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Germany returns remains of Indigenous people to New Zealand

Remains of 95 Maori and Moriori people, including six mummified tattooed heads, were returned by German institutions.



A repatriation team in 2012 carry 20 Maori mummified tattooed heads, also known as toi moko, during a Maori welcome ceremony at Te Papa Museum in Wellington. The tattooed heads were handed over by French officials at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris after a four-year political struggle [File: Marty Melville/AFP]

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The remains of 95 [Indigenous New Zealanders](#) as well as artefacts and cultural treasures have been returned to New Zealand from museums and universities in Germany.

The ancestral remains of the 95 [Maori and Moriori individuals](#), including six toi moko – Maori mummified tattooed heads – were welcomed to Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum, in a private ceremony on Wednesday.

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New Zealand Ambassador to Germany Craig Hawke said the remains were being repatriated after “more than a century away from their homeland” and in a manner that demonstrated the “mature and close relationship” between Berlin and Wellington.

“Our relationship goes deeper than a traditional diplomatic relationship, to one of culture, science and knowledge exchange. These repatriations are a poignant example of our collaborative partnership,” Hawke said.



The Te Papa museum’s head of repatriation Te Herekiele Haerehuka Herewini said “significant respect and understanding” and a “strong sense of doing the right thing” had been shown by the German institutions involved.

“As we celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations between Aotearoa New Zealand and Germany, these repatriations demonstrate the mature and close relationship we share,” he said.



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Since 2003, the national museum has overseen the repatriation of more than 600 Maori and Moriori ancestral remains from institutions based overseas, including Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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In 2012, after a four-year political struggle, France's Quai Branly Museum in Paris returned 20 toi moko mummified tattooed heads – that were removed to Europe in the 18th century.

According to The New Zealand Herald newspaper, the remains and other artefacts repatriated on Wednesday were returned by the Grassi Museum, Leipzig, the Reiss Engelhorn Museum, Mannheim, Linden Museum, The Stuttgart State Museum of Natural History, the Georg August University in Gottingen, the Roemer und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim, and Museum Wiesbaden.

In December, [Germany returned 20 historic bronze sculptures to Nigeria](#) as part of efforts to address the country's "dark colonial past", the country's foreign minister Annalena Baerbock said at the time.

The sculptures, known as Benin bronzes, were among thousands looted from the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin – now part of southern Nigeria – by British troops when the country was under colonial rule. Some of the treasures also ended up in the custody of other foreign governments including Germany.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA, DPA