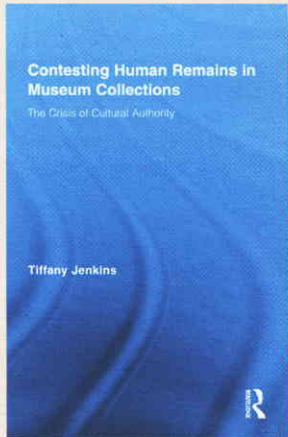


# Crisis of conscience



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are also a tool used by indigenous groups and British Pagans in their quest for identity.

Across the book's six chapters (Transforming concerns about human remains into an issue; Scientists contest repatriation; The crisis of cultural authority; The rise and impact of pagan claims-makers; Explaining why human remains are a problem; Covering up the mummies), Jenkins refers to published literature and interviews carried out in British museums. She maintains the reader's attention by posing challenging questions with regard to the various expectations from the public and museum professionals, who continue to search for dignified ways of displaying human remains.

Although a detailed bibliography and an index are provided, explanations of the abbreviations used in the text as well as a biography of the author are notably lacking. In addition, a visual, chronological presentation of the different arguments would have given a clearer overview of the synergies at stake.

Despite its flaws, this book is an excellent and detailed introduction to an important topic in the museum field today. Jenkins uses sociological analysis convincingly to illustrate the position of museum professionals, who having lost their traditional cultural authority, try to reassert their influence by advocating high standards in the dialogue surrounding human remains in museum collections.

*Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority* by Tiffany Jenkins  
Publisher: Routledge (UK)

The decision to return the remains of Saartjie Baartman, otherwise known as the Hottentot Venus, from France to South Africa in 2002, came about following a long and emotional debate lasting about 30 years. Such highly charged debates over human remains often originated in Africa, North America and Oceania. But in the 1980s, British museums sparked many a discussion on this sensitive topic. In her book, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*, Tiffany Jenkins convincingly illustrates how dialogue surrounding human remains in Britain is most often initiated by museum professionals and not – as usually argued – by the indigenous people of former colonies. To support her claims, Jenkins provides examples of groups requesting returns in Britain today, including New Pagan streams such as Wicca and Druidry. She suggests that their requests are driven by a search for their own history combined with future interests rather than the human remains themselves. According to Jenkins, the return of human remains can also be therapeutic. While repatriation can help to heal the wounds of colonisation and other forms of discrimination, human remains