluctant, and, most importantly, it is becoming more present in peoples minds and societies' awareness. This should make us confident indeed.

What makes us just as happy, is that we can at the same time present another, a real and living 'Number Four', and that is within our team itself. Already in June 2025, we had the honor to welcome Dr. Felicity Bodenstein as a new member of the editorial board. Felicity Bodenstein is an art historian and currently holds a position as lecturer in the history of museums and heritage studies at the Université de Sorbonne in Paris. Since 2015, she also works as a Primary Investigator within the *Digital Benin* project.¹ She is especially interested in questions of representation and display of translocated objects, which directly translates into her recent research on value transformations and narratives that have accompanied the Benin pieces' looting and successive translocations. We are delighted that she volunteered to lend her great experience and excellent expertise to the project, notably in the fields of colonial contexts of acquisition, African art and digital methods of research. We have already had the great pleasure of working with her in jointly realizing 'Number Four'.

Once more reaching out to France, we had the honor to continue our ongoing *Interviews* series on the European restitution commissions and regional coordination centers for provenance research, this time with Frédérique Dreifuss-Netter, President of the French *Commission pour la restitution des biens et l'indemnisation des victimes de spoliations antisémites* (CIVS). Answering all our questions in great detail, Frédérique Dreifuss-Netter provides an outstanding introduction to the organization, procedures, tasks and responsibilities of the CIVS as well as the French commission's already rich institutional history. She explains how the CIVS considerably differs from other European restitution commissions in that it does not only occupy itself with the return of looted artworks held in public museums, Dreifuss-Netter also outlines the reasons for this, which lie deeply rooted in French history. Taking our interview as an opportunity to look back after her institutions' tenth birthday this year, Miriam Olivia Merz shares many valuable insides into the work, scope and organizational structure of the Zentrale Stelle für Provenienzforschung Hessen (Central Office for Provenance Research in Hesse). Characterized by a clear focus on conducting and coordinating provenance research on public museum holdings in Hesse, the Zentrale Stelle is predominantly concerned with Nazi looted art. Along with many long-term research projects, e.g. on the suspicious acquisitions by its then-director August Feigel (1880-1966) for Hessisches Landesmuseum (Hessian State Museum) Darmstadt or on the prominent WELLA company collection, the Zentrale Stelle, as Merz points out, is particularly engaged in financing and promoting "Erstcheck" (first check) projects, especially in smaller municipal and rural museums all over Hesse.

¹ <https://digitalbenin.org/>, <07.11.2025>.

Taking the lead in this issue's *Research Articles* section, Kai Artinger presents his recent investigations into the holdings of Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, still comprising some works which in 1942 had been exhibits of the special exhibition *Niederländische Kunst der Gegenwart* (Dutch Contemporary Art) at the Stuttgart "Ehrenmal der Deutschen Leistung im Ausland" (Memorial of German Achievement Abroad). Organized by the "Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete" (Reichskommissar for the German-occupied Netherlands), Arthur Seyß-Inquart (1892-1946), Artinger explicates that the exhibition was aimed to represent a form of Dutch art allegedly unaffected by modern or other tendencies dissenting from Nazi art doctrine. In this way, his article retraces a specific, hitherto largely unknown aspect of the cultural relations between the German-occupied Netherlands and Nazi Germany proper. At the same time in German-occupied France, the internationally significant art collection of Jewish businessman Gaston Lévy (1893-1977) was looted by the Nazis – however, Peter Elliott and Harry Spillane question the full extent and indeed the legitimacy of his post-war claims. Critically examining Lévy's self-composed inventory of looted goods, exploring his partly shadowy biography as well as his later compensation claims through the West German system, the authors put the rather romantic narratives of Lévy's life, woven by auction houses in recent years, to the test. Focusing on selected works, mainly paintings by Paul Signac, the two authors argue that Lévy claimed works to have been looted which he actually did not own at the time or which indeed never existed.

