Drew University
College of Liberal Arts

# Skeletons in our Closets:

## The Ethics of Displaying Human Remains in Museums

## Case Studies of the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme

A Thesis in Anthropology, Art History, and French

By

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**Abstract**

This thesis addresses the changing ethical standards regarding human remains in museums and, subsequently, the museums' role to adhere to best practices. I specifically evaluate the possession and display of non-western human remains by three western museums: The British Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme. Throughout each case study, I discuss the institution's ownership and display of human remains in relation to the mission statement, the history of the museum, and any national law which is relevant to the museum. I evaluate specific instances where human remains are on display, and suggest improvements which would advocate for a more respectful viewing experience. The display of human remains in museums has been normalized; museums do not make a distinction between human remains and other museum objects. In a museum setting, human remains are no longer associated with their original cultural and/or funerary context.

**Table of Contents**

## Introduction

The questions surrounding the ethics of displaying human remains open a Pandora's box of competing issues. To fully explore this topic, this thesis will address these overarching concerns: colonization and the rightful ownership of cultural objects, museum authority and their social responsibility, and the role of law to regulate changing ethical standards. The ethical problem of the display of human remains in individual museums is discussed frequently in the news and in academia, all institutions that have human remains are facing ethical questions. The goal of this study is to examine three institutions, the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme, and compare how these museums are confronting these ethical issues. My goal is to bring a fresh perspective to the fundamental question: why do western museums think they have the authority to display human remains from non-western countries, and what does this say about our modern society?

This thesis scaffolds existing literature to compare the three western museums. The British Museum is a history museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an encyclopedic art museum, and the Musée de l'Homme is an anthropological museum. Although all three are different types of museums, each possesses a collection of human remains where only a small percentage is on display. In addition, this comparative study looks at how the display of human remains at these institutions is in conflict with their mission statements (the mission statement for each institution is found at the beginning of each chapter).[1] I will examine how each institution is adapting to changing ethical standards, and argue that no significant or timely change will occur without legal incentive.

[1] See appendix for full mission statements from each institution. Each is listed at the beginning of the case study.

In this thesis, the term **human remains** refers to "[t]angible or recognizable physical bodies or parts of bodies (bones, soft tissue, or parts that are naturally shed [hair, teeth, nails]) of once living humans, which at times may be incorporated into objects."[2] This includes mummification which is best divided into two categories. Mummification can occur naturally or may be achieved through artificial methods.[3] **Anthropogenic** mummification, most commonly associated with the ancient Egyptians, occurs when "intentional human activity assists in the preservation of bodies."[4] **Spontaneous** mummification occurs when bodies mummify naturally in areas with extreme environmental conditions, such as aridity or cold.[5] Mummies and skeletal remains are the main focus of this text because their existence in museums is more prevalent; this is not to denote a higher significance to them over other cases. It should also be noted that while this thesis will touch on the issues of repatriation when it is germain to my discussion, it is not the focus of my argument. I discuss repatriation when it directly relates to the display of human remains and the surrounding ethical questions. I demonstrate how since there are legal obstacles to repatriation, the ethics concerning display should be prioritized since changes pertaining to display are more achievable and can normalize the changing ethical standards.

The display of human remains in museums dehumanizes the deceased and normalizes the spectatorship of remains who have been removed from their funerary contexts. In museums, the

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[2] "Statement on Human Remains, 2.0 Principles and Definitions," University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, accessed April 25, 2023, https://www.penn.museum/about-collections/statements-and-policies/statementon- human-remains.
For the purposes of this thesis, the breadth of this term avoids denoting more significance to one type of human remains. Bone fragments, skin, and hair are often overlooked in favor of fully articulated mummies or skeletons.
[3] "Mummies." World of Forensic Science. Encyclopedia.com. (February 23, 2023). https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mummies
[4] Panzer, Stephanie, Albert R. Zink, and Dario Piombino-Mascali. "Scenes from the Past." *RadioGraphics* 30, no. 4 (2010): 1123–32. https://doi.org/10.1148/rg.304095174.
[5]Panzer, Stephanie, Albert R. Zink, and Dario Piombino-Mascali. "Scenes from the Past." *RadioGraphics* 30, no. 4 (2010): 1123–32. https://doi.org/10.1148/rg.304095174.

context of the remains changes to become curiosities and objects. Once remains are removed from their original burials and placed on display, they lose their context and it is unable to be genuinely replicated. This is especially problematic when remains of non-western descent come into the possession of western institutions, who display remains from the perspective of the colonizer and study the remains out of the benefit to western society, not in line with the deceased's culture or wishes. Western society is starting to face unethical collection histories, discussed further below, but there continues to be a lingering reluctance from museums to adhere to a universal ethical standard.

Attitudes and behaviors towards human remains are rapidly changing, yet museums are progressively falling behind in how they adapt the way they handle them. It is fair to say that the initial acquisition of human remains by museums and collectors through archaeological exploration, from the 19th century to present, was economically and colonially motivated. Now, there is a changing understanding of ethics that promotes a reevaluation of owning and displaying human remains. This need for change is a response to the immense amount of cultural damage that has already been done; the possession of non-western and indigenous human remains by western museums is a clear result of a system of capitalism and colonialism. It is impossible to go back and erase the colonial foundations of museums so it is now their obligation to take responsibility for faults and elicit changes to adhere to the current ethical standards. This will be accomplished by a reevaluation of collections and display practices, enforced by legal pressure to do so.

This comparative study explores how the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme have or have not responded to the evolving attitudes concerning

corporeal material. Using existing literature regarding the ethics in museums, I bring together the three museums to compare and discuss whether or not they are treating their collections of human remains in an ethical manner. By highlighting strengths and weaknesses, I demonstrate the need for strict regulation regarding the treatment of human remains. I wish to further push the prioritization of cultural ties to human remains over pedagogy. I argue that the possession of human remains should be given priority to the deceased's descendant culture regardless of the educational benefit the remains hold in the possession of western institutions.

Museums are created with a mission statement that "articulates the museum's educational focus and purpose and its role and responsibility to the public and its collections," and gives the "governing authority a foundation from which it can strategize."[6] Thus, museums have the choice to make changes which correspond with evolving best practices, attitudes, and ethics, yet often do not implement changes, thereby violating their own mission statements. Ultimately, although there are guidelines put out for museums by national and international organizations, such as the American Alliance of Museums and the International Council of Museums, generally museums will not adhere to change without legal incentive.

**State of the Literature**

A substantial amount of literature has been published which critically examines the ethical and unethical treatment of human remains. The literature surrounding these issues is complex and diverse: it engages several methodologies and intersects with traditional scholarship, scientific research, social issues, and ethics. The scope of this study is limited to the

[6] "Developing a Mission Statement." Alliance Reference Guide. American Alliance of Museums. Accessed April 2, 2023. https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/developing-a-mission-statement-final.pdf.

key contributions to the discourse surrounding the treatment and display of human remains. The unethical treatment of human remains is a fairly recent concern, only first addressed in the latter part of the 20th century. Debates came to a head in the United States with the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (hereafter NAGPRA) in 1990, which constituted the "repatriation and disposition" of Native American human remains.[7] This came from discussion between Congress, Native Americans, and Museums to "promote a greater understanding between groups" while maintaining the "important function museums serve in society by preserving the past."[8] NAGPRA was crucial to initiating action to reevaluate the display of human remains. Even prior to its enactment, NAGPRA launched a major scholarly debate that had reverberations throughout the academic and scientific worlds, extending beyond the United States. Simply the suggestion to reevaluate the study of human remains caused an immense uproar within the anthropological community as the halt of excavations and reburial of remains threatened the careers and life-long studies of scientists and scholars alike.

There were scholars on both sides of the argument, for and against the repatriation and/or reburial of Native American remains. Some argued that decisions about the treatment of human remains belong with their ancestral lineage, and that must be the priority. Others believed that scientific inquiry was of most importance. They felt threatened that if they could no longer study the remains, the future of their research and careers was in jeopardy. Scientists against NAGPRA argued that there was greater value in continued research, especially alongside technological

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[7] "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service)." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed February 4, 2023. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation act was enacted in 1990 and requires all museums in the United States that receive federal funding to identify Native American human remains, funerary items, and objects of cultural significance in their collections and collaborate with Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to repatriate them.

[8] "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service)."

advances which "allow them to analyze bones and learn new facts and pursue important research on diet, disease, genetics and related matters."[9] One such scientist against NAGPRA and its foundations is William Bass, an American forensic anthropologist who fought vehemently against the reburial of Native American human remains. In 1981, he defended the scientific investigation of human remains found from the Crow Creek Massacre.[10] He describes the thought of reburial as "disturbing" as it would hinder the gathering of "in depth knowledge needed to understand man's adaptation to his environment and culture."[11] Bass speaks for those who clearly do not recognize that cultural respect ranks ethically higher than scientific investigation. His argument exemplifies how some believe pedagogical benefit outweighs cultural values ascribed to human remains. However, he does not speak for every forensic anthropologist.

In 1993, the American Alliance of Museums (hereafter AAM) created a *Code of Ethics for Museums* which establishes that "the unique and special nature of human remains and funerary and sacred objects is recognized as the basis of all decisions concerning such collections."[12] The AAM provides guidelines for American museums but these are just guidelines, not law. In 1996, the American Journal of Conservation (hereafter AIC) updated their guidelines to include specific regulations for the conservation of human remains. In *The Ethical Dilemma Facing Conservation: Care and Treatment of Human Skeletal Remains and Mortuary*

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[9] U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Indian Affairs, Providing for the Protection of Native American Remains and Cultural Patrimony,101st Cong., 2d sess., 1990, S. Rep. 101–473, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/upload/SR101-473.pdf.

[10]Willey, P., and Thomas E. Emerson. "The Osteology and Archaeology of the Crow Creek Massacre." *Plains Anthropologist* 38, no. 145 (1993): 227–69. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25669192.

[11] Bass, William M. "Skeletal Biology on the United States Great Plains: A History and Personal Narrative."Plains Anthropologist 26, no. 94 (1981): 12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25667732.

[12] American Alliance of Museums. "AAM Code of Ethics for Museums." American Alliance of Museums, 1993, amended 2000, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/.

*Objects*, the need for "introducing stronger language into the AIC *Code of Ethics* and *Guidelines for Practice* for the responsible treatment of corporeal materials" is addressed and the argument that the cultural values ascribed to bone are stripped by museums is introduced.[13] The AAM and AIC's updated guidelines demonstrate a shift in attitude in the United States towards prioritizing the treatment of human remains over display and scientific investigation.

In Britain, especially at the British Museum, the repatriation of cultural items is controlled by Parliament. This adds a layer of complexity to the situation where the museum staff does not have the authority to elicit significant change. This hinders the ability to repatriate human remains, discussed further in chapter two. As of 1991, the Museum Ethnographers Group adopted *Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums.*[14] It acknowledges the history of collecting, that human remains in museums were often "acquired under conditions of unequal relationships" and sets guidelines covering collections management, display and interpretation, and requests for the return of human remains.[15] As of 2005, the Department of Digital Culture in the United Kingdom also established the *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums.*[16] Unlike the United States, where museums are independent non-profit institutions, this is based on parliamentary legislation.[17] It seeks to give a legal and ethical framework for the treatment of human remains as well as deal with the curation, care, and use of

[13] LaRoche, Cheryl J.; McGowan, Gary S. "The Ethical Dilemma Facing Conservation: Care and Treatment of Human Skeletal Remains and Mortuary Objects" (PDF). Journal of the American Institute for Conservation. Vol. 35, no. 2 (1996): pp. 109-121.
[14] Museum Ethnographers Group. "Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums."*Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 6 (1994): 22–24. This was revised on 7 April 1994. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793551.
[15] Museum Ethnographers Group.
[16] Department for Digital Culture. "Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums." GOV.UK. GOV.UK, October 10, 2005.
[17] It supports the Human Tissue Act of 2004. See Chapter Two.

remains, and provides a framework for handling claims for the return of remains.[18] Just nine years later, in 2014, the British Museum published *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum.* This collection of essays was the first of its kind, covering a range of topics concerning their collection of human remains from curation to care. It was created to "emphasize that for a museum of any size, it is impossible to separate out issues of repatriation or display from those of conservation, documentation and research in relation to human remains."[19] The museum is arguing to justify their retention of human remains for scientific inquiry by separating research from ethical issues.[20]

As for France, there is a "marked absence of research on the actual practice of repatriation" and a lack of published guidelines regarding the display of human remains in museums.[21] It was not until 2002 that a "major reform on museum management recognized the legitimacy of deaccession and created the Commission Scientifique National des Collections (referred to as 'the Commission'), whose mission was to oversee such a process."[22] The Commission discussed guidelines for the display of human remains in museums, however, the president of the Commission "underlined that it did not have the authority to discuss criteria for the repatriation of human remains."[23] Prior to this, it was near impossible to legally deaccession any objects from French Museum collections. Like in Britain, there are legal hoops which

[18] Department for Digital Culture. "Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums." GOV.UK. GOV.UK, October 10, 2005.
[19] Fletcher, Alexandra, Daniel Antoine, and J. D. Hill. *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum*. London: British Museum, 2014.
[20] This is discussed further in chapter two.
[21] Jean-Nabbache, Simon. "Toward Repatriation of Human Remains as a Postcolonial Museum Practice." *Museum Worlds* 10, no. 1 (2022): 193–98. https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2022.100115.
[22] Vigneron, Sophie. "The Repatriation of Human Remains in France: 20 Years of (Mal)Practice." *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, no. 2 (6) (2020): 313–38. https://doi.org/10.4467/2450050xsnr.20.022.13025.
[23] Vigneron, Sophie.

virtually prevent the repatriation of objects and human remains.[24] In 2018, the Sarr-Savoy report on the *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage, Toward a New Relational Ethics* in France "brought forward the issue of the restitution and repatriation of cultural objects, including human remains that were collected during the violent era of colonization."[25] In January of 2022, the French senate put forward a bill which proposed "facilitating the restitution of human remains in French public collections."[26] This bill was not made law and in January of 2023, French politicians tried again to implement the ability to repatriate remains into law. They are now "planning to introduce three framework laws intended to facilitate the restitution of contentious artworks as well as human remains currently held within the country's public collections."[27] This demonstrates that most countries are trying to move forward with law but there are obstacles.

In 2013, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published a *Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums*.[28] Section 1 covers the care and display of human remains. ICOM, created in 1946, represents museums and museum professionals. They are "committed to the promotion and protection of natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible."[29] Museums look to national organizations for guidance, like ICOM which is the

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[24] Discussed further in chapter four.
[25] F. Sarr, B. Savoy, The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics, November 2018, https://www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr_savoy_en.pdf
[26] Harris, Gareth. "What Has Happened to France's Grand Plans to Return Africa's Heritage?" The Art Newspaper - International art news and events. The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, June 1, 2022. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/06/01/what-has-happened-to-frances-grand-plans-to-return-africas-heritage.
[27] Lauter, Devorah. "France's Ministry of Culture Is Pushing Forward a Trio of Groundbreaking Laws That May Have Sweeping Effects on Restitution." Artnet News, January 18, 2023. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/frances-ministry-of-culture-is-pushing-forward-a-trio-of-groundbreaking-laws-which-may-have-sweeping-effects-on-restitution-2243534.
[28] "Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums." International Council of Museums. International Council of Museums, 2013. https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/.
[29] "International Council of Museums." International Council of Museums | www.icom.museum. Observatory Illicit Traffic, January 1, 1970. https://www.obs-traffic.museum/international-council-museums#:~:text=The%20International%20Council%20of%20Museums,and%20future%2C%20tangible%20and%20intangible.

world representative organization that sets guidelines for museums to follow. Although ICOM does not have legal jurisdiction over member museums, they chose to publish guidelines. Now, ten years later, it is more than overdue for museums to implement these practices seriously. This disturbing silence from museums demonstrates how a wider legal framework is necessary to elicit change.

