

Course Outline: History of Heidelberg University's Collection

During the nineteenth century, bird skins from Mexico, Venezuela and Indonesia found their way into the zoological collections of the University of Heidelberg. In addition, there are also references to a mammoth bone found in the Neckar basin, which sparked high hopes that it might even be possible to excavate and exhibit a complete skeleton. Meanwhile in another collection, the Botanical Garden, a dispute broke out over some stolen plants. These are just a few examples of the eventful and multifaceted history of the University's collections, which, however, have so far been scarcely researched from a historical perspective. In this primary source seminar, we aim to take a closer look at recently digitised records from the University Archives relating to the collections mentioned above and to explore in detail the histories of individual objects and collectors. In doing so, we will collaborate with both the University Archives and individual collections at the University of Heidelberg. This offers an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with and deepen our understanding of working with handwritten and material sources. Furthermore, the primary sources seminar provides an insight into the field of the history of collections, which does not view university collections in isolation, but rather examines them within their social, institutional and cultural contexts. For example, the animals that were killed and subsequently stuffed are the result of diverse collecting practices and processes of negotiation at local, regional and global levels, of conflicts between hunting students and disgruntled hunters in Heidelberg, and of colonial violence in the former Dutch East Indies. The aim of this primary sources seminar will ultimately be to analyse and highlight these diverse histories in the form of a blog post.

Part I: Basics – History of Collections, Critical Source Analysis and Transcription

Session 1 | 25.04.25 | Introduction

Session 2 | 02.05.25 | Theory I: Global Entanglements – Local Practices

Session 3 | 09.05.25 | No class

Session 4 | 16.05.25 | Theory II: 'The Classics'

Session 5 | 23.05.25 | Transcriptions – with and without Transkribus

Part II: Critical Source Analysis – Administrative Records Studies (*Aktenkunde*)

Session 6 | 30.05.25 | Administrative Records Studies – Visit to the University Archive

Session 7 | 06.06.25 | Selection of Blog Topic and Visit to the Zoological Collection

Session 8 | 13.06.25 | Supervised Group Work with Primary Sources

Session 9 | 20.06.25 | Supervised Group Work with Primary Sources

Session 10 | 27.06.25 | Supervised Group Work with Primary Sources

Part III: Writing – Academic Blogs

Session 11 | 04.07.25 | Writing Academic Blog Posts - Introduction

Session 12 | 11.07.25 | Supervised Writing Process

Session 13 | 18.07.25 | Supervised Writing Process

Session 14 | 25.07.25 | Presentation of Blog Posts