Combining colonial history and museum studies, this French-language book explores the history and implications of a particular case of the collection and display of human remains. Ataï was a leader of the indigenous Kanak people of New Caledonia in the South Pacific, who was beheaded in the 1878 uprising against French colonial rule. For more than one hundred years, Ataï’s preserved head was either displayed or studied in a number of French museums, ultimately arriving at the French National Museum of Natural History. In 2014, France repatriated Ataï’s skull to New Caledonia in an act of great political and cultural significance. The book features a preface by notorious French anthropologist Alban Bensa, who specializes in the Kanak people of New Caledonia.

The Author

Christelle Patin is a professor of life and earth sciences and an associate researcher in historical and cultural anthropology at the Centre Alexandre-Koyré in Paris. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the process of the patrimonialization of human remains in natural history collections, its history, and current dialectics.