

Welcome

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Dear Readers,

I was pleased to join you in the opening of the “International Conference Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts: Principles, Approaches, Challenges” and to address you on behalf of the Volkswagen Foundation.

Our funding of the project on Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnology in Lower Saxony is based on our funding initiative “Research in Museums”. Please allow me to give you a little bit of background in a few sentences about our relationship to this topic. The Volkswagen Foundation can look back on more than 10 years of funding collection-related research in museums. During this time, it has funded around 100 projects, especially collaborations between medium-sized and small museums with universities. Through the “Research in Museums” funding initiative the Volkswagen Foundation wanted to strengthen German museums as research institutions. Of central importance in this context was the intensive cooperation of museums with other research institutions as well as the promotion of young scientists in collection-related research.

The projects supported within the framework of the funding initiative were characterised by a very special diversity. The scientists supported by the Foundation have approached the objects in their collections with surprising and in some cases highly original research approaches, have brought to light interesting findings, and have also translated these findings into exhibitions that have attracted the attention of the public. In our recent funding activities, we broadened the scope of funding into the international sphere by setting up a call on “Cultural Heritage and Change” in which – besides other topics – museums and other research institutions from the Global North and the Global South are encouraged to collaborate in collections-based research.

Let me now briefly touch on our connection with provenance research.

Besides supporting several projects in this field, the Volkswagen Foundation also initiated and sponsored a few conferences addressing different aspects of provenance research in order to support scientific exchange and networking. To name just two: In 2009 at the conference “Erblickt, verpackt und mitgenommen – Herkunft der Dinge im Museum” (“Seen, Packaged and Taken – Origin of Things in Museums”), the first provenance research on cultural objects seized as a result of Nazi persecution at various German art museums, largely initiated by restitution claims, was presented. A few years later in 2015, the Volkswagen Foundation, in cooperation with the German Museums Association, took up the issue of provenance research on non-European collections in the conference “Museums of Culture, Wereldmuseum, Världskulturmuseet... What else? Positioning Ethnological Museums in the 21st Century”.

The timeliness and importance of the topic of the PAESE Project became clear just from the debate about the visit of the German President Steinmeier to Namibia and the Reconciliation Agreement, in which Germany for the first time recognises the atrocities committed against the Herero and Nama as genocide.

I wish you an inspiring read!