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of five main chapters. The first chapter will discuss the history and evolving attitudes regarding human remains, and will address the core issues of provenance, repatriation, and curation. Chapters two through four are case studies of the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme, respectively. Chapter four, the Musée de l'Homme, is written in French and accompanied by an English summary in fulfillment of the French Honors. Each case study discusses the collection of human remains within the respective institution. The museum's actions are considered alongside museum policy, guidelines, and national legislation.

# Chapter 1
# History and Evolving Attitudes

Museums are not neutral institutions. Numerous western museums were created to showcase the success of imperialist nations and the curiosites "discovered" during colonialism. Although we now allegedly exist in a postcolonial world, museums continue to retain and profit off of the cultural material gained from the colonial era. The display of human remains is a complex topic within this context; there are evolving guidelines regarding best practices in order to uphold a high standard of respect for human remains and their cultures as we attempt to progress towards a postcolonial society. This chapter discusses the historically biased nature of museums and how modern display practices regarding human remains came into fruition. It explores the challenges concerning care, research, storage, and display.

## Historical Context

Human remains have been unethically collected and exhibited in museums for hundreds of years, acquired through "racist, colonial and paternalistic collecting practices."[30] There is a duality of cultural and scientific values ascribed to human bone yet a lack of respect for the dead has been enshrouded by pedagogical benefit. Scientific investigation has taken precedence over the "cultural concerns for the sacred, spiritual, and metaphysical significance of human remains."[31] This is because western, white, and European governments have historically abused

[30] Clary, Katie Stringer. "Human Remains in Museums Today." History News 73, no. 4 (2018): 12–19. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26975176.
[31] LaRoche, Cheryl J.; McGowan, Gary S. "The Ethical Dilemma Facing Conservation: Care and Treatment of Human Skeletal Remains and Mortuary Objects" (PDF). Journal of the American Institute for Conservation. Vol. 35, no. 2 (1996): pp. 109-121.

their power over indigenous and non-western communities to gain economic and cultural capital. The western world views their technological advancements as proof that they are superior, and deserving of power. This is exemplified in museums as they "have always been purveyors of power" and the museum's collection is a "symbolic reflection[s] of political hierarchy."[32] This is how the retention of cultural property is justified. Museums actively remove spiritual value from human remains and violate cultural beliefs. The removal of corporeal material from its mortuary context "desanctifies and nullifies the talismanic properties of the remains by displacing the spirit, while deconsecration renders the sacred object secular."[33] Once human remains are removed from their burial sites, the original funerary context is null and void. When one's mortuary context is disturbed it is near impossible to reconstruct in a museum in accordance with the deceased's death practices. There is no amount of educational value to the benefit of the western public about the deceased or their funerary practices which can justify the destruction of in situ burials. The displacement of the deceased from their burial site to a museum demonstrates the prioritization of the educational value of the remains to western society. As for spectatorship, specifically, it is difficult for a western viewer to discern that the presence of human remains in museums may be unethical. Because of western viewer's preconceptions about death and their own cultural funerary practices, it is difficult to distinguish that human remains seen on display are real people, not objects. It is the display that strips the remains from the context.

The most pertinent example of human remains in museums is anthropogenic mummified remains, specifically from Ancient Egypt. The public's fascination with mummies, or

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[32] Lakshmi, Rama. "Musings on Museums." India International Centre Quarterly 37, no. 1 (2010): 102–17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23006459.

[33] LaRoche, Cheryl J.; McGowan, Gary S. "The Ethical Dilemma Facing Conservation: Care and Treatment of Human Skeletal Remains and Mortuary Objects" (PDF). Journal of the American Institute for Conservation. Vol. 35, no. 2 (1996): pp. 109-121.

mummified remains, stems from colonialist archaeological excavations of Egypt around the turn of the 19th century.[34] Although mummies were previously sold around the world as curiosities, structured scientific study of Ancient Egyptian mummies began in the early 20th century. The first X-ray of a mummy was performed in 1903 by Howard Carter and Grafton Elliot Smith in Cairo on the mummy of Thutmose IV.[35] In addition to x-rays, wrapped mummified remains were often unwrapped in order to understand the mummification process and extract objects within the wrappings. Now, CT scanning is regularly performed on mummified remains by scientists. It enables scientists to examine the body and any contents within the wrappings without unwrapping the remains. The preliminary scientific analyses of anthropogenic mummified remains (in the early 19th century) ignited Egyptomania, the western world's fascination with mummies and Ancient Egypt. The Western world is enthralled by Ancient Egypt and mummified people with a sort of macabre curiosity about life after death and the physical preservation of the body. This is accompanied by a sense of exoticism and mysticism that has been propagated by western Egyptoligsts since the 19th century. From November 1976 to April 1979, the exhibition "Treasures of Tutankhamun," which exhibited the contents of King Tut's tomb, traveled the US and drew millions of visitors.[36] This fascination persists today; a simple google search of "mummies" amasses 474,000,000 results.[37] Ancient Egyptian art collections are found at most major museums and their presence contributes to a sense of wholeness for a museum. Having a

[34] A mummy is generally an animal or human being whose body, soft tissues, and/or organs have been preserved either naturally or unnaturally for ceremonial purposes. Now referred to as mummified person or mummified remains.
[35] Cockburn, Aidan, Eve Cockburn, and Theodore Allen Reyman. *Mummies, Disease and Ancient Culture*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),3.
[36] Hindley, Meredith, Andrew Lawler, and Amy Lifson. "King Tut: A Classic Blockbuster Museum Exhibition That Began as a Diplomatic Gesture." The National Endowment for the Humanities. Accessed March 28, 2023. https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2015/septemberoctober/feature/king-tut-classic-blockbuster-museum-exhibition-began-diplom#:~:text=Using%20a%20replica%20of%20an,%2C%20to%20January%2015%2C%201978.
[37] As of 17 March 2023.

comprehensive collection of Ancient Egyptian art gives museums a level of credibility, in addition to being a great marketing tool. Museums greatly profit off of ticket sales and mummy themed gift shop items, thus the possession and retention of Ancient Egyptian remains directly contributes financially to the museum.[38] Although this fascination with Ancient Egypt is still present, the treatment of mummified remains today is different than it was one hundred years ago.

**Evolving Attitudes**

Attitudes towards collecting human remains and mummified people have changed since many of them entered museum collections. Attitudes continue to evolve rapidly with the growing imperative that the museum world reflects a more accessible and ethically considerate society. According to a recent HyperAllergic article, *Forget "Mummy," It's "Mummified Person" Now*, there is a growing movement to replace the term "mummy" with "mummified person" or "mummified remains" in the interest of preserving the legacy of the once living person. It is important for museums to keep up with changing attitudes as they progress towards understanding the most ethical way of caring for their collections. The silence from some museums in response to changing attitudes is extremely disturbing. Although contemporary expectations have not always been standardized, it is crucial that museums recognize mistakes, become accountable, and align with best practices, rather than continuing with outdated and improper procedures.

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[38] Beard, Mary. "Souvenirs of Culture: Deciphering (in) the Museum." *Art History* 15, no. 4 (December 1992): 505–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.1992.tb00504.x.

The modern interest in viewing human remains is influenced by how dying, unlike burial practices, is a universal experience for all humans. Human remains, especially of well preserved spontaneous mummification, show a commonality between ourselves and the people who lived thousands of years earlier. They show incredible snapshots of human life from the past; seeing a well-preserved ancient body that looks almost alive fulfills a natural curiosity of what humans looked like thousands of years ago. It is rare that we see the skeletons of people who are living, so it is no surprise that human remains peak a natural curiosity. This fascination is perpetuated by the people who continue to excavate, care for, and exhibit human remains. As "attitudes to death and human remains…change within cultures over time,"[39] it is increasingly considered unethical to remove human remains from their burial sites, especially without the input or against the wishes of the communities which share the deceased's ancestral lineage. It is up to the institutions which we trust to educate the public to encourage an accurate perception of human remains as more than a curiosity.

**Museum's Influence**

Museums are perceived as fact-giving, non-partisan institutions. Statistically, they are the most trusted purveyors of information for the general public.[40] Because of their authoritative nature, museums are responsible for the information that they convey. They have a social obligation to communicate unbiased, accurate information as they influence public opinion, interest, and education. However, museums across the world actively make unethical decisions

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[39]Museum Ethnographers Group. "Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums."*Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 6 (1994): 22–24. This was revised on 7 April 1994. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793551.
[40] American Alliance of Museums. "Museums and Trust 2021." American Alliance of Museums, October 13, 2021. https://www.aam-us.org/2021/09/30/museums-and-trust-2021/.

regarding human remains, despite the growing higher expectation for museum best practices. Museums cannot be impartial, they are not neutral institutions. They have the potential to be "'relevant, socially-engaged spaces in our communities'" yet continue to choose to ignore evolving guidelines.[41] It is up to larger museums to self-analyze, lead by example, and be vocal about the changes they are making for the world to see and follow.

Museums are not all created equal. They differ in what they choose to collect and the information they convey. There are different purposes for displaying human remains, depending on the type of museum or cultural institution. Art historians and archaeologists have different objectives, thus human remains serve different purposes when on display. The three museums in this comparative study are classified differently and thus demonstrate different objectives: The British Museum is a history museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an encyclopedic art museum, and the Musée de l'Homme is an anthropological museum. An art museum, such as the Met, will typically display mummified people within the context of art and decoration.[42] For instance, mummified people from Ancient Egypt will have paintings on their wrappings and sarcophagi which are evidential of art and funerary practices. This information can tell us about the lives of the Ancient Egyptians or what kind of materials they had available to them. An anthropological museum, such the Musée de l'Homme, will also display mummified people but will place greater emphasis on how the art represents specific cultures or how the remains inform us about the deceased's lifestyle or society. In addition, an anthropological museum is more

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[41] Carlsson, Rebecca. "Can Museums Be Neutral or Should They Take a Stance?" MuseumNext, July 7, 2022. https://www.museumnext.com/article/can-museums-be-neutral-or-should-they-take-a-stance/.

[42]Nayyar, Rhea. "Forget 'Mummy," It's 'Mummified Person' Now." Hyperallergic, January 27, 2023. https://hyperallergic.com/795453/forget-mummy-its-mummified-person-now-museums/.
The jargon concerning mummies is evolving to be more considerate of the person. Mummies now can be referred to as "mummified persons" or "mummified remains."

inclined to have human remains which are not incorporated within an artwork, such as bone fragments or spontaneous mummification. They may be more equipped to examine it with modern science and technology, such as performing CT scans and other imaging, to learn more about the individual's body and health which can educate about their time period and society. Although there is overlap between the types of museums, as they all choose to display human remains, the museums take on different approaches to the material. Anthropological museums focus on presenting the narratives or the role that the object played in society which would influence the production of the object. Art museums tend to focus on presenting aesthetics and how art works reflect the time and attitudes in which they were produced. The institution, whether it be art or anthropological, conveys information to the public and influences their understanding and perception of the human remains.

Regardless of the intention for display, there is a set of standards for institutions that display human remains. These must be reached in order to guarantee a significant level of care and ethicality in regard to respect for the deceased and their descendant culture. Since curatorial decisions regarding the display of remains comes down to a discussion of power and who holds it, I argue that remains will be treated most ethically when in the hands of cultural stakeholders who are best able to determine proper display practices in accordance with their culture, and intended mortuary practices. Curators control the narrative of the deceased and their descendant culture, thus voice should be given to the culture of origin in order to avoid the portrayal of intentional or unintentional bias.

The curator shapes the viewer's perception and chooses what information to prioritize. They can easily, or even unwittingly, leave out important information or categorization. This is

problematic especially when a curator conveys inauthentic information because they do not share cultural heritage with the deceased. Curators can not teach what they are not aware of, and are at a disadvantage if they are trying to create a narrative of a culture that they do not belong to or are lacking first hand knowledge of. Regardless of education and experience, it is beneficial to involve consultants from the descendant communities to contribute to the proper display.[43] There is a pedagogical benefit to housing remains in a foreign institution that is accessible to the public, but pedagogical concerns should not usurp remaining inline with the intended burial practices. As a basis for starting to have a more ethical standard for displaying human remains and in the interest of best practice, challenges concerning aspects of **provenance**, **repatriation**, and **curation** must be addressed.

**Provenance, Repatriation, and Curation**

An artwork's history of ownership, from the time of its creation to the present, is known as **provenance**. The study of provenance is essential for museums to uphold a standard of best practice, and critical for legal and ethical reasons.[44] Provenance records are a way to demonstrate that the object was not stolen or illegally acquired by the institution. In many western museums, provenance records are lacking and there is an unclear history of how human remains came into collections. This is due in part to the underdevelopment of universal guidelines for museums. Gaps in provenance records can speak loudly towards an unethical history or improper acquisition by today's standards. Refusal by museums to address or publicize missing or

[43] A tangential example is how certain Native American exhibitions will consult with living descendants for exhibition curation. This demonstrates how this is being done in other contexts, but must be adopted for the display of human remains.
[44] "Provenance Research." Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Accessed April 21, 2023. https://www.mfa.org/collections/provenance.

questionable provenance records can indicate unethical means of acquisition. Provenance information should be open access for public record including the acknowledgement of unclear or missing information. In order to maintain "open dialogue between museum professionals and indigenous peoples" it is necessary that museums offer transparency on records of provenance.[45] Museums should go out of their way to make the provenance of human remains available to the cultures of origin regardless if repatriation requests have been made. If the place of origin is not known, investigation efforts should be made by the host institution and once established, the place of origin may be contacted. Then, the place of origin can decide if they would like to claim the remains.

If the place of origin decides to claim ownership of human remains, efforts to repatriate should not be ignored by the institution. All requests for **repatriation**, to return the human remains to their place of origin, should be "accorded respect and treated sensitively," especially when there is a lack of provenance or a suggestion that the remains were acquired illegally.[46] This process would take time to accomplish and could be expedited if museums were to hire a specific team responsible for the investigation of provenance and repatriation. The team would be able to navigate any legal hoops towards repatriation.[47] This way there may be more of a concentration to uphold the ethical standard for museum collections. This suggested process is of

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[45] Museum Ethnographers Group. "Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums."*Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 6 (1994): 22. This was revised on 7 April 1994. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793551.

[46]Museum Ethnographers Group. "Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums."*Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 6 (1994): 24. This was revised on 7 April 1994. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793551.

[47] "Colonial-Era Provenance." Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Accessed April 21, 2023. https://www.mfa.org/collections/provenance/colonial-era-provenance.
An example of this is the Nazi-Era Provenance research done by the Boston Museum of Fine Art, to investigate the provenance of their European painting collection and determine if any works were acquired as a result of Nazi looting. This process can be applied to human remains collections.

course riddled with legal bounds which block museums and nations from repatriating. If museums are able to prove that the issue of repatriating humans is justified it is more likely that governments can reassess any policies which prohibit the rightful return of remains.

If remains are to be kept in an institution, away from their place of origin, and are to be displayed, curators should make decisions in accordance with the deceased's culture and funerary practices. **Curation**, the action or process of selecting, organizing, and looking after the items in a collection or exhibition, is where the collection and museum intersect.[48] As stated by ICOM, "where extant representatives of the cultural groups exist, any display, representation, research and/or deaccession must be done in full consultation with the groups involved."[49] Curators display decisions and choices on what information to communicate ultimately informs the public's perception of the deceased and their descendant culture. If the curator does not share the culture of origin with the deceased it is more likely that they may not have a full and proper understanding or connection to the proper cultural and funeral practices. It would be more ethical for museums to prioritize hiring or consulting curators and researchers with relevant education or background, or who share a common cultural heritage with the deceased to give a voice to the culture of origin. They may better influence decisions about display and are in line with encouraging a more accessible and diverse museum world by also removing discriminatory barriers towards staff.

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[48] Oxford English Dictionary.
[49] "Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums." International Council of Museums. International Council of Museums, 2013. https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/.

