Life histories of ivory objects in museum collections

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Anthropological and world cultures museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford are full of biological materials, giving us a window into animal-human relationships past and present. One particular material of value and interest in our collections is ivory. Ivory originates from a variety of animals which live in different habitats across the globe. Identifying, geographically sourcing, and telling the biological histories of objects made from ivory in our collections has scientific value for, among other things, providing rare genetic information from extinct species and targeting conservation efforts for species which are still living today. By combining analytical tools such as ancient DNA and proteomics analysis with method development of minimally destructive techniques for sampling museum materials, scientists working with museum collections have developed many innovative tools in the last decade targeted at successful application of scientific methods working alongside conservation techniques. This poster will give a tour of the analytical methods which are currently in development or recently used for analysing ivories in museum collections, with case studies of how these methods have been developed with research questions, open data sharing through digital museum databases, and outreach to diverse publics, in mind.