Compared to countries like the Netherlands and France, the Nazis' ideological attitude was very different regarding Eastern Europe. This is reflected upon in Daniela Mathuber's article on the library holdings of "Publikationsstelle Wien" (Publication Office Vienna), which, forming part of the "Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)" (Reich Security Main Office of the SS), conducted research on Eastern Europe to justify and facilitate those countries' military occupation and exploitation. The Publikationsstelle's rich holdings, including many rare and highly valuable books, maps and historical manuscripts, were to a large extent looted by Special Command Künsberg in the Soviet Union, only to

then be confiscated by the Western Allies in 1946 and transferred to London, where they were integrated into the library of the British Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), as Mathuber was able to discover through some fortunate chance finds in British archives.

Taking us back to early modern Rome, a completely different context for the application of provenance research presents itself in Flavia De Nicola's article investigating the provenance of the painting *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, which is housed at the Galleria Borghese and currently attributed to Peter Paul Rubens. De Nicola meticulously reconstructs the painting's provenance based on her research in various Italian archives and museums. Her specific findings on the *Lamentation* offer scope for evaluating the context of its patronage. This leads her to propose an alternative possible attribution of the painting to Anthony van Dyck. Daniel Potter takes us from Italy to late 19th and early 20th-century Egypt and Sudan critically examining the "myths of the excavator-supplier", as he tellingly denominates the socio-functional narratives archaeologists employed during that period to justify their often quasi-entrepreneurial activities. Analyzing a selection of transactions on the contemporary antiquities market based on archival records, Potter illustrates the importance of investment-style financing and patronage making the 'excavator-suppliers' seek to acquire archaeological artifacts, whether by excavating or purchasing them from local dealers, to recover their costs and satisfy the collecting desires of individuals, states and museums in the Global North.

As the struggle of Western imperial powers for colonies, political influence and economic exploitation left its mark in Egypt and Sudan, so it did in the South Pacific. Indeed, we start our *Research Reports* section with an exemplary restitution project of a ship's prow from the former German colony of Samoa. Drawing on sources that shed light on both the German and Samoan perspectives on the historical events, Brian Alofaituli, Dionne Fonoti and Bettina von Briskorn trace the turbulent journey of this impressive artefact, which, taken in 1888 by Admiral Wilhelm Souchon during the Samoan Civil War, had entered the collection of Übersee-Museum Bremen in 1932. In 2024, the prow finally returned to Samoa, reflecting a complex

process which the three authors jointly illustrate while contextualizing the artefact within Samoan as well as German history in a vivid approach of transcontinental collaboration. Oceanic art made up quite a substantial part of the business volume of the art dealer Ludwig Bretschneider (1909-1988) who is much better known for his dealings with the Nazi regime, amongst others supplying art for Hermann Göring, Martin Bormann and, notably, for “Sonderauftrag Linz” (Special Commission Linz). This is shown in the seminal article by Nils Fiebig, who for the first time comprehensively examines the dealer’s life. As the author demonstrates, Bretschneider massively profited from his business with the Nazis, yet despite his closeness to the regime successfully portrayed himself as an opponent of National Socialism in his postwar denazification hearings. Being well connected, especially within the Munich art scene, Bretschneider made a name for himself after the war as a dealer in ‘exotic art’, providing objects for various ethnological museums and private collectors.

To see how an article published Open Access in *transfer* promptly encourages subsequent research on particular collections is a joyful experience indeed. In the footsteps of Danielle Smotherman Bennett’s research on the antiquities collection of French physician Daniel Marie Fouquet (1850-1914),² Cecilia Benavente Vicente not only identifies two further objects formerly belonging to that collection, a Roman head in the Getty Museum and a counterweight in the Musée du Louvre. In her article she also addresses a significant misunderstanding surrounding the 1922 auction of the Fouquet collection, showing that several individuals involved have been misidentified in earlier research.