**Hypocrisy of Western Behavior**

Is it fair to question why we should care about ethics. It may seem silly to advocate for the thousands of years old deceased with minimal connection to the modern world. This lack of understanding stems from the portrayal of human remains and funerary objects of colonized cultures, from the colonizer's lens. This is exactly why ethics should be at the forefront of caring for and displaying human remains. The history of neglectful display of remains in museums highlights years of colonialism. There is a clear dichotomy between the treatment and portrayal of western remains versus non-western and indigenous remains. For example, the tombs of famous European leaders in western contexts are often available for visit but are not on display per se. Notable western figures, in accordance with their cultural funerary practices, are predominantly interred within tombs or cathedrals yet it is rare that the remains are visible. The remains are kept within large tombs with their names simply engraved in grand lettering, that the public can visit. The spaces often discourage picture taking despite the remains not being visible. The bodies have been kept within Europe, even returned there if they were to die outside of the continent. This is a substantial difference in behavior when compared to the treatment of non-western remains that are analyzed and put on display as objects of curiosity. The notable western remains are not located within museums, they are located within state buildings, religious buildings, or cemeteries which correspond with their religious and cultural death and burial practices. The context, which is what defines the viewer's perspective, is completely different than if they were to be kept as an artifact in a museum. The remains of high status

people within their culture are not visible as that would be a sign of disrespect for the dead in their society. They are kept within their tombs and out of reach.

Western museums tend to exhibit human remains of non-western descent differently than remains of western descent. It is rare that western remains are on display at all, especially within the United States. Small remains, typically bone fragments, are sometimes found within religious reliquaries yet they serve a different purpose than they would in a museum. They function for religious reasons and are not typically gawked at from interest or shown to receive a profit. One example is the religious reliquary located at St. Trophime in Arles, France, which displays bone fragments attributed to various saints, however there is no accompanying narrative (fig I) (fig. II). Visitors come to the reliquary to pray before the relics of particular saints. The remains serve a localized religious function, they are not used for education or studied for science. There are European descendant remains on display in Europe and the Americas but it is rare to encounter European remains displayed in non-western countries.

**Remains are Human, Not Objects**

Ultimately, if bodies are to be displayed for contemporary purposes, there is no way to consult the dead, but it is possible to proceed with ethical intentions in consideration of the deceased and to acknowledge their culture. When viewing ancient or mummified remains, people experience a disconnection from reality, where they do not distinguish that the human remains were once living. This may explain why museums are not reluctant to display human remains or offer content warnings. Remains, especially partial remains or bone fragments like a head or a leg, are viewed and treated as objects within the context of a museum where they are

**Fig I.** Reliquary at Saint Trophime, Arles, France.

**Fig II**. Relic of Saint Roch, Saint Trophime, Arles, France.

displayed among thousands of artifacts. Cultural institutions perpetuate this phenomenon in the way that remains in museums, especially mummified people, are glorified and commercialized. Institutions benefit greatly from selling souvenirs to commemorate the visitor's experience at the museum, such examples being postcards of unsettling images of unwrapped mummified people that would justify content warnings if posted online today.[50]

Contemporary visitors in the current digital age tend to look first with their cameras, in an often failed attempt to save and return later to the information, instead of experiencing it in the moment. This furthers the disconnection from reality where viewers do not understand the depth of the subject matter, that the remains are of real people. If viewers were to spend more time reading about the mummified remains and viewing them, they would start to make more of a connection. Museums also profit off of the deceased by sensationalizing them to sell tickets and exhibition catalogs and books. Mummified people are painted to be ghoulish and frightening, along the same lines as ghosts and typical halloween lore. This perpetuates the idea that mummified people are not real people, and creates a subconscious misunderstanding of mummified people despite existing extensive academic research of their lives and culture.

There are also cases of spontaneous mummification that have been uncovered in modern times. Should these remains be treated with the same respect as intentionally preserved remains? Cases of spontaneous mummification such as Otzi the iceman, a Copper Age man whose body was preserved in the Tyrolean alps, or bog bodies are displayed as scientific and cultural revelations, yet they did not choose to be preserved.[51] Since in these instances their preservation

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[50] Beard, Mary. "Souvenirs of Culture: Deciphering (in) the Museum." *Art History* 15, no. 4 (December 1992): 505–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.1992.tb00504.x.

[51] "Ötzi the Iceman, Museum of Archaeology Bolzano." Accessed March 28, 2023. https://www.iceman.it/en/the-iceman/.

was unintentional, we must call into question whether these individuals would consent to be on display. Generally, once a preserved individual is discovered, the findings are published in the media and the individual is moved to a lab to eventually be put on display. The most ethical course, in the best interest of the person, would be to thoroughly research the death practices from their culture and perform some sort of reburial within the nation of origin. Once discovered, the default plan of action in accordance with museum best practice is to maintain or preserve the individual's state of being as well as possible. This means caring for the remains so that their condition does not become worse by storing them considerately such as in a temperature controlled environment and preventing accidental damage or loss. Caring for remains like this, acknowledging their humanness, maintains a higher level of respect.

**Future Improvements**

It would be in the best interest of ethics to create a distinction of human remains amongst other artifacts. Context should be given to viewers prior to entering a gallery which contains remains, especially if the remains are wrapped, covered, or otherwise non-distinguishable as human remains to the untrained eye. For example, much like when entering a special exhibition, context can be given as wall text prior to entering a gallery or as the preliminary information text on the item labels. Visitors should be taught and encouraged to have respect for the remains as a key component of museum etiquette and protocol. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, refraining from taking pictures of human remains and speaking softly. There are other methods to signal to the viewer to behave appropriately around remains, such as dramatic lighting and dark gallery walls with intimate display cases. Remains can be kept separate from other objects,

to discourage confusion or the suggestion that they are the same. Providing viewers with context allows them to gain a new perspective to understand and appreciate how to treat remains in museums under the context of art history or anthropology. Museums hold the power to create this visitor experience or to neglect it.

The following three chapters will discuss how the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Musée de l'Homme treat human remains within relative socio-political contexts. The evaluation of the museums in the following case studies will expand upon what was introduced in this chapter.

# Chapter 2
# The British Museum

## Mission Statement

"[The British Museum's] aim is to hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ('the collection'), and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited."

## Introduction

The British Museum houses a collection of over 6,000 human remains for display and research throughout multiple departments.[52] This chapter discusses the collection of human remains within the Egypt and Sudan Department at the British Museum alongside museum policy, British law, and current controversies concerning ethical issues and repatriation at the museum. In this chapter I weigh the ethicality of the museum's past and current actions regarding the remains, suggesting how they can alter the display to better satisfy best practice. I detail my observations gathered during my internship at the British Museum where I spoke with staff members, including the curator of the bioarchaeology lab for the Egypt and Sudan department, who disclosed their personal feelings about the controversies surrounding the display of human remains and the museum.

## History of the Museum and Controversy

With an average of 5.9 million visitors per year, the British Museum is one of the largest and most renowned museums in the world. Established by an act of Parliament in 1753, now governed by the British Museum Act of 1963, the museum is a non-departmental public body

[52] Rebecca Whiting (co-investigator, department of Egypt and Sudan, British Museum), tour of the bioarchaeology lab, November 10th, 2022.

accountable to Parliament and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.[53] Complimentary general admission was established with the fundamental ideologies of the institution and is maintained by their exempt charity status.[54] Despite the enormous collection, only 1% of the 8 million objects are on display daily. Most of the collection is available for independent study upon request of researchers.

Recently, over the last decade or so, the British Museum has been under fire for issues concerning ethics, most infamously artifacts removed from non-European nations without consent or permission. The museum's authority is under scrutiny from a world-wide public as awareness of repatriation issues concerning objects such as the Parthenon Marbles and the Benin Bronzes gain traction especially amongst the efforts of other London museums to return known looted objects.[55] Academics and the general public alike are questioning the institution's right to claim ownership of items and the legality which they claim as support. The Trustees of the museum, who determine the institution's actions, actively choose to keep looted objects in an effort to maintain the museum's status. This status is supported by the breadth of the collection, yet their reluctance to acknowledge ethics speaks loudly. The museum's actions, or lack thereof,

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[53] "Governance." The British Museum. Accessed February 13, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/governance#:~:text=The%20British%20Museum%20is%20a,(Opens%20in%20new%20window).

[54] Museum, British. "Fact Sheet - British Museum." British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/fact_sheet_bm_collection.pdf.

[55] The Parthenon Marbles are otherwise known by the British Museum as the Elgin marbles named after Lord Elgin who is associated with the (questionable) transfer of the marbles from Greece to Britain. They were removed from Greece and installed in the British Museum in the beginning of the 19th century. Greece has requested the return of the Marbles, they have even built a museum to house them currently full of copies, but the British Museum has refused their persistent requests.

The Benin Bronzes are a group of West African sculptures which were looted by the British Army during the second half of the 19th century. Other English cultural institutions, such as the Horniman Museum in London, have recognized the unethical acquisition of the sculptures and have repatriated them back to West Africa. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has also returned some Benin Bronzes. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

Other institutions, such as the Horniman Museum located in South London have made major strides to repatriate the Benin Bronzes.

in turn undermine the credibility of the museum as a world class, internationally recognized cultural institution. In my opinion, the museum's behavior carries on a colonial and supremacist legacy that it should be anything but prideful of.

Because the weight of the museum's actions are determined by the Trustees and law, it is unfair to characterize the entirety of the British Museum in this way. The actions and beliefs of the museum Trustees, who govern the museum's socio-political actions, do not universally reflect the beliefs of the British Museum staff. The staff generally are in opposition with the actions of the Trustees to retain the looted items.[56] Due to the amount of press that is published to underscore the museum's unethical actions, the general public has quickly formed assumptions on either side of the debate with little knowledge of the details of the situation, regardless of the museum's intentions. It is of my belief that actions speak louder than words; if the pro-repatriation staff and public truly wanted to see change come to fruition they would take more intense actions with boycotting the museum and protesting to the Trustees.

Despite their clear reluctance to repatriate items, the British Museum does acknowledge certain informational gaps within the collection. The museum recognizes that there is missing provenance information concerning objects in the collection, as stated on the website and press releases. It rationalizes the collecting processes on the website, stating: "[some] ways in which objects entered the British Museum are no longer current or acceptable, though others remain familiar. Objects continue to be collected to ensure the collection remains relevant and representative today and into the future."[57] I believe that this acknowledgement is disingenuous, published to minimize public scrutiny as the museum does not apologize or claim that it intends

[56] Based on personal communications with staff of the libraries and archives, September - December, 2022.
[57] Museum, British. "Collecting Histories." The British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/collecting-histories.

to make repatriation efforts. If the institution truly felt remorse for the foundation of the collection, it would do more than put bandaids over bullet holes. Considering how much of the collection's provenance is questionable, there have been minimal efforts made to address repatriation issues further.

**Human Remains at the British Museum**

Along with the aforementioned issues concerning the museum's lingering colonial tendencies, there are ethical concerns pertaining to the museum's extensive collection of 6,000 human remains. The British Museum claims to be mindful of ethical obligations, ensuring that the human remains held in its care are always treated and displayed with respect and dignity.[58] However, the majority of the human remains owned by the museum contradict the museum's mission statement (appendix 1) to "hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ('the collection'), and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited."[59] Remains that are not on display or actively under research do not satisfy this mission. Many of the remains from various collection departments are stored in cardboard boxes throughout the museum without much information about them.[60] Most of the human remains that are on display belong to the Egypt and Sudan department, one of the most notable and popular collections.

The Egypt and Sudan Department most famously houses anthropogenic mummified

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[58] "Human Remains." The British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains.
[59] "Privacy Policy." The British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/privacy-policy#:~:text=The%20British%20Museum%20was%20founded,%2C%20curated%2C%20researched%20and%20exhibited.
[60] Based on personal observation.

remains from Ancient Egypt. The popular *Egyptian death and afterlife: mummies* galleries, Rooms 62 and 63 (fig. III), display 23 of the 85 mummified people belonging to this curatorial department.[61] The rest of the anthropogenic mummified remains are stored in the department's climate controlled bioarchaeology storage. The galleries "[explore] death and the afterlife,"[62] focusing on the process of mummification, tombs, and death and afterlife rituals. The wall text, describing the ancient Egyptian burial process and the passage to the afterlife, is simple yet informative. They describe the elements which fulfill the Ancient Egyptians' beliefs about the afterlife and maintaining it, yet contradict them by having excavated the tombs and putting

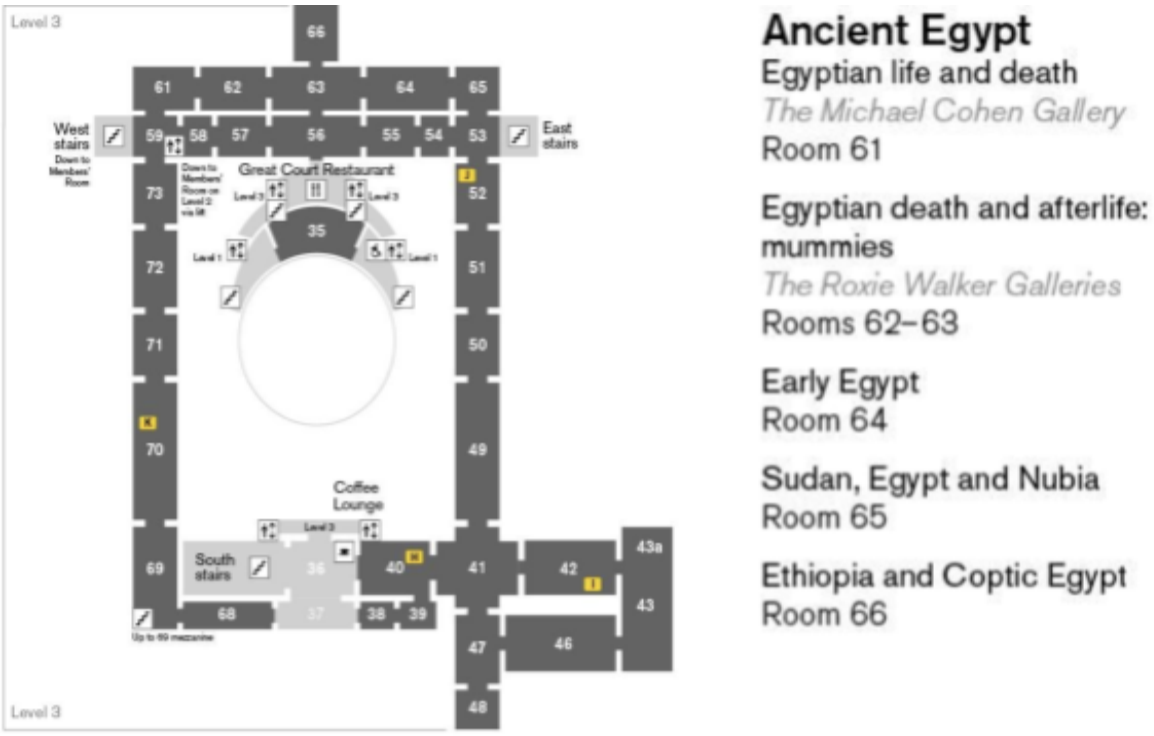


**Figure III.** British Museum Map Level 3.(Photo: (c) The Trustees of the British Museum)

[61] Rebecca Whiting, Project curator of archaeology, November 9, 2022.
[62] "Egyptian Death and Afterlife: Mummies." The British Museum. Accessed March 20, 2023. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/egyptian-death-and-afterlife-mummies.

on display the mummified people and tomb objects. The galleries are not conducive to an atmosphere which supports the ethical display of human remains or advocates for a somber viewing experience. As visitors enter these galleries, they are abruptly confronted by the human remains. Because the anthropogenic mummified remains are wrapped, the physical body is not visible to the naked eye. This creates a disconnect where viewers do not realize that they are in the presence of deceased people. There are no content warnings at the entrances of the galleries to indicate the presence of sensitive material. As a result of the previously mentioned public craze for ancient Egyptian mummified people, the galleries are noticeably more crowded than most. They are filled with chatter and excited children running amidst the display cases. Visitors observe the mummified people more often with their phones than their eyes, even posing for pictures with the remains. They behave this way without questioning if it is disrespectful because the museum has not taught them to respect the deceased people. It is the British Museum's responsibility to educate the public on the ethical way to view the remains.

