

Erckenbrecht, C. 2016. The Politics of Time: Hermann Klaatsch in the Wet Tropics and the fate of his ethnographic collection in Europe.

***Memoirs of the Queensland Museum – Culture* 10: 93-106. Brisbane. ISSN 2205-3220.**

This article examines the scientific and political background and the multiple changes in ownership of the Aboriginal artefacts from Australia collected by the German physical anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch.

Originally, Klaatsch travelled to Australia in 1904 in search of the origins of humanity. However, the lack of evidence for the 'Out of Australia' theory and the requests by German Museums of Ethnology to collect artefacts for their institutions led to Klaatsch becoming a full-time collector of cultural artefacts, especially during his time in the Wet Tropics. He inscribed the artefacts and sent them to Germany in several shipments to various museums where they were later re-united, displayed and redistributed.

Upon his return to Germany in 1907 Klaatsch was appointed professor of anthropology at Breslau University. He took there a portion of his artefact collection for his own teaching and study purposes. Due to political changes in central Europe after the Second World War, this collection was transferred to Warsaw, Poland, in 1953. New ownership insignia were applied while others were (partly) erased. Through these transformations the artefacts became encoded with a rich history and new meanings. A detailed study of Klaatsch's historical documents allows cross-referencing of the artefacts to the original localities and circumstances of their acquisition. Thus, more than one hundred years after first being collected, the artefact transactions and property claims can be re-assessed.