School libraries in the GDR lie at the heart of Annett Büttner’s research, commencing this issue’s extensive *Case Studies* section. Examining the specific case of the Aschersleben “Stephaneum” grammar school, Büttner broaches the issue of dissolutions of historical libraries in the context of GDR cultural policy. While the regime saw the

removal of old books on ‘bourgeois’ subjects, like theology or the classics, as a necessity to enforce Communist educational policy, the handling of the library holdings’ quickly changed from utter destruction to purposeful utilization via covert sale into the ‘non-Socialist economic area’. From a legal perspective, however, the dissolutions of libraries in the GDR were purely administrative acts and are thus not litigable as ‘unlawful’ acquisitions. This, of course, does not diminish the immense material and intellectual losses, as Büttner emphasizes. Another, no less clandestine case of dealership and subtle networking is presented by Lara Deniz Ersoy in her case-study of the Iranian art dealer Saeed Motamed (1925-2013). Focusing on several objects Motamed provided for Weltmuseum Vienna, Ersoy has proven that these are either not original or have otherwise been tampered with. In order to achieve higher prices, Motamed misdated or skillfully reworked objects, including many archaeological artefacts, making them appear older, and thus more interesting, as Ersoy has shown.

Illicit practices in the dealing with antiquities and other archaeological artefacts sadly are a quite common phenomenon, their trafficking consequently being subject of strict national, international, and EU regulations likewise. By contrast, existing legal restrictions concerning the trafficking of fossils are sorely insufficient, as is convincingly shown by Paul Stewens. Taking the seizure of nine fossilized teeth from Morocco by the French customs in January 2025 as an example, Stewens addresses the determination of the fossils’ origin and problematizes the blurred distinction between paleontology and archaeology. Examining implications for the regulation of the illicit fossil trade, he discusses the legal framework for the fossils’ seizure and evaluates it in light of European Council Regulation 2019/880 as well as French domestic law. We move from fossils to forestry with Gabriela Brudzyńska-Němec in her article on the confiscation of Polish forestry science collections by Nazi German authorities in 1939/40, focusing on the holdings of the Warsaw General Directorate of State Forests (SGGW) and the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Poznan. With the cooperation of German academic forestry colleges, in particular those in Tharandt and Eberswalde, these holdings were systematically cataloged and transferred to

2 Danielle Smotherman Bennett: Identifying Old Collection Marks on Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas Associated with the Collection of Daniel Marie Fouquet, in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection* 2 (2023), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2023.1.101806>, 121-134.

Germany, a process that Brudzyńska-Němec was able to reconstruct on the basis of previously little-known files from the Tharandt University of Forestry. Despite a systematic return of the looted objects, including many books, but also scientific instruments, that was largely completed by the early 1950s, the author's provenance research reveals that the holdings of Saxon State and University Library Dresden (SLUB) still contain various volumes that arrived from Poland in 1940.

Within Franco-German history, the case of Alsace is always a special one – this seems to be equally true regarding art policy, art looting and museum acquisitions, as can be seen in Constance Jame's groundbreaking research at the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, both in Strasbourg. Looking at different contexts in which artworks were acquired by the two museums between 1940 and 1945, Jame on the one hand traces the provenance of several artworks which the two museums were entrusted with after their sequestration from so-called "enemies of the people and the Reich". On the other hand, she also investigates artworks formerly acquired by the Nazis for the Berlin "Neue Reichskanzlei" ("New Reich Chancellery"), which were found in 1945 in Wildenstein Castle, Germany, by a French Army Captain and were then deposited in Strasbourg.