Within the department's galleries, there are also cases of spontaneous mummification on display. In these instances, the remains are uncovered. It is much easier for visitors to distinguish the reality of what is in front of them when the remains are visible. One such example is a spontaneously mummified human known as the Gebelein Man, on display in gallery 64. He was fatally shot in the back over 5,000 years ago, and his body was preserved in the hot Egyptian sand. The Gebelelin Man is located in a reconstructed burial site within a glass case in the middle of the Early Egypt gallery (fig. IV). In 2012, the mummified man was taken to the Bupa Cromwell Hospital in London to be CT scanned. This was done to "learn more about his life and

**Fig IV.** Gebelein Man, Predynastic period, around 3500 BC, Gebelein, Egypt, British Museum EA32751 (Photo: (c) The Trustees of the British Museum)

his death in ways never before possible."[63] The CT scan allowed the researchers to determine a more accurate biological profile including the approximate age at death and cause of death.[64] The gallery now includes an accompanying screen which shows a virtual autopsy of the mummified man and educates the museum goer about the technology used and the results of the museum's research. This addition of technology has boosted visitor engagement with the Gebelein Man and improved understanding that the mummified man was real as visitors now interact with the technology and then return to the display for a second look.[65]

In some cases, like with the addition of technology alongside the Gebelein Man, there are other sides to the story which show efforts from the British Museum staff to adhere to evolving ethical attitudes. Additionally, although the Egypt and Sudan department's collection includes

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[63] Antoine, Daniel. "Virtual Autopsy: Discover How the Ancient Egyptian Gebelein Man Died." The British Museum, November 16, 2012. https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/virtual-autopsy-discover-how-ancient-egyptian-gebelein-man-died.

[64] Information available at https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/virtual-autopsy-discover-how-ancient-egyptian-gebelein-man-died.

[65] Rebecca Whiting (co-investigator, department of Egypt and Sudan, British Museum), tour of the bioarchaeology lab, November 10th, 2022.

unwrapped mummified remains, they claim to have never unwrapped a mummified person in their possession.[66] The unwrapped mummified remains were acquired in that state. Additionally, it is shocking to learn that within the last decade the British Museum acquired 2,000 Sudanese human remains. One may assume, due to the museum's reputation, that this occurred unethically. However, it was the Sudanese government that donated the collection to the British museum for research and care purposes. Sudan at the time did not have trained bio-archaeologists or the facilities to care for or perform research on the remains. The British Museum is helping to train Sudanese archaeologists and set up proper facilities so that the collection can eventually be returned and Sudan will be able to care for them in their home country.[67]

**British Law**

The museum is conservative in many of its beliefs and actions as they are dictated both by the Trustees who want to preserve the museum's mission, and British law. As mentioned, the Trustees want to carry out the museum's mission to "hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ('the collection'), and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited."[68] In other words, the Trustees of the museum see that the objects in their collection best belong in the care of their institution, and that the nations of origin are not suited to house them. They argue that the remains are of higher pedagogical value in London where tourists can see them, than in the nations of origin where they would be accessible to the descendant cultures. It is almost as if the

[66] Rebecca Whiting.
[67] Rebecca Whiting.
[68] "Privacy Policy." The British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/privacy-policy#:~:text=The%20British%20Museum%20was%20founded,%2C%20curated%2C%20researched%20and%20exhibited.

museum is suggesting that non-western countries do not have tourists and are incapable of caring for their own cultural artifacts.

British law furthers this ideology; there are laws which prohibit the museum from returning items in question even if it was the museum's intention. The British Museum Act of 1963, enacted by parliament, states that the Trustees are forbidden from approving deaccession, the act of removing a museum object from the collection, unless under special circumstances.[69] There are contemporary amendments concerning the legal obstacles preventing repatriation of objects, such as the Human Tissue Act of 2004 and the subsequent British Museum Human Remains Policy, developed under the recommendations of the code of practice published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2005.[70] This act gave power to the Trustees to deaccession human remains, yet there is still a clear reluctance to do so in order to "safeguard the Museum's collection for the benefit of present and future generations."[71] The act excludes the transfer of human remains when the person passed away more than one thousand years prior to October 3rd, 2005, when section 47 of the Human Tissue act 2004 was enacted. Thus, the policy as written prevents the return of Ancient Egyptian mummified people.[72] The policy justifies the museum's retention of remains claiming it is in the interest of public benefit stating:

> 5.2.1 Human remains are a record of the varied ways that different societies have conceived of death and disposed of the remains of the dead;
> 5.2.2 Human remains in the Collection help advance important research in fields such as archaeology, human biology, the history of disease, palaeoepidemiology, bioarchaeology, physical anthropology, forensics and genetics;

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[69] British Museum Act, 1963, Chapter 24 § (1963).
[70] "Human Remains." The British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains.
[71] "Human Remains." The British Museum.
[72] All of the mummified people in the collection died prior to 1005 CE (one thousand years prior to 2005).

> 5.2.3 Human remains, which have been physically modified by a person working within a cultural context, or which form part of an archaeological record, illuminate other objects in the Collection.

They also acknowledge that:

> 5.4 The Trustees will continue to add to the Collection and lawfully hold human remains on the condition that, as far as is possible, provenance has been clearly established, there is no suspicion of illicit trade and that the remains are of potential public interest to the Museum's worldwide audience.

Collectively, these claims delegitimize the same benefit the remains would hold in institutions with more relevant connection to the remains. For example, it would be more appropriate for the mummified remains from ancient Egypt to be in the care of Egyptian museums. The British Museum, without words, falsely declare themselves as the only place capable of caring for or studying the remains. The remains would be of public and pedagogical benefit elsewhere, especially if there are requests for their return to their nation of origin. Since the date of ancient Egyptian remains is excluded from repatriation consideration, not surprisingly the museum has not published any record of repatriation claims for remains within the Egypt and Sudan Department. By contrast, they have published six repatriation requests for human remains, all outside of the Egypt and Sudan Department.[73] The western public would find it odd if their ancestral remains were held in a non-western museum and studied by their researchers instead of our own, so why does this not apply the other way around?

**Ethics and Best Practice**

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, there are many perspectives from which to view the

[73] They can be found on the museum's website under "Claims on human remains at the Museum" [https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains].

ethicality of displaying human remains at the British Museum. To begin, the sheer presence of the ancient Egyptian human remains within the museum's collection negates the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians to maintain a final resting place. There is no debating that the removal of the remains from their original burial is unethical. The museum acknowledges that the burial process and tomb items are crucial to the journey to the afterlife, the fundamental belief of the people at the time, yet both objects and mummified people have been removed from the original site, separated from their tombs and shipped to a different continent. This practice is not in accordance with the intended death practice and is disrespectful to the individual and their culture. Frankly, the tombs should not have been excavated in the first place. In certain cases, it is valid to argue that tomb excavations were necessary to avoid tomb robbing, however at the very least the mummified remains should have been reburied in a safe and controlled area in Egypt.[74] This argument places the museum and excavation teams in an unjustified white savior position where they feel they have rightful ownership just because they "found" the tombs. Finders keepers should not apply here. It is more ethical that the findings remain in the country of origin, where, foremost, they are accessible to the nation and to tourists secondarily.

In western museums, it is not possible for contemporaries to ever fully understand the burial practices or wishes of the deceased, especially of non-western ancient cultures. Since ancient Egyptians are not present to speak for themselves, the argument can go both ways. On one hand, they are unable to consent to display. On the other hand, their practices may not be relevant and thus modern society can do as they wish with the remains in their own interest. According to British museum policy (appendix 1), the museum's Trustees see the value of access

[74] The issue is further complicated by the fact that there is also fault in the hands of the Egyptian government who sold off "mummies" and excavation spots for monetary gain. This is too much to get into for the purposes of this thesis.

to the remains - for research, benefiting the collection, and for public view - to be higher than the value of respecting the dead and their culture. However, it is again unethical for these objects and mummified people to be on display as they did not give consent. As the tombs were intended as a *final* resting place, it is highly unlikely that the deceased would have chosen to be removed from their tombs, moved to London, and put on display for millions of viewers. At what point do remains become so dehumanized that consent is not considered? For the British Museum, it is a matter of age that dictates when human remains become so dehumanized that consent is not considered.

The unofficial role of the British Museum as a "savior" of heritage comes into play repeatedly and is used to justify the retention of cultural material. This retention is additionally justified with pedagogical intent. From their perspective, as outlined in the museum's mission statement (appendix 1), the knowledge gained and shared from research and display of human remains outweighs any ethical missteps. Although seemingly sound, the pedagogical justification is not applicable to all of the human remains at the museum. There is an evident contrast between the treatment and attitude towards mummified people versus other human bone fragments: mummified people within the Egypt and Sudan department are kept in the climate controlled, bioarchaeology store room while there are also cardboard boxes on shelves in the Greece and Rome department ominously labeled "human remains." What constitutes a better care of mummified remains over bones? If the remains are not on display or being studied, their possession by the museum is in conflict with the mission statement. After the museum has conducted its own research, why not return the remains to the country of origin and let them decide to do further research, display, store, or rebury them?

Modern technology offers a solution to this issue. There is no longer the same need to physically display mummified people as there was in the past. As mentioned with the Gebelein man, non-intrusive technology such as CT scans allows for more comprehensive research to be done. This information can be published online making it more accessible to the general and international public than visiting the museum. The high quality imaging and scanning available in the modern age allows for almost perfect copies/replicas, like 3-d modeling/printing, to be made. These replicas can replace the real human remains on display. Then, the museum can continue to conduct its research without the need for the real remains, allowing for the repatriation of the remains. Additionally, the British museum has an extensive online collection with information on over four million objects, where many of the remains can be seen. If images and information of the remains are openly accessible online, they are arguably more accessible to the public than visiting the museum.

Although mummified people are a common curiosity to the world, they have become more of a spectacle to look at than just to study. This is witnessed first hand in the galleries where the behavior of visitors demonstrates a preference for taking pictures and selfies, rather than reading about what they are looking at. This phenomenon of gawking at the mummified remains and shouting around them is disrespectful to the dead. Because mummified remains have become such a point of entertainment and are so ancient, there is a phenomenon occurring that viewers do not fully realize that they are in the presence of real people. There is a disconnection partially due to the fact that most of the remains are not exposed. The galleries should encourage respectful behavior so people are mostly quiet and respectful in the presence of the dead, but this behavior is stripped away because of the context in which the bodies are

presented. They are on display like any other objects in the museum, and there is not a true distinction between a physical object and human remains.

The British Museum can afford to make adjustments to the galleries to promote a more respectful environment such as lowering the lighting and prohibiting pictures, or having a statement of respect prior to entry into the galleries. At the moment, there is no true distinction between these galleries and the rest of the wing. Visitors can walk into the galleries from four different sides without warning that human remains will be present. The rooms are brightly colored with full lighting. It would be beneficial to close off the galleries so that there is one point of entrance and exit. The walls could be painted a darker more somber color with darker and more focused lighting. These changes would reduce the amount of traffic through the rooms and would encourage quiet voices.[75] There may also be wall text prior to entry which explains to the viewer that they will be in the presence of human remains and that it is proper to keep voices low and can forbid photography. If the mummified people are to remain on display, adjustments like this would allow for a more ethical environment and viewing experience without removal.

**Recent Improvements**

Ethics or best practice in the case of displaying human remains is not one size fits all. It is best viewed not as a strict set of laws, but as a spectrum where each case must be assessed independently. Each case must be evaluated based on its cultural ties, its provenance, and the purpose it serves in the museum. The collection of human remains at the British Museum is problematic and multifaceted. The most problematic issues are repatriation and provenance; it is

[75] Similar changes have been done in the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo. The British Museum would benefit by following the lead of the descendant community.

clear that the museum claims rightful ownership of remains especially from non-western descent and is unwilling to budge.[76] The British Museum has made recent strides in tune with contemporary changes to be more considerate of human remains in its collection. Since repatriation or removing remains from display is off the table for now, allow these issues to be put on a shelf for a moment. The staff in charge of those collections do not have the power to repatriate, but are at the forefront of evolving attitudes in terms of respect for the remains. In terms of display, the most recent exhibition including human remains, *Hieroglyphs: unlocking ancient Egypt,* exemplified how the museum's permanent galleries may change to more ethically display remains.[77] There was a clear content warning prior to entering the gallery, which stated that the exhibition featured "human remains on closed display" (fig. V). It also explained to the visitor that the museum is "committed to curating human remains with care, respect and dignity." This encourages the visitor to adopt a respectful mindset to carry throughout the exhibition. The anthropogenic mummified persons from ancient Egypt were displayed in a quiet corner at the end of the exhibition, away from the buzz of the main gallery. The walls were dark with contrasting, ambient lighting which encouraged a quiet, introspective atmosphere. This exhibition demonstrates that the British Museum is capable of creating a more respectful environment for human remains on display. The permanent galleries should be renovated to match the elements of this exhibition design.

The museum staff has made other improvements in addition to display practices. As mentioned in chapter one, they have adopted new, more appropriate language when referring to human remains. They eliminated the term "mummy" and replaced it with "mummified remains"

[76] Most relevantly remains from Ancient Egypt.
[77] This exhibition ran from 13 October 2022 through 19 February 2023.

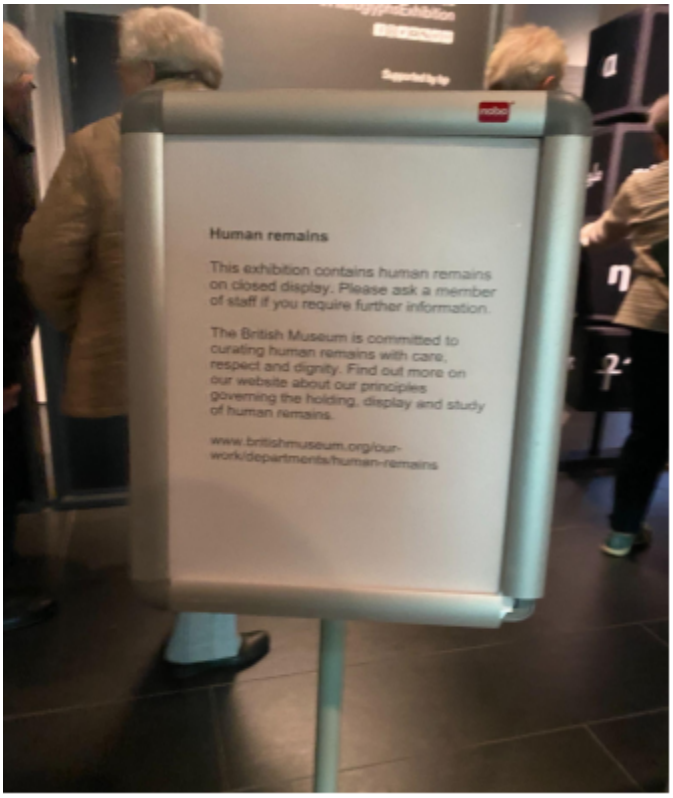


**Fig V.** 18 November 2022. Content warning sign prior to entry of *Hieroglyphs: unlocking ancient Egypt*. The British Museum.

or "mummified person." In addition to this, the museum is admittedly on a more positive path when addressing issues of provenance, despite refusal to repatriate. The website addresses where most of the collection originated, acknowledging gaps, and explaining that most of the objects were gifts or donated by Sir Hans Sloane's collection at the time of the museum's foundation.[78] Much of the early acquisitions are recorded in the Trustee's minutes, located within the museum's in-house archives.[79] It is possible to submit a request for repatriation of human

[78] Museum, British. "Collecting Histories." The British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/collecting-histories.
[79] The British Museum's Archive is located within the building in the Round Reading Room. The Round Reading Room was the original home of the British Library before it moved to King's Cross. The British Museum Library is not affiliated with the British Library.

remains although there are legal barriers as mentioned. The museum also has published a collection of essays, *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum* which details the issues surrounding human remains in museum collections, offering possible solutions to the dilemmas relating to their curation, storage, access management and display.[80]

**Conclusion**

The British Museum is still attached to its colonial tendencies and current policies have certainly caused justified controversy. The Trustees appear to not be budging in terms of repatriating human remains; however, it is evident that evolving attitudes towards displaying and caring for human remains are concerns among the staff. With their status as a world renowned museum, the British Museum is responsible for respecting and implementing changes in ethics and paving the way for smaller institutions to follow. The staff can start to suggest changes and accept new rhetoric as they have been doing, but it is up to the Trustees and the law to adapt these changes as well as advocate for the best interest of the deceased.

