

Berlin, 15 June 2021
PRESS RELEASE

The German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts Publishes an Inventory of Benin Bronzes in Museums in Germany

Information on Benin Bronzes held by museums in Germany is now available at one central web address. In addition, the museums will be extensively documenting the provenance of these objects and making these details publicly accessible on the website of the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts (<https://www.cp3c.de/>).

This publication is based on a joint decision agreed on 29 April 2021 by Monika Grütters, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media; the directors of the museums in Germany belonging to the Benin Dialogue Group; the responsible Cultural Affairs Ministers of the *Länder* and Germany's Federal Foreign Office. The German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts has its seat at the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States.

The publication of information on museums' own websites and the publication of an inventory of Benin Bronzes on the website of the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts are important steps on the road towards creating extensive transparency with regard to the Benin Bronzes in collections and exhibitions in Germany. The initial focus is on the museums belonging to the Benin Dialogue Group. The participating museums include the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, part of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (the State Museums of Berlin); the Linden Museum, Stuttgart; the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (World Cultures and Arts, MARKK), Hamburg; the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne and the Ethnographic Museums of Saxony within the consortium of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD). Initially, a total of 1127 objects are being presented in the database. These will be gradually supplemented by information from additional institutions. The overview of holdings encompasses objects attributed to the courtly art of the Kingdom of Benin (collectively designated as “Benin Bronzes”) that were looted from the Royal Palace of Benin by British troops in 1897 and are currently held in museums in Germany.

In the medium term, as part of the “3-road strategy” agreed on by the German government, the *Länder* and the municipal umbrella organisations, a separate portal for collections from colonial contexts is to be created within the German Digital Library. Via this portal, all Benin Bronzes located at German institutions – and, in the future, other collections from colonial contexts as well – will be accessible online.

Monika Grütters comments: “With the publication of the digital inventories of holdings, we are keeping a promise made in regard to the handling of Benin Bronzes located in

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Germany and are ensuring the greatest possible transparency. Thus, we are reaffirming our willingness, in dialogue with the Nigerian side, to enable both substantial returns of Benin Bronzes and future-facing cooperative efforts around this issue.”

Dr. Andreas Görgen, Head of the Culture and Communication Department at the Federal Foreign Office, comments: “Today’s digital publication by the Contact Point of the most important holdings of Benin Bronzes in German collections is an important step on the road to an agreement with Nigeria regarding the objects’ future and the establishment of a new, joint museum cooperation. The Federal Foreign Office will continue its intensive discussions with our Nigerian partners to create the framework conditions for a return of the objects and thus also for a long-term cultural cooperation with Nigeria in the realm of museums.”

Klaus Lederer, chair of the Conference of Cultural Ministers and Senator for Culture and Europe in Berlin, adds: “The ball is finally rolling! I am delighted that extensive transparency is being created with a digital inventory of the Benin Bronzes in the collections and exhibitions of museums in Germany. Only transparency can lay the foundation for further dialogue in regard to returning objects to Nigeria. I am confident that on this basis, a relationship of trust will develop that, in the future, will enable us to display rightfully restituted Benin Bronzes, perhaps only a few, once again in German museums as loans.”

Prof. Markus Hilgert, Director of the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts, states: “I am very happy that, in such a short time, we were able to develop a digital certification system that provides a preliminary overview of Berlin Bronzes in Germany. In the next stage, we want to work together with the participating museums to improve the quality of data and integrate data from more institutions into the database. The transparency we are striving for is a significant prerequisite for the planned return of Benin Bronzes to Nigeria.”

Further information about the German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts is available at <https://www.cp3c.de/>.

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