With objects emanating from colonial contexts held within a university collection, Annika Vosseler and Michael La Corte open up a very different field of investigation. Engaging with objects from the Palau Islands in the Ethnological Collection of the University of Tübingen, their case-study exemplifies how colonial holdings can be recontextualized, researched, and made digitally accessible. The objects partly originate from the so-called Hamburg South Seas Expedition (1908-1910), which was accompanied by the artist and scholar Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow (1874-1945) providing a rare case of female colonial collecting. Under the authors' supervision, an interdisciplinary student research project reconstructed object biographies and critically reflected on the possibilities and limitations of equitable cooperation with partners in Palau, which resulted in the stunning digital exhibition *Colonial Shadows*.³ Like university

collections, smaller and/or remotely situated museums remain on the margins of research, especially when objects from colonial contexts of acquisition are concerned. With their promising project *Mapping the Object*, Felicity Jensz and Ute Christina Koch aim to gain an overview of the number and diversity of non-European objects in Westphalian-Lippe museums. In their corresponding article the two authors describe the process of examining and reviewing the collections both through the creation and cleaning of databases as well as through the physical viewing of the objects. In this way, Jensz and Koch were able to support many smaller museums also in making their collections broadly accessible via the *museum:digital* online database,⁴ and likewise by presenting the results as part of an educational program to a broader public. As the two authors sum up, they were able to identify some 1.700 non-European objects in 44 museums.

When addressing the state of application and transformation into national law of the 1998 Washington Principles in our previous issue's *Editorial* (one year later, there is still a lot to be done!), we confidently quoted Jacques Schumacher's guide on *Nazi-Era Provenance of Museum Collections* (London 2024), at the time hot off the press. Unsure whether this served as an unintended call, we are albeit very glad that Alice Cazzola and Fenya Almstadt have submitted an in-depth review of Schuhmacher's by now much publicized work, which you will find in the *Book Reviews* section. We hope that the two reviewers' detailed discussion of the guide may also serve as another gentle reminder, that we explicitly welcome book reviews of relevant monographs, anthologies, conference publications or source editions and are available to apply for and provide the necessary reviewer's copies.

In summary, we are delighted that 'Number Four' in no way stands in the shadow of its three precursors, gathering a multitude of fascinating, well-written and highly insightful articles representing all three established 'contexts of injustice', but also a pleasingly high number of contributions introducing completely new areas, yet unknown sources and innovative methods of (provenance) research. Within this, a certain tendency towards

3 <https://mewi.pageflow.io/koloniale-schatten>, <08.11.2025>.


4 <https://westfalen.museum-digital.de/collection/775>, <08.11.2025>.

investigating double-, or even multiple ‘contexts of injustice’ seems ever more tangible, accompanied by an unsurprisingly strong desire for the application of more and consolidated digital methods. Bringing together scholars of many different fields in a transdisciplinary approach that is clearly reaping its fruits, ‘Number Four’ likewise mirrors the progressive internationalization of the research community itself.


This dynamic community, as we are fully aware, includes many young, early career researchers whose plentiful thought-provoking submissions we are pleased to again see published in high proportions. Starting with them, we greatly thank *all* our authors, and of course also those, whose promising and much to be encouraged research could not make it into the issue at this time. We are deeply obliged to the growing force of our esteemed reviewers, and we recognize their invaluable generosity in offering us their expertise and special knowledge as well as their steady interest for the many submissions that we receive. Finding the right reviewer for each individual text is often a difficult challenge which would be impossible to meet without our strongly-committed Advisory Board members. We are deeply grateful for their encouraging help and advice, not least in further developing and promoting this journal. For their excellent technical support and guidance in all questions related to Open Access publishing, we sincerely thank the whole team of *arthistoricum.net*, notably Maria Effinger, Viktoria Guscinas, Frank Krabbes, Lena Kunkel, and Bettina Müller. We sincerely thank the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the generous funding *transfer* receives. For his great skill and, as always, fantastic work in realizing *transfer*’s layout and typesetting, we are much obliged to Benedikt Schmitz. Finally, we want to heartily thank all our readers, many of whom accompanying us from the very beginning, from ‘Number One’, so to say. We very much hope you stay with us again in ‘Number Five’, which, by the way, will be our first semi-annual issue in line with *transfer*’s increased frequency of publication beginning in 2026.

Carrying on in good spirits, we wish you pleasant reading!

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Reference

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