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These physical documents are technically accessible to the public if requested, but the archives are overwhelmed and not in a state to be accessed by the public currently. These documents have not been digitized and are not available on open access. The trustees' minutes and other documents relevant to acquisitions are available on microfilm in the Anthropological Library and Research center located in the museum. These are accessible to the public solely by appointment.

[80] "Human Remains." The British Museum. British Museum. Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/human-remains.

# Chapter 3
# The Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Mission Statement

"The Metropolitan Museum of Art collects, studies, conserves, and presents significant works of art across time and cultures in order to connect all people to creativity, knowledge, ideas, and one another."

## Introduction

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is regarded as an authoritative institution because they portray an adherence to best practices. As an encyclopedic art museum, their collection of human remains is not as expansive as other types of institutions like the British Museum. However, at the Met, human remains are "represented in virtually every curatorial collection."[81] The Met is not as transparent as they portray themselves, currently facing backlash for their unethical collection history and failure to properly address it. This chapter critiques the acquisition, display, and treatment of human remains at the Met given their mission statement, efforts to improve policy, and compliance with repatriation laws like NAGPRA. Although the Met demonstrates the intention to comply with evolving guidelines, such as declaring their dedication to develop a human remains policy, it is legal intervention which incentivises any true changes that they make. It is their lack of transparency which undermines their credibility and suggests that they are hiding much more than they will acknowledge.

## Past Mistakes

In 1935, the Met performed one of the most egregious examples of unethical practices

[81] Schorsch, Deborah. "Caring for The Met: 150 Years of Conservation." Metmuseum.org. Accessed January 27, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/conservation-stories/history-of-conservation.

towards an anthropogenic mummified person from Ancient Egypt. The *Mummy of Wah* was unwrapped in order to extract and display jewelry that was identified through x-ray technology.[82] This process was justified because the museum intended to preserve the mummy by taking "careful notes and detailed photographs" in addition to "[making] a faithful replica with its own mask and bandages" which was deposited into Wah's coffin. Besides the publication from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* in 1940, there has been no recent statement from the Met regarding this ethical misstep.[83] There is also no record of Wah's mummified remains on the museum's online catalog. The Met's ignorance of this occurrence speaks volumes to any sort of transparency they claim to have regarding the collection. Due to modern technology and understanding of ethics, it is hard to imagine that mummified remains would be unwrapped today. This exemplifies the weight of the Met's wrongdoing and the peculiarity of their silence.

**History of the Museum**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, located in the heart of New York City, is one of the largest art museums in the world. With a growing collection of over 1.5 million objects, this encyclopedic art museum "covers five thousand years of global art history, divided among seventeen curatorial departments."[84] The grand building is owned by the City of New York and supported by taxpayer dollars.[85] Most recently, the Met has faced allegations concerning unethical practices such as the ownership of looted objects. As of March 2023, it has come to

[82] Winlock, H. E. (1940). The Mummy of Waḥ Unwrapped. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, *35*(12), 253–259. https://doi.org/10.2307/3256926
[83] Winlock, H. E. (1940).
[84] Hollein , Max, and Marina Kellen. "The Met's Role in Protecting Cultural Heritage." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 7, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2018/met-role-protecting-cultural-heritage.
[85] The Met is funded by city and state taxes as well as private donations.

light that over 1,000 works in the Met's collection had been previously owned by persons "indicted or convicted of antiquities crimes."[86] Unlike the British Museum, the Met has complied with the government for the repatriation of items to claimant countries. In 2019, the Met coordinated with the Manhattan District Attorney's office to return the gilded Coffin of Nedjemankh to the Government of Egypt.[87] After a "rigorous vetting process in recognition of the 1970 UNESCO treaty, in adherence to the Association of Art Museum Director's Guidelines on the Acquisition of Ancient Art and Archaeological Materials, and in compliance with federal and state laws," it had come to light that the coffin was stolen from Egypt in 2011.[88] In September of 2022, the Manhattan District Attorney's office seized twenty seven artifacts from the Met; twenty-one to return to Italy and six to return to Egypt.[89] It is clear that the Met is compliant with the review of their collection and not adamantly opposed to the restitution of objects of unethical provenance.

As of 2018, the Met's current director, Max Hollein, acknowledged the recently evolving policies and practices regarding the acquisition of antiquities and archaeological materials. He claims that the Met has "encouraged greater respect for cultural heritage, and greater transparency," through maintaining four core principles: transparency, research, ethical

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[86] Woodman, Spencer, Malia Politzer, Delphine Reuter, and Namrata Sharma. "More than 1000 Artifacts in Metropolitan Museum of Art Catalog Linked to Alleged Looting and Trafficking Figures." ICIJ, March 20, 2023. https://www.icij.org/investigations/hidden-treasures/more-than-1000-artifacts-in-metropolitan-museum-of-art-catalog-linked-to-alleged-looting-and-trafficking-figures/.

[87] "The Metropolitan Museum of Art Returns Coffin to Egypt." Metmuseum.org, February 15, 2019. https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2019/metropolitan-museum-of-art-returns-coffin-to-egypt.

[88] UNESCO refers to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization which aims at "promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture." "The Metropolitan Museum of Art Returns Coffin to Egypt."

[89] Valle, Lauren del, Liam Reilly, and Alaa Elassar. "Dozens of Artifacts Seized from the Metropolitan Museum of Art." CNN. Cable News Network, September 2, 2022. https://www.cnn.com/style/article/met-museum-artifacts-seized-new-york-looting/index.html.

acquisition, and restitution.[90] Because of this direct acknowledgement to improve policy, the Met does not spend as much time under fire in the media spotlight like the British Museum does. Although the Met shows intention to comply with evolving attitudes, the museum is not as transparent about the contents of its collections as the British Museum. Information about knowingly questionable objects does not enter the public sphere until restitution efforts are already underway.

Despite being more open to making efforts to adhere to changing ethical standards, the Met is considerably less transparent than the British Museum. While it vows to "... 'continually [research] the history of works in the collection…and [have] a long track record of acting on new information as appropriate,'... "[91] the Met is only transparent when forced by the media or the government. As it has acknowledged, it is the Met's responsibility to perform their due diligence. In recent years, the Met developed the "1970 rule" for ethical acquisition where "the Museum does not acquire an object without proof that it was outside its country of origin before 1970 or legally exported,"[92] with exceptions. However, this does not acknowledge a dedication for assessing the provenance of the existing collection. In conjunction with this, there is lack of transparency and provenance records regarding human remains within the museum's collection; the Met "[lacks] high quality origin records"[93] which virtually prevents the ability for provenance research. Unlike the British Museum, which has an open access catalog of all of the human

[90] Hollein , Max, and Marina Kellen. "The Met's Role in Protecting Cultural Heritage." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 7, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2018/met-role-protecting-cultural-heritage.
[91] Woodman, Spencer, Malia Politzer, Delphine Reuter, and Namrata Sharma. "More than 1000 Artifacts in Metropolitan Museum of Art Catalog Linked to Alleged Looting and Trafficking Figures." ICIJ, March 20, 2023. https://www.icij.org/investigations/hidden-treasures/more-than-1000-artifacts-in-metropolitan-museum-of-art-catalog-linked-to-alleged-looting-and-trafficking-figures/.
[92] "The Met's Role in Protecting Cultural Heritage."
[93] Woodman, Spencer.

remains in the collection, the Met keeps this information under wraps. The Met has updated its online presence, uploading over 470,000 of its artworks onto the online collection, including mentions of human remains.[94] The Met has also made significant progress towards publishing the ownership history of the online collection, eighty-four percent uploaded by 2018, yet information on the collection of human remains is left out.[95]

Regardless of these efforts to make the collection more accessible by publishing it online, the Met's possession of human remains is in conflict with its mission statement's (appendix 2) claim to "present significant works of art across time." Entries on the online collection such as *Human remains: right femur of child?* (accession number: X.435) and *Human remains: right tibia of child?* (accession number: X.426) are not art objects. Yet, they are classified as such. Neither of the listings have published provenance records other than that they were accessioned in the "early seventies." The ownership of remains such as these by museums, raises concerns about their modern ethical integrity. This may be contrasted with the presence of decorated sarcophagi and wrapped mummies can logically be considered art as well as human remains since they fall within the purview of the museum's mission as an art museum. Bone fragments would be more logical, not necessarily ethical, in the context of an anthropological museum. The Met does not display these bones, as they do not fit within the purview of their collection. What is the true motive or the benefit that housing the bone fragments brings to the Met?

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[94] "Latest Updates." The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection API. Accessed January 27, 2023. https://metmuseum.github.io/.

[95] Hollein , Max, and Marina Kellen. "The Met's Role in Protecting Cultural Heritage." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 7, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2018/met-role-protecting-cultural-heritage.

**Human Remains at the Met**

Regardless of the means of acquisition, the Met has a collection of human remains which should be cared for and displayed according to best practices, especially as one of the leading museums in the United States. Human remains are found throughout the Met's collection areas, ranging from bone fragments to mummified remains to a 19th century Lyre made with a human skull. However, certain bone fragments and partially unwrapped mummified remains are recorded in the online collection with public data and provenance information, yet images are often restricted.[96] And, based on the online records, the unwrapped items are rarely on display. One example is an entry titled: *Human remains: right femur of child?* from an unknown period in Egypt with an unknown donor from the early 1970s. The point of retaining such fragments in the collection can be questioned especially when they are not actively under research, without pedagogical justification. There is little available information about the item thus it does not serve much of a purpose to the public or for internal research. It is not clear how these items entered the collection, suggesting that it was likely an unethical acquisition.

The Met's ownership of mummified remains highlights questions surrounding issues of colonialism and romantic notions of Ancient Egypt, especially when viewed through the lens of Egyptomania.[97] Many of the mummified people were accessioned to the Met in the early 20th century, around the time of Howard Carter's "discovery" of the Tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922.[98] During the early 20th century in the United States there was a growing interest in Ancient Egypt,

[96] Discussed further below.
[97] Egyptomania refers to the Western World's fascination with Ancient Egypt, which peaked in the 19th century.
[98] Howard Carter (1874-1939) was a British Archaeologist and Egyptologist who discovered the tomb of King Tutankahmun in 1922.

much like what was happening in late 19th century Europe when Napoleon led a campaign in Egypt. The Met was intune with the growing craze, wanting to develop a collection of Egyptian Art like European museums. Interestingly enough, according to the Met's open access provenance records, some of the mummified people in the collection were purchased directly from the Egyptian government in the 1920s. This fact begs the question, is this more of a reflection on the Egyptian government's role in Egyptomania, or does this speak for both parties involved? Were there exterior pressures which encouraged the Egyptian government to sell their cultural heritage?

The Met has at least sixteen wrapped mummified people listed in the online collection, fourteen of which are on display in the Egyptian art galleries.[99] Although the Met has performed offsite CT scans and other imaging on its mummified remains in the collection, they do not have a bioarchaeology lab within the institution.[100] There are at least three mummified people - *Mummy of Prince Amenemhat* (gallery 130), *Mummy of Lady Nefer* (gallery 130), and *Mummy of Kharushere* (gallery 126) - listed in the online catalog that do not feature images but are on display in the galleries. Images of human remains are generally frowned upon being published in the anthropological sphere as it is inconsiderate towards the deceased who is unable to provide consent. Publishing an image of the mummified person in the catalog entry on Met's website being unethical is indicative that the overall display of the person to the general public is not in the best interest of the deceased. Most of the human remains listed on the online catalog are not on display and pictures are not available. Examples include:

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[99] "Metropolitan Museum of Art Kids Q&A." Metropolitan Museum of Art . Accessed January 27, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/learn/family-map-and-guides/kids-qa/mysterious-mummies.pdf.

[100] A bioarchaeology lab would allow for more research on the mummified people to be performed on site, and would contribute to arguing that there is a strong pedagogical benefit to the Met keeping the human remains.

*Shoulder of a soldier with arrow embedded in it,* Accession Number: 27.3.138
*Human remains from the coffin of Ahmose,* Accession Number: 12.181.298c
*Head from the mummy of Tiye,* Accession Number: 25.3.181
*Contracted body which has been naturally mummified,* Accession Number: 99.3.5
*Partially unwrapped mummified hand with ring,* Accession Number: 06.1190

Much like the British Museum, the Met's Egyptian art galleries are not intimate spaces. The Lila Acheson Wallace Galleries of Egyptian Art, galleries 101 through 138, are located on the main entrance level right off of The Great Hall (figure VI) which permits a significant amount of foot traffic, much more than galleries on the upper floors would naturally warrant. However, the galleries and cases which contain the mummified remains are mostly concentrated in galleries 104 to 133. Away from the main entrances to the galleries, these spaces are more conducive to a respectful space. The galleries are darker with more focused lighting, accompanied by significantly less noise and chatter from visitors. The mummified remains are spread out within the galleries, allowing more attention to be paid to each individual instead of as a collective group. By contrast, the British Museum galleries are bright, crowded, and have multiple entryways. Additionally, the mummified persons are displayed in a way that does not distinguish them from regular art objects. They are contained within glass cases similar to shadow boxes, in the same way that objects are presented within the same galleries (fig. VII). This, again, does not aid the viewer to perceive the human remains as distinguished from other artworks and objects.


**Fig VI.** Metropolitan Museum of Art Map Level 1.


**Fig VII.** View of "Egypt Under Roman Rule" Gallery at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo © Deborah Feller.

The Egyptian art galleries opened in 1983, prior to contemporary discussions and evolving attitudes towards displaying mummified people. To create a gallery environment which would naturally encourage a more respectful environment for the mummified people, the Met would benefit from imposing similar strategies as previously suggested for the British Museum on the now outdated galleries. Although there are clear successes of the galleries to create a respectful environment, renovation would still be beneficial to the display. For one, the addition of preliminary wall text that informs the viewer of the presence of human remains is key to establishing this connection. The Met would benefit from following in the curatorial choices of NYC's Brooklyn Museum's where the visitor is confronted with contextual wall text (figure VIII) prior to entering the gallery which contains mummified remains. Visitors also could be prompted with thought provoking questions to solidify the connection that the remains are real, such as "How would you feel if your ancestors' remains or coffin were displayed in a museum?"[101] Similarly, display case labels for human remains can more clearly communicate that human remains are present, by the inclusion of a small emblem such as a skull or an additional label to remind visitors. The department has attempted to establish that the mummified remains are present but it is not consistent. For certain labels, like the *Mummy of Nesmin* (figure IX), the materials include "human remains." This information is small and not consistent with every label for mummified remains. The Egyptian Art Department displays the significant majority of human remains at the Met, thus it is necessary that it lead the way for changes toward best practices regarding human remains at the institution.

[101] Riggs, Christina. "Should We Be Displaying the Dead Bodies of Preserved Ancestors?" Hyperallergic, September 10, 2021. https://hyperallergic.com/595456/should-we-be-displaying-the-dead-bodies-of-preserved-ancestors/.


