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Introducing an Extensive Digital Public Repository of Collections from Colonial Contexts in Germany

The information about collections from colonial contexts of 25 German institutions will soon be searchable through one central website under an agreement reached by representatives of the German Federal Government, Länder governments and municipal umbrella organisations together with the institutions in question, the consortium partners of the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts and the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (“German Digital Library”, DDB).

The creation of a central access to collections that have already been published digitally is the first step on the path to releasing information on collections from colonial contexts in Germany both comprehensively and centrally. In a preliminary pilot phase, the data will be provided via an interface to the DDB, where it will be published in a central location. In a subsequent step, unified standards will be jointly developed for the basic digitisation and digital publication of still unpublished information about the collections.

The Federal Commissioner for Culture, Prof. Monika Grütters, remarks: “Our common goal of establishing maximum transparency concerning holdings from colonial contexts is a crucial prerequisite for the sweeping endeavour of reckoning with the histories of these objects’ origins as well as for the dialogue we seek to engage in with the societies of origin. As a central access point for digitised collections, the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek provides the appropriate foundation for this. The Federal Government is therefore allocating considerable funds to this meaningful project.”

Klaus Lederer, chair of the Conference of Cultural Ministers and Senator for Culture and Europe in Berlin, adds: “I am pleased that we are finally laying the groundwork for publishing records of collection holdings from colonial contexts with the greatest possible transparency. The central access point to numerous pre-existing databases will soon make it easier for all interested parties, especially those from countries and societies of origin, to conduct research and request further information. I would like to thank everyone who played a part in achieving this decision and all those who will contribute to its implementation. However, we are only beginning to come to grips with colonial injustice. There is much more to be done.”

This measure is part of the “Guidelines for a 3-road strategy on the documentation and digital publication of collections from colonial contexts held in Germany” which was jointly adopted at the 13th Cultural Policy Summit on 14 October 2020 by Prof. Monika Grütters, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media; Dr. Andreas Görge, head of the Directorate-General for Culture and Communication at the Federal Foreign Office; the ministers of culture of the German Länder and the representatives of the municipal umbrella organisations.



Page 2, Press release of 29 March 2021

The “3-Road Strategy” includes a variety of short-, medium- and long-term measures for cataloguing and digitally publishing relevant collections with the goal of maximising transparency. In addition to establishing a central access for collections from colonial contexts which have already been published digitally (Road 1), the strategy includes basic digitisation and digital publication of still unpublished collections of still unpublished collections from colonial contexts in a central data repository (e.g. the DDB) according to unified standards (Road 2) as well as the digitisation and digital publication of collections from colonial contexts based on standards devised in collaboration with countries and societies of origin as well as the diaspora in Germany (Road 3). The implementation of the “3-Road Strategy” is supervised by the Federal-Länder Working Group on Handling Collections from Colonial Contexts in Germany and coordinated by the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts, which has its seat at the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States. You can find more information on the “3-Road Strategy” at www.cp3c.org.

The following 25 institutions in Germany were selected to implement the pilot phase of the “3-Road Strategy”, all of which have already digitised data on their collections from colonial contexts: the Applied Botany Collection (ABC) at Universität Hamburg, the Bonn Collection of the Americas (BASA Museum), the Ethnographic Collection at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SPK), the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité, Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) in Hamburg, the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich, the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Museum Wiesbaden – Hesse State Museum of Art and Nature, the Museum of Nordfriesland in Husum, the five museums of the PAESE consortium (the Landesmuseum Hannover, the Lower Saxony State Museum of Nature and Humanity in Oldenburg, the Roemer- und Pelizaeusmuseum in Hildesheim, the Municipal Museum of Braunschweig, the Ethnographic Collection of the University of Göttingen, the University of Marburg, the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne, the Ethnographic Museums of Saxony within the consortium of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD), the State and University Library Bremen (SuUB), the Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, the Übersee-Museum in Bremen, the Institute for African Studies at the University of Bayreuth and the University of Freiburg.

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Page 3, Press release of 29 March 2021

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