**Fig VIII.** Wall text at the Brooklyn Museum in the Egyptian Art galleries.

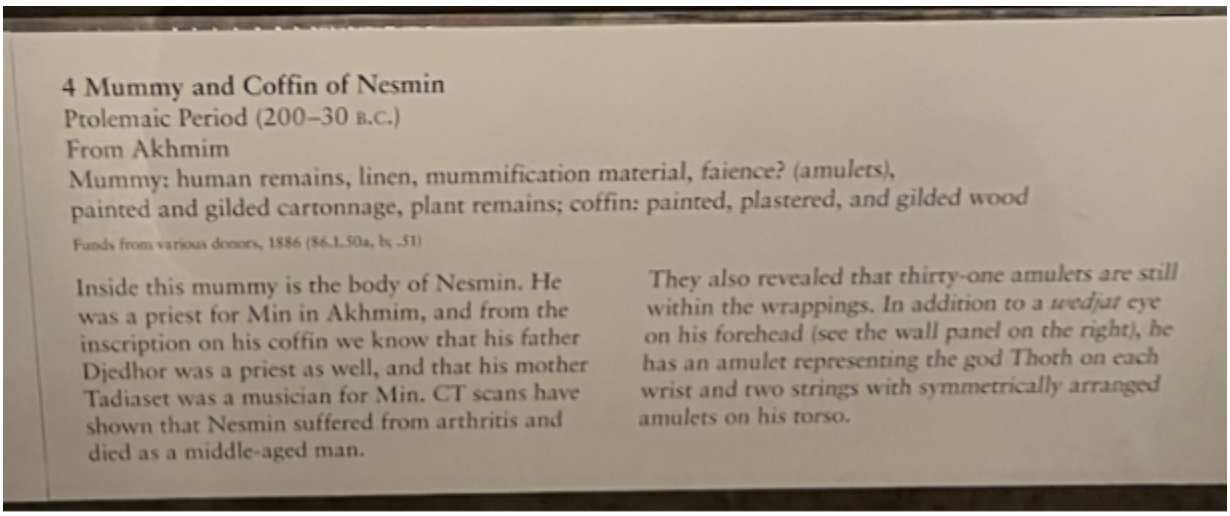


**Fig IX.** Label for *Mummy and Coffin of Nesmin*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The human remains in the collection are all referred to as artworks throughout the museum and on the online catalog. This highlights how institutionally the distinction has not yet been made to view human remains as such, not as artworks. Yes, anthropogenic mummified persons that are decorated can be analyzed through the art historical lens but they should be recognized as human first, art second. The display of human remains into museums removes their funerary context, thus shifting the general public's conception of mummified people to ultimately recognize their humanity starts at the institutional level. It is up to institutions like the Met to make clear that mummified people were living human beings and to request of the visitor a level of respect for them. Only then will visitors learn and educate themselves to better understand the ethical questions surrounding the display of remains and the dead.

In addition to the Egyptian Art Department, the Musical Instruments Department holds a notable collection of human remains. Although not currently on display, the department owns multiple instruments made with human skulls. Five examples are published on the online catalog: three similar lyres (figure X) from Africa and two drums (figure XI), one from Africa and one from Asia.[102] According to Ken Moore, the curator emeritus of the department, the lyre (89.4.1268) has not been exhibited since before 1980. Moore adds that it is most likely "a sensational item made by a clever indigenous entrepreneur for trade and profit with Europeans."[103] Additionally, the Damaru, or skull drum, "[was] used in Tibet in connection with meditation traditions focused on the impermanence of life and material existence. They were also thought to be powerful tools for protection against evil."[104] Moore's comments highlight the

[102] Moore, Ken. "Instruments of Macabre Origin." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, July 7, 2014. https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/of-note/2014/skull-lyre.
[103] Moore, Ken.
[104] Moore, Ken.

**Fig X.** Lyre. Central Africa, 19th century. Human skull, antelope horn, skin, gut, hair; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.1268)

**Fig XI.** Damaru. Tibet, 19th century. Skull, cloth, wax; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.213)

problematic nature of the skull in the Met's collection. He suggests an inauthenticity of the instrument compared to the instruments made to be used by indigenous people, and highlights the exploitation of non-western remains. These examples are the extent of the human remains included within the online collection. Since the Met does not have a public record of all of the human remains in the collection, there is no way of knowing if these three items represent the extent of human remains in the musical instruments collection. The provenance of the skull instruments is attributed mainly to Mary Elizabeth Adams Brown, a musical instruments collector who donated her collection to the Met.

**United States Law: NAGPRA**

There are no laws preventing the holding or display of human remains within museum collections in the United States other than the ownership of Native American remains. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (hereafter NAGPRA), enacted in 1990, "requires Federal agencies and museums to provide information about Native American cultural items to parties with standing and, upon presentation of a valid claim, ensure the item(s) undergo disposition or repatriation."[105] The goal of NAGPRA is to prioritize the holding and integrity of Native American remains and artifacts by Native Americans. NAGPRA denounces the ownership of remains by non-indigenous institutions, prioritizing the best interest of the deceased. NAGPRA not only facilitates the repatriation of human remains and forces museums to reassess collections. By facilitating the repatriation of human remains, the remains are taken

[105] Reclamation, Bureau of. "NAGPRA." NAGPRA | Bureau of Reclamation. Accessed February 4, 2023. https://www.usbr.gov/nagpra/.

off display. Although not codified by law, I argue that the best practices established by NAGPRA may be applicable to all human remains regardless of their origin.

According to NAGPRA, the descendant communities of the human remains are entitled to any known information regarding the deceased, and are able to request the return of the remains. The descendant communities, or local governments, should be met with full transparency and the opportunity to decide if they would like the remains back without any financial obligations. It is my belief that contemporary notions of ownership towards cultural heritage items by western museums (including human remains) should be void when objects were illicitly acquired during times of colonialism under a peaceful guise. Museums are not entitled to purchased or gifted objects which were originally taken unethically from nations. NAGPRA's ideology is a prime example of best practices which prioritizes the interest of the deceased, their culture, and descendant communities.

**Ethics and Best Practice**

In addition to applying the best practices suggested by NAGPRA to the collection of human remains at the Met, there are ways that the Met can replace the need to display authentic human remains. The Met already has facsimiles, almost exact copies of works, on display within the Egyptian art galleries. One such example is Charles Wilkinson's *Facsimile Painting of Geese, Tomb of Nefermaat and Itet,* 1920-1921. This shows that it is acceptable by its standards to have and display facsimiles, suggesting that it would be possible to create facsimiles of mummified people to replace the originals on display. This would be acting in the best interest of the deceased, but would also benefit the public pedagogically. In addition, replicas do not need to

be housed in the same environmentally created conditions as organic materials, and are replaceable. This would allow the public to interact more with the works and would accommodate the growing concern for accessibility rights, as it could also accommodate touch and multi-sensory friendly tours and effectively increasing the accessibility of the museum. The mummified people, if their condition is preserved well enough to permit it, could be returned to Egypt and replaced with the replicas.

Since there are no other laws or regulations regarding human remains for the museum to follow, it is in the interest of best practice to create policies concerning human remains. This would help the museum increase transparency, and set the standards for other institutions if the Met were to publicize its policies and practices regarding remains. According to the Met's website, they have begun to address these issues and are in the process of creating a "publicly accessible human remains policy" so that there is a guideline for how to care for and assess "culturally sensitive materials."[106] According to the Met conservator, Deborah Schorch, the Met's team is "surveying the most sensitive of [human remains]."[107] The policy will address the following issues: "how human remains are defined and cataloged, methodologies for appropriate display and storage, best practices for engaging in dialogue with source communities, and protocols for undertaking scientific analysis and conservation treatment."[108] This policy should not only address how the museum will regard human remains in the present, but should address the history and mistakes made. Additionally, the Met is responsible to communicate this to the museum goer and expand it into its pedagogy.

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[106] Schorsch, Deborah. "Caring for The Met: 150 Years of Conservation." Metmuseum.org. Accessed January 27, 2023.https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/conservation-stories/history-of-conservation.
[107] Schorsch, Deborah.
[108]Schorsch, Deborah.

**Conclusion**

As stated in its title, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an art museum at its core. Since they acquire works in the interest of aesthetics, they have significantly fewer remains than an historical or anthropological museum would. An art museum would not be collecting items which are not considered man made objects of art. Most of their collection of human remains are part of a mummified person or coffin which has been decorated as art (such as the mummified persons from ancient Egypt) or part of an artwork which incorporates bones (such as the aforementioned lyres).[109] The display of human remains at the Met, specifically those of mummified persons from Ancient Egypt, are justified because:

> "Egyptian Mummies are not just human remains, but a prime example of the artistic culture of ancient Egyptian society. Every mummy, and their accompanying funerary objects, demonstrates the talents of scribes, sculptors of wood and stone, painters, jewelers, and embalmers. Egyptian society heavily revolved around preparation for the afterlife, and in order to understand the artistic language of that culture, some argue that the display of these mummies is necessary."[110]

Furthermore, the displays at the art museum do not tend to be as graphic as what one would encounter at the British Museum or the Musée de l'homme who, as part of the purview of their institution, will display spontaneous mummification or bones. However, those institutions can still be scrutinized for their display of human remains. The Met can have off site scientific analyses performed on remains for research purposes, yet they don't serve the same benefit within the art museum as it would in an anthropological or scientific institution. While the Met

[109] The coffins and/or sarcophagi that contain mummified persons from Ancient Egypt are considered works of art, as they are decorated with paint on gesso.
[110] Bennett, Persephone. "Is It Art? -an Examination of Human Remains at the Met: Jonsbones: Osteology Educationp." JonsBones. Accessed January 27, 2023. https://www.jonsbones.com/blog/is-it-art-an-examination-of-human-remains-at-the-met.

remains an imperfect institution they are taking steps towards modifying past policies with the goal of achieving current best practices. They have made mistakes in the past and to prevent unethical actions going forward are developing a human remains policy. Ideally, the Met would be more transparent about the totality of human remains in the collection and what efforts are being made to address all of the human remains holdings.

# Chapter 4
# Le Musée de l'Homme

## Déclaration du Musée

"Il regroupe, sur les thématiques de l'évolution de l'Homme et des sociétés, les 5 missions du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle : conservation des collections, recherche, expertise, enseignement et diffusion des connaissances au plus grand nombre."

## Introduction

Le Musée de l'Homme possède une collection énorme d'ossements humains, mais la plupart est cachée du public. Comme en Grande-Bretagne et aux Etats-Unis, les collections des musées en France ont des fondements coloniaux. L'acquisition des ossements humains provient souvent de relations inégalitaires entre les cultures. Dans ce chapitre, je critique l'exposition et la possession des ossements humains dans ce musée qui contredisent leur déclaration de mission. Pour souligner ce contraste entre la manière de présenter ces ossements et la mission du Musée, je pars du contexte historique et de la législation française qui posent des entraves envers le déclenchement muséal pour ensuite discuter les mesures qui ont été prises par ce musée.[111] Une comparaison avec le British Museum et le Metropolitan Museum of Art permet d'évaluer leur éthique à l'égard de ces ossements.

## Histoire du Musée

Le Musée de l'Homme, fondé en 1937, supervisé par le Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, est un musée d'anthropologie situé dans le 16ème arrondissement à Paris. C'est le descendant du Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, qui était le premier musée d'anthropologie en France. Le Musée de l'Homme, dû à son histoire et à sa place, jouit d'une grande autorité

[111] La discussion d'exposer les ossements humains est une partie de la grande discussion du rapatriement et le déclenchent. Cependant, je fais référence au déclenchement muséale en France parce qu'il est un sujet lié qui démonte mon argument, mais le rapatriement n'est pas la concentration.

dans le domaine de la connaissance anthropologique. Situé dans le cœur de Paris, les collections attirent les touristes quotidiennement.  Le musée est le lieu de présentation de plusieurs restes humains, notamment pour la science et l'anthropologie, et se focalise sur l'évolution. La déclaration de mission du Musée de l'homme est composée de cinq buts de base: "conservation des collections, recherche, expertise, enseignement et diffusion des connaissances au plus grand nombre."[112] Leur collection se focalise sur l'évolution de l'homme et les galeries ont été organisées **"**avec pour objectif de comprendre l'humain et la place qu'il occupe dans le vivant, de raconter ses origines et de questionner nos marges d'adaptation dans le monde de demain."[113] Après une grande rénovation, le Musée de l'Homme a réouvert en 2015. L'agencement du musée a été rénové pour abriter "30,000 pièces ou lots de restes humains, appartenant à 23,000 individus" (fig XII)(fig XIII).[114] Cette collection inclut environ 17,600 crânes. En raison d'un jugement d'un comité d'éthique du musée, le musée rénové n'expose plus autant d'ossements dans l'exposition permanente comme avant la rénovation. Le comité d'éthique "a déterminé ce qui était montrable et ce qui ne l'était plus : enfants ou fœtus, corps nus, restes identifiés."[115] Cependant, le musée rénové n'a pas fait le déclenchement des ossements qui a déterminé de n'etait pas montrable.

Récemment, les collections et les actions du musée ont suscité des polémiques similaires à celles sus-mentionnées du British Museum. Le comportement des musées en France est armé à

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[112] Qu'est-Ce Que Le Musée De L'Homme ?" Musée de l'Homme. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://www.museedelhomme.fr/fr/qu-est-ce-que-le-musee-de-l-homme.
[113] "Qu'est-Ce Que Le Musée De L'Homme ?"
[114] Morin, Hervé. "Anthropologie: Des Squelettes Dans Les Limbes." Le Monde.fr. Le Monde, October 9, 2015.https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2015/10/12/anthropologie-des-squelettes-dans-les-limbes_4788041_1650684.html.
[115] Morin, Hervé.


**Fig XII.** “Dans la réserve des crânes.” Nicholas Krief/Divergence pour"Le Monde"

**Fig XIII.** “Au musée de l'homme, la réserve des squelettes.” Nicolas Krief/Divergence pour "Le Monde”

double tranchant: c'est évident qu'ils essaient de suivre les niveaux évolués des bonnes pratiques, comme l'évaluation par le comité d'éthique, mais ils refusent d'être franc sur l'étendue de la collection ou de faire le rapatriement des ossements humains. A première vue, la France a ouvert la voie pour le rapatriement des objets volés ou controversés. En Novembre 2021, la France a rendu 26 œuvres au Bénin, œuvres qui avaient été volées en 1892 par les soldats Français.[116] De plus, le Président Macron est le premier à faire des déclarations pour répondre aux collections colonisantes des musées mais le succès est minime. Cependant, ce geste courtoisie ne s'est pas appliqué pas aux ossements humains. Le Musée de l'homme ne traite pas ce problème malgré la controverse et les demandes pour le rapatriement ainsi que l'évolution de l'éthique à propos des restes humains et les meilleures politiques.

**Les restes humains**

Il y a des ossements humains dans tout le musée, et dans les salles d'exposition et stockés dans le sous-sol du musée. L'étendue de la collection des restes humains inclut des momies, des moulages anthropologiques, des restes humains modernes, et des restes paléoanthropologiques.[117] La plupart des restes sont squelettiques, pas de personnes momifiées,et les visiteurs peuvent voir ces os. Les restes humains au musée proviennent de cultures partout dans le monde et pour la plupart, ils proviennent de cultures de l'Europe moderne ou des communautés indigènes. Selon le musée, leur collection ostéologique de restes humains a "plus de 1,000 squelettes dont 360 articulés et 18,000 crânes."[118] La collection est le "le produit des recherches d'anatomie

[116] Reuters. "France Returns 26 Looted Artifacts and Artworks to Benin." CNN. Cable News Network, November 11, 2021. https://www.cnn.com/style/article/benin-art-returned-scli-intl/index.html.
[117] "Collection Ostéologique De Restes Humains." Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. Accessed February 15, 2023. https://www.mnhn.fr/fr/collection-osteologique-de-restes-humains.
[118] "Collection Ostéologique De Restes Humains."

médicale, d'anthropologie et de préhistoire réalisées par le Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle … dès le début du XVIIe siècle."[119] La plupart de ces restes humains sont trouvés dans le stockage du musée, loin des visiteurs.

Au Musée, il y a une salle d'expositions principales qui s'appelle la Galerie de l'Homme. Ici, les visiteurs peuvent voir beaucoup de restes humains, y compris des momies naturelles. Le Musée de l'Homme se distingue du British Museum et du Metropolitan Museum of Art par le fait qu'il n'y a pas une collection spécifique des personnes momifiées de l'Egypte Ancienne. En effet, ce musée a été fondé après le mouvement d'engouement et de curiosité pour l'Egypte Ancienne en Europe au 19e siècle. Le Musée de l'Homme aussi, contrairement au British Museum et le Met, est un musée d'anthropologie qui n'inclut pas de collection d'art. Par contre, les momies de l'Egypte Ancienne sont considérées comme des objets d'art au British Museum et le Met. Le Musée de l'Homme a plusieurs personnes momifiées par la momification naturelle et une collection d'os. Bien que le musée n'ait pas de département conservateur pour l'Egypte Ancienne, ils ont une collection d'autres momies. Ils certifient que leur collection de momies inclut: "63 momies complètes dont 33 égyptiennes, 23 sud-américaines et 7 d'autres origines, ainsi que 52 têtes momifiées isolées venant aussi d'Égypte et d'Amérique du Sud, et divers autres fragments de corps."[120] Ils déclarent qu'ils n'exposent pas, pour la plupart, des momies pour des raisons d'éthique et de conservation. Mais, ils en exposent cependant certaines dans la collection. Par comparaison avec le British Museum et le Met, le Musée de l'homme à la

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[119] Van Praët, Michel. "Le Musée De L'Homme Compte 18,000 Crânes: à Quoi Sert Cette Collection?" The Conversation, February 9, 2023. https://theconversation.com/le-musee-de-lhomme-compte-18-000-cranes-a-quoi-sert-cette-collection-196681.

[120] "Collection De Momies." Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. Accessed February 15, 2023. https://www.mnhn.fr/fr/collection-de-momies.
Le site-web du musée perpétue d'utiliser le terme "momie"." Ils n'utilisent pas "un personne momifiée": le nouveau jargon contemporain.

quantité de restes humains de plus grande nombre et le plus morbide; les restes sont le plus indicatif visuel des corps et la provenance ont les origines plus colonialistes. De plus, au Musée de l'Homme, la plupart des restes humains sont "d'origine extra-européenne, pour partie africaine, y représentent quelques milliers d'éléments" parce que dans les temps ils étaient collectés pour des raisons raciste.[121]

Dans la Galerie de l'Homme, il y a une vitrine qui expose des restes humains de cultures différentes pour expliquer les variations des rituels face à la mort et des croyances de la vie après la mort. Une plaque, intitulée *La mort et ses au-delà,* reconnaît que la mort est une renaissance pour plusieurs cultures et que "le rituel funéraire est alors indispensable pour permettre au défunt d'y accéder."[122] La vitrine contient trois restes humains et des objets funeraire relatifs aux restes, qui incluent:

1. *Momie chachapoya,* Pérou, 9e - 15e siecle (fig. XIV)
2. *Momie d'enfant égyptien,* Plastron en perles bleus orné d'un scarabée et d'un masque, Époque ptolémaïque, (332-30 avant notre ère)
3. *Urne funéraire de Marcel Cohen,* (1884-1974), spécialiste des langues d'Éthiopie ayant donné son corps au Muséum

Le sujet de cette vitrine montre que le musée est conscient des relations culturelles avec la mort, et comment les cultures ont des pratiques différentes. Les restes dans cette vitrine sont exposés comme ils sont des objets: il n'y a pas une clarification entre les restes humains et les

[121] Van Praët, Michel. "Le Musée De L'Homme Compte 18,000 Crânes: à Quoi Sert Cette Collection?" The Conversation, February 9, 2023. https://theconversation.com/le-musee-de-lhomme-compte-18-000-cranes-a-quoi-sert-cette-collection-196681.
[122] Le Musée de l'Homme.

**Fig XIV.** Momie Chachapoya, Pérou, 9-15 siécle, le Musée de l'Homme.

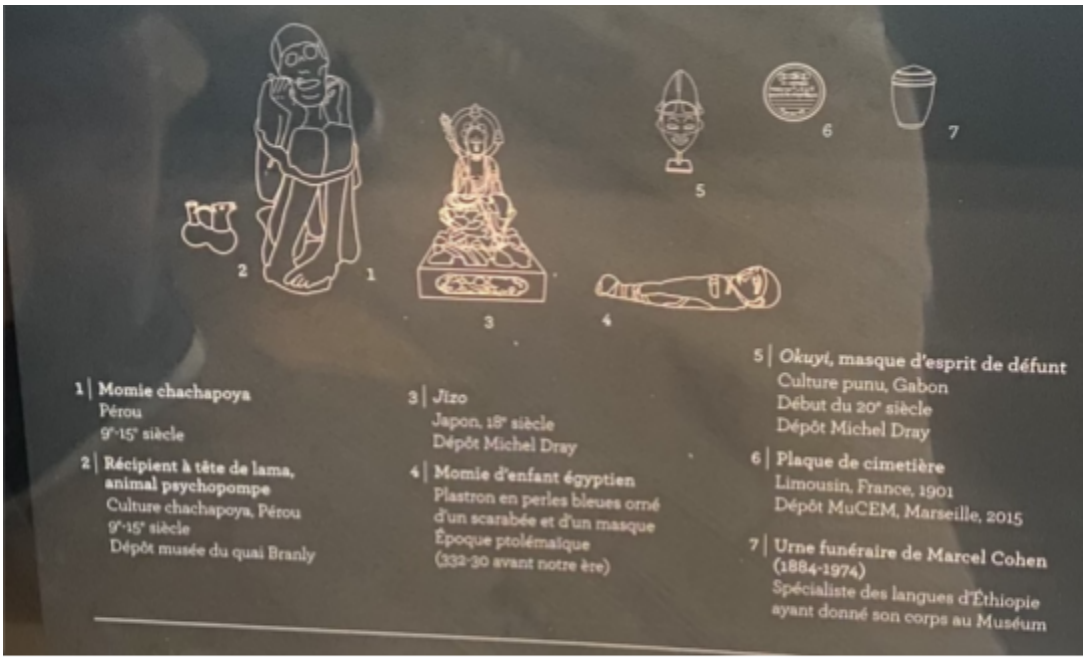


**Fig XV**. Le placard pour la vitrine "*La mort et ses au-delà*," Le Musée de l'Homme.

les objets dans la vitrine. Il n'y a pas d'indication pour distinguer que les restes humains sont vrais (fig. XV).

Le Musée de l'Homme offre aussi un exemple de restes humains d'origine occidentale. Le crâne de René Descartes - un philosophe, scientifique, et mathématicien français - fait exception au règlement du comité d'éthique qui évite d'exposer les restes identifiés.[123] Le reste du squelette de Descartes est enterré dans l'église de Saint-Germain des Prés à Paris. Le musée explique la provenance de l'acquisition qui a été achetée par Georges Cuvier aux ventes aux enchères en 1821, puis a rejoint la collection du musée de l'homme à un moment.[124] *L'urne funéraire de Marcel Cohen* est européen et a été donnée par lui au Musée. *L'urne funéraire de Marcel Cohen* est un exemple à suivre parce qu'il souligne l'importance du consentement des personnes décédées.

Contrairement à la déclaration de mission qui promet de promouvoir l'"enseignement et [la] diffusion des connaissances au plus grand nombre,"[125] le musée crée des barrières pour faire des recherches dans cette collection. Ces barrières neutralisent toutes justifications de la pédagogie pour sauvegarder la collection dans le bâtiment du musée. Selon le NYT, les critiques en France déclarent que le musée limite la recherche sur des cas sensibles dans la collection. En 1989, Mennecier (un conservateur du musée) a créét une base de données de la collection qui identifie les restes humains sensibles mais les chefs du musée ont refusé de donner la permission

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[123] Morin, Hervé. "Anthropologie: Des Squelettes Dans Les Limbes." Le Monde.fr. Le Monde, October 9, 2015.https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2015/10/12/anthropologie-des-squelettes-dans-les-limbes_4788041_1650684.html.

[124] "Crâne De Descartes." Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. Accessed February 16, 2023. https://www.mnhn.fr/fr/crane-de-descartes.

[125]"Qu'est-Ce Que Le Musée De L'Homme ?" Musée de l'Homme. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://www.museedelhomme.fr/fr/qu-est-ce-que-le-musee-de-l-homme.

à Mennecier d'informer les autorités. Le musée, presque 25 années plus tard, continue à sauvegarder l'information.

**Règlement du Musée et législation française**

Le Musée de l'Homme n'a pas de politique qui régule la collection des restes humains au musée, en ce qui concerne la manière de les exposer et/ou de les rapatrier. Cependant, il n'y a pas non plus de politique qui précisément empêchent le rapatriement. Les politiques existantes restituent seulement les restes humains qui ont une connexion spécifique avec un demandeur, mais les personnes ne peuvent pas réclamer ces restes humains si le musée ne publie pas le contenu de la collection.[126] Cette politique s'appelle "l'exigence d'identification nominale" qui ne se partage pas avec les autres musées et n'ont pas une connection légale. Ce système est contre-productif puisque le musée refuse de justifier le rapatriement des crânes s'ils n'ont qu'une connexion culturelle, mais refusent aussi de faire des recherches plus approfondies qui pourraient révéler des affiliations plus fortes.

En France, il n'y existe pas une loi généralisée sur le rapatriement des ossements ou un standard pour la manière de les exposer dans les collections muséales, particulièrement les restes d'origine non-européenne. C'est à cause du fait qu'il y a un principe de loi qui date du 16e siècle et qui considèrent les objets dans les collections muséales comme faisant partie du patrimoine culturel national inaliénable.[127] Le Musée de l'Homme est contraint par cette loi, mais les

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[126]Méheut, Constant. "A Paris Museum Has 18,000 Skulls. It's Reluctant to Say Whose." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 28, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/28/arts/design/france-human-remains-restitution-skulls.html.

[127] Sansom, Anna. "France's National Assembly Votes to Return Colonial-Era Artefacts to Benin and Senegal." The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, September 28, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/10/07/frances-national-assembly-votes-to-return-colonial-era-artefacts-to-benin-and-senegal.

collections privées n'ont pas, ils peuvent faire le rapatriement sans loi. C'est possible aussi pour les lois individuelles d'intervenir et de faciliter le déclenchement pour les cas spécifiques. Pour ces raisons, les exemples de rapatriement d'ossements humains en France actuellement ne sont pas nombreux. Un exemple de rapatriement des ossements humains de Saartjie Baartman (exposé à Paris sous le nom Vénus hottentote) qui était exposé dans un zoo humain en 1810 à cause de sa race, sa stature, et d'anomalies physiques. Après sa mort en 1815, son reste était conservé au Musée d'Histoire Naturelle puis exposé au Musée de l'Homme de 1936 jusqu'en 2002. En 1994, Président Mitterrand de France promet de faire le rapatriement de ses restes mais le Musée de l'homme a refusé. Finalement, en 2001, le député Nicolas About a présenté une proposition de loi privée qui a autorisé le relèvement des restes de sa collection et son rapatriement en Afrique du Sud.[128] La proposition a été promulguée en Mai 2002.[129] Cet exemple reste un geste très symbolique qui ne prend pas en compte les effets du colonialisme et de la responsabilité éthique et morale de la France à ce sujet. L'implication de cette loi montre que la possession et l'exposé de Saartjie Baartman est immoral. Pourquoi n'y-a-t-il pas de directives pour l'exposition des ossements humains quand c'est clair que l'effort d'intégrer les standards d'éthique évolue?

En janvier de cette année, 2023, le ministère de la culture en France, Rima Abdul-Malak, a annoncé trois propositions de loi qui faciliteraient le rapatriement des restes humains mais il y a des obstacles à l'intérieur du gouvernement qui bloquent le progrès significatif.[130] Jusqu'à

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[128]Vigneron, Sophie. "The Repatriation of Human Remains in France: 20 Years of (Mal)Practice." Santander Art and Culture Law Review, no. 2 (6) (2020): 313–38. https://doi.org/10.4467/2450050xsnr.20.022.13025.
Lehoërff, Anne. "Rencontre Avec Nous-Mêmes: Les Restes Humains En Contexte Archéologique." *Esprit*, no. 457 (2019): 131–42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26775281.

[129] Saartjie Baartman Is Finally, Finally Home, "New African" 2002, Vol. 408, p. 44.

[130] Lauter, Devorah. "France's Ministry of Culture Is Pushing Forward a Trio of Groundbreaking Laws That May Have Sweeping Effects on Restitution." Artnet News, January 18, 2023.

présent, la France a rapatrié seulement 50 restes humains au cours des 20 dernières années, moins que leurs voisins européens. Il doit y avoir une loi qui réglemente le traitement et la possession des restes humains ou au moins demande aux institutions culturelles de garder une transparence sur le contenu et le récit de tous les objets qui existent dans un musée, en particulier les restes humains. Si le musée est public et est donc financé par le gouvernement, il doit y avoir des conséquences et il doit être tenu pour responsable. L'effort est minime malgré le fait que le Président français Emmanuel Macron a juré de rapatrier les objets pillés.[131] C'est important pour les lois qui concernent le rapatriement d'évoluer. La question du rapatriement est plus complexe que celle de l'exposition de ces restes,  donc ces lois pourraient aussi ouvrir la discussion pour la régulation de l 'exposition.

Comme indiqué, la législation française empêche  l'examen de cette question de rapatriement parce que les objets dans les collections des musées publics sont la propriété de l'Etat français. Par conséquent, il faut que la loi de propriété change pour faciliter le rapatriement. S'il n'y a pas de législation qui approuve le rapatriement des restes humains, le musée ne peut pas le faire. Il devient la responsabilité du musée de provoquer un semblant de changement, et d'être le défenseur des ossements humains dans leur collection. De plus, le Musée de l'Homme refuse de prendre les choses en main: ils n'ont pas publié une politique publique qui réponde aux restes humains, contrairement au British Museum. Le musée aussi n'a pas exprimé l'intention de développer une politique des ossements humains ou le Met au moins a déclaré qu'ils travaillent sur ce but. Le choix du Musée de l'Homme de refuser de durcir sa position indique leur connexion des fondations coloniales du musée. Ces barrières envers le rapatriement

[131] Ce inclut les Bronzes de Benin.
Nayeri, Farah. "France Vowed to Return Looted Treasures. but Few Are Heading Back." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 22, 2019.

et la mentalité du personnel se traduit par une hésitation à s'occuper de cette question de l'exposition des ossements humains.

**Discussion**

Le Musée de l'Homme justifie leur grande collection des restes humains. Ils expliquent qu'il y a un bénéfice pédagogique à garder une telle collection, vu son étendue et qui lui permet de fournir du matériel pour les études en anthropologie, médecine, stomatologie (dentaire), paléontologie humaine et génétique des populations.[132] Toutefois, ils donnent priorité à ce but pédagogique plus qu'à une vision éthique de leur collection. Contrairement au British Museum et au Met, le Musée de l'Homme n'a pas de collection compréhensive en ligne que l'on peut parcourir. Ce fait contredit le but pédagogique proclamé dans la mission du musée puisque la plupart de la collection n'apparaît pas dans les galeries ou en ligne, donc le public ne peut pas rechercher ou accéder à la recherche menée par le musée. Le public ne peut pas apprendre quelque chose s'il ne peut pas y accéder. Oui, les chercheurs du musée peuvent faire de la recherche et puis partager l'information avec le grand public, mais ce fait donne la priorité aux spécialistes pour leur recherche et ne met pas l'accent sur le problème des ossements humains ou des communautés de descendants. En somme, le musée crée des barrières pour rechercher la collection pour dissimuler l'étendue de la collection.

Le musée peut résoudre le problème des barrières de recherche en publiant la collection en ligne. C'est intéressant d'observer que le musée n'a pas assuré la collection en ligne étant donné qu'on vit dans une ère de grandes avancées technologiques et que ce musée utilise la

[132] "Collection Ostéologique De Restes Humains." Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. Accessed February 15, 2023. https://www.mnhn.fr/fr/collection-osteologique-de-restes-humains.

technologie interactive dans les galeries. Hormis ce fait, le musée et le site web sont à jour avec la technologie et l'accessibilité. Il y a des choses interactives pour les visiteurs handicapés comme l'impression 3D pour toucher les objets et le braille. Et en plus, le site web existe en français et anglais. C'est évident que le musée est capable d'assurer un musée aménagé et un site-web compréhensif, mais ils ne choisissent pas de rapporter l'information sur la collection ostéologique. S'ils rendent public le contenu et la provenance de la collection, ils ont besoin de regarder en face le fait qu'ils doivent rapatrier la plupart des restes humains et accepter la responsabilité pour leurs actions contraires à l'éthique. Aussi, il sera réduire le besoin d'exposer les restes dans les galeries, parce qu'il peut être accessible en ligne.

Le musée est mystérieux et problématique concernant leur énorme collection de restes humains, qui couvre le monde, grâce à l'histoire coloniale de France. La collection de 18,000 crânes inclut les restes des chefs tribaux d'Afrique, les rebelles du Cambodge, et les personnes indigènes d'Océanie.[133] L'étendue et la provenance des restes humains ne sont pas connues par le public parce que le musée veut sauvegarder leur réputation et éviter les requêtes de rapatriement. Selon le personnel et ex-personnel du musée, il existe les papiers du musée qui notent l'information sur les identités des crânes et le contexte de la collection, cependant cette information n'est pas publique. Un mémo confidentiel dit que la collection inclut les os d'un chef musulman d'afrique du 19e siecle, une famille d'Inuits qui a été exposée dans un zoo humain en 1881, et cinq victimes du genocide arménien. La provenance de la collection a été  tenu secrète par les superviseurs du musée qui ont peur du scandale.

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[133]Méheut, Constant. "A Paris Museum Has 18,000 Skulls. It's Reluctant to Say Whose." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 28, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/28/arts/design/france-human-remains-restitution-skulls.html.

**Conclusion**

Trois raisons principales retiennent le Musée de l'homme dans son traitement de la collection des restes humains: la mentalité du personnel du musée, les barrières légales qui empêchent le déclenchement des ossements humains en France, et la peur du scandale. La France est à la traîne des autres pays européens, comme l'Allemagne, qui a développé des directives pour s'occuper des restes humains et qui ont rapatrié les crânes et les autres restes humains. Le Musée de l'homme est excessivement prudent en coulisse pour tenter de protéger sa réputation. A l'évidence, les valeurs des officiels du musée ne s'alignent pas avec les nouvelles valeurs du public et des pays d'origine qui veulent signifier leur respect pour les restes humains. Ils tiennent fermement à leur héritage colonial au détriment des autres cultures, particulièrement celles de pays non-européens. C'est toujours essentiel d'enquêter sur les institutions qui ne rendent pas publiques leur pratiques et par là ne révèlent pas la vérité de leur motivation. En choisissant de dissimuler la vérité de la collection et en évitant le conflit, le musée perd de sa crédibilité. Malgré quelques recommandations, l'évolution des attitudes ou les mesures prises par d'autres pays, le musée de l'homme ne changera pas jusqu'à ce que la loi l'impose. Bien que "le débat [soit] urgent. la loi est une contrainte,"[134] c'est évident que le musée peut préconiser le rapatriement s'ils le désirent. Est-ce le musée a sincèrement "[l'objectif] de comprendre l'humain et la place qu'il occupe dans le vivant, de raconter ses origines et de questionner nos marges d'adaptation dans le monde de demain"[135] s'ils refusent de s'adapter et de donner la

[134] Lehoërff, Anne. "Rencontre Avec Nous-Mêmes: Les Restes Humains En Contexte Archéologique." Esprit, no. 457 (2019): 131–42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26775281.
[135]"Qu'est-Ce Que Le Musée De L'Homme ?" Musée de l'Homme. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://www.museedelhomme.fr/fr/qu-est-ce-que-le-musee-de-l-homme.

priorité à l'intérêt des restes humains dans leur soins? Le Musée de l'homme ne sert pas la société en cachant leur collection et en refusant pour ainsi dire.

**English Summary**

The Musée de l'Homme, founded in 1937 in Paris, possesses one of the largest museum collections of human remains in the world. This collection, rooted in French colonialism under the guise of scientific and pedagogical motives, consists of over 30,000 bones and bone fragments from around 26,00 individuals, including a startling collection of about 17,600 skulls. The museum, under the supervision of the Museum of Natural History, underwent a major six year long renovation from 2009 through 2015. The new permanent galleries do not display as many remains as prior to the renovation, due to the discretion of the Museum of Natural History's ethics committee who decided that it is unacceptable to display infants, fetuses, naked bodies, or identified remains.[136] The current galleries display a range of remains of non-western descent, including cases of spontaneous mummification and various skulls and bones.

Like the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Musée de l'Homme is also spending time in the spotlight for their failure to keep up with evolving attitudes regarding the display and repatriation of remains. Much of their collection stems from France's colonial ties and unequal relationship with Africa. The refusal of the Musée de l'Homme to repatriate and be transparent about the origins of their collection, especially of which is in storage, is due both in part to their own reservations and legal barriers. In France, there is a law from the 16th century which considers objects in public museum collections of national cultural patrimony to be

[136] An exception to this rule of thumb is the skull of Renée Descartes.

inalienable. There are two ways to bypass this law in order to repatriate human remains. First, it is possible for private collections to repatriate without any consideration of the law. This however would require other means of incentive. It is also possible for singular acts to be enacted which permit the repatriation of specific cases. One such example is the repatriation of the remains of Saartjie Baartman, known as Venus Hottentote, who was exhibited in a human zoo in 1810 due to her physical abnormalities. After her death in 1810, her remains became the property of the Museum of Natural History and she was exhibited in the Musée de l'Homme from 1936 - 2002. In 2001, after years of promise, French member of Parliament Nicolas About proposed a private law which finally authorized the return of her remains to South Africa. Most recently in January 2023, the French Minister of Culture Rima Abdul-Malak has proposed laws which would facilitate the repatriation of human remains but this has not yet come into fruition.

The Musée de l'Homme has not made its own effort to address the questionable collection. Despite the input of the ethics committee in the creation of the new permanent galleries, the museum has not announced plans to create a human remains policy which would create self-imposed guidelines to regulate the retention, care, and display of what is in the museum's possession. The museum is not transparent about provenance or the extent of the collection, mostly out of fear of criticism and the loss of the collection once laws are passed which enforce repatriation. The institution uses the existing legislature as a crutch to hide, including a policy called the "l'exigence d'identification nominal" which prevents the repatriation of remains that do not have a clear cultural identification. In conjunction with this, the museum is more than fully equipped with modern technology and qualified staff to research

the probable regions of descent. The museum avoids conducting this research which would allow for the identification and reparation of the remains.

The museum's mission statement is composed of five primary objectives: the conservation of the collection, research, expertise, and the teaching and dissemination of knowledge to as many people as possible. Its actions are in direct opposition to this, when the museum limits research and is not transparent about the collection that is not on display. The pedagogical benefit of the collection is not available to as many people as possible if the remains of non-western descent are kept in the basement of a European museum. The museum also claims that the objective of the permanent gallery is to understand humankind and its place in the world, to tell its origins and to question our margins of adaptation in the world of tomorrow. The Musée de l'Homme is not questioning our margins in the world of tomorrow. If it were, the museum would think introspectively and come to understand that the interests of the deceased are not prioritized within the confines of the institution.

The Musée de l'Homme is hesitant to confront the collection of human remains due to legal barriers and the mentality of the museum staff in an attempt to protect the museum's reputation. France is behind other European countries, such as Germany, which have developed policies to deal with human remains and have repatriated human remains. Clearly, the values of museum officials do not align with the evolving attitudes of ethics elsewhere. The museum holds firmly to their colonial heritage and speaks without words that they do not prioritize the interest of the deceased. Despite evolving attitudes, guidelines, or the actions of others, the Musée de l'Homme does not adhere to its mission statement and will not change until the law forces it to. The Musée de l'Homme does not serve society by hiding its collection and refusing to address it.

# Conclusion

In sum, the discussion regarding the ethics of displaying human remains in museums is extremely complex and dynamic. It is multidisciplinary and multifaceted, where new issues may arise alongside tentative solutions. It is difficult to propose a tangible solution for an ethical issue which is ultimately philosophical and qualitative. However, due to a lack of regulation, it is more likely that museums will continue to make unethical decisions regardless of changing ethical standards. Attitudes are constantly evolving towards the ultimate goal of reaching a system of best practices. Because of this dynamic nature, it is increasingly important that museums be aware of these changes and remain open to adapting. Although the three museums studied in this thesis serve different functions, they share the commonality of possessing and displaying human remains of non-western descent. The quantity of human remains possessed by each institution varies. The three also differ in their display practices, transparency, and legal accountability.

## Collection

The extent of the human remains collections at each of the institutions differs, corresponding with the mission of the museum. The Met's collection is the least extensive of the three, although the exact amount of remains is unknown, largely due to the fact that it is an art museum. The Met's acquisition of remains is geared towards those which are incorporated into works of art. Although first and foremost human remains, both the mummified remains from Ancient Egypt and the human remains as musical instruments have been modified into works of art. The human remains within the collections that are not works of art, such as certain bone fragments, are in conflict with the museum's mission statement.

The British Museum's collection of human remains is larger, totaling over 6,000. Although, for the purposes of this paper, I focused on the Egypt and Sudan Department, the British Museum's collection encapsulates a diverse chronology and geographical range. This reflects the fact that it is a historical museum, intending to cover the entire world's history both through objects and art. Thus, the museum's scope of acquisitions of human remains is wider than the Met's as it is not limited to acquiring human remains that can be considered works of art.

The Musée de l'homme's collection of human remains is the most expansive, totaling over 18,000. The anthropological museum intends to portray the course of human evolution, so, like the British Museum, it is less limited to what type of remains to collect than the Met. It is interesting to note that, unlike the Met and the British Museum, the Musée de l'homme does not have a specific collection department for Ancient Egypt. This is an important contrast because human remains are so prevalent in the Ancient Egyptian collections at the other two museums, making up the majority of the remains on display. The Musée de l'Homme, unlike the Met and the British Museum, do not collect in the interest of art. Because the Musée de l'homme is an anthropological museum that focuses on human evolution, it possesses the most chronologically recent examples of human remains.

**Display Practices**

Now that I have highlighted the differences between the scope of each institution's collection of remains, I can address the differences in display. First and foremost, all three institutions would benefit from the addition of context to establish to the viewer the authenticity

of the human remains. When human remains are confined to the context of a museum, they gain the same qualities ascribed to the rest of the museum's collection, whether they be an artifact, object, or artwork. This is different in cases where remains are present within a museum which specifically aims to collect human remains. The three institutions would also benefit to reevaluate the curation of the displays to encourage a more respectful environment for viewing the remains. Despite this commonality of the need to improve the physical display spaces, each institution differs in what part of their human remains collections they choose to display.

Upon visiting the Met, it is apparent that it chooses to display the fewest number of remains in comparison to the British Museum and the Musée de l'Homme. Although the museum owns a more extensive collection of remains than on display, the only examples on display are within the Egyptian Art galleries. The Met has not publicly commented on this decision to omit the more graphic examples of human remains within the collections, like the aforementioned lyres from the Musical Instruments Department.

The British Museum is less hesitant to display the scope of their collection than the Met. The institution has a range of human remains on display including bones, skeletons, spontaneous mummification, and anthropogenic mummification. It has acknowledged that the "issue of whether and how human remains should be displayed in museums continues to be debated," but has chosen not to reduce its display as it claims that the British public is "highly supportive of the display of human remains."[137] Alongside this, the British Museum has demonstrated the potential to improve the display of human remains with the addition of technology to the Gebelein Man display as well as the recent exhibition: *Hieroglyphs: unlocking ancient Egypt.*

[137] Fletcher, Alexandra, Daniel Antoine, and J. D. Hill. Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum. London: British Museum, 2014.

Since Musée de l'Homme's renovation, the extent of the collection of human remains on display was significantly reduced. This was because the ethics committee determined that infants, fetuses, nude bodies and identified remains are unacceptable to display. Similarly to the Met, the Musée de l'Homme chooses to censor what it puts on display. Despite the Musée de l'Homme's choice to censor and the British Museum's choice not to, both offer transparency about their choices, unlike the Met.

**Transparency**

On that same note, the three institutions largely differ when it comes to transparency about their collections and actions. The British Museum is the most transparent of the three. Although the museum is institutionally reluctant to change, it is honest about this. The institution is transparent about the scope of the human remains collection; there is an open access catalog which lists all of the human remains in the collection. The museum has also published a human remains policy and a book which addresses the collection, along with what it is willing and not willing to do. The Met is less transparent than the British Museum, but has established the intention to become more transparent. It has also established the intention to create an institutional human remains policy, but has not revealed the full extent of human remains within the collection. The Musée de l'Homme is the least transparent, actively under fire for secrecy about the provenance of the collection of human remains.

**Legal Accountability**

There is an inherent difference among the laws enforced at each institution since each resides in different countries, thus they are subject to different legal ramifications. The British Museum is unique in the way it is controlled by Parliament. This contributes to a contrast between the wishes of the staff and the trustees; where the staff is unable to make changes such as deaccession of human remains as it is legally prevented. There are specific parliamentary laws, such as the Human Tissue Act of 2004, which prevent the repatriation of remains. This is much different than the United States, where the only legal policy concerning human remains that the Met is bound to is NAGPRA, which works in part to ensure the repatriation of human remains. The Musée de l'Homme is also constrained by national law which puts up barriers towards repatriation.

**Moving Forward**

The inconsistency among how these institutions handle their collections of human remains is apparent. It highlights the need for a universal regulated legal framework for all museums that possess, care for, and display human remains. Although there is social pressure to change and guidelines set forth, there is no universal set of rules to control the display of human remains in museums. Without enforced regulation, it is impossible to ensure that museums will adhere to these guidelines and adapt to changing attitudes. It is my belief that a legal framework is necessary to enforce change within museums, whether that be a legal requirement for museums to develop institutional human remains policies, a federal set of guidelines that museums must adhere to, and/or a human remains department that could audit institutions.

Through NAGPRA, we have seen that the legal enforcement to repatriate remains is possible on a national level. However, in order to ensure a universal policy, this framework must be established on the international legal level. I acknowledge that this claim is expansive and logistically challenging, but I maintain that this is the singular most effective way to enforce accountability for museums. To ensure the ethical display of human remains, museums must be forced to address the skeletons in their closets.

# Appendix

## 1. British Museum Mission Statement

“Its aim is to hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ('the collection'), and ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited.”

## 2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Mission Statement

“The Metropolitan Museum of Art collects, studies, conserves, and presents significant works of art across time and cultures in order to connect all people to creativity, knowledge, ideas, and one another.”

## 3. The Musée de l’Homme Mission Statement

“Il regroupe, sur les thématiques de l’évolution de l’Homme et des sociétés, les 5 missions du Muséum national d’histoire naturelle : conservation des collections, recherche, expertise, enseignement et diffusion des connaissances au plus grand nombre.”

The Musée de l’Homme brings together the five missions of the museum of natural history: conservation of the collections, research, expertise, teaching and diffusion of knowledge to many.

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