

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

Colonial Collecting
Strategies

Colonial Collecting Strategies

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Abstract

Based on the analysis of the Cameroon collection in the *Übersee-Museum Bremen*, the following chapter names nine strategies with the help of which the colonial masters appropriated objects of all kinds under different circumstances in Cameroon. This shows how diverse the possibilities of acquiring objects were and how they were used. Examples of these collecting strategies were punitive and scientific expeditions, trials and war reparations as well as the economic activities of companies, recreational journeys, missionary activities and other forms of purchasing and exchanging. Outlining the different fields and strategies of appropriation of objects during the colonial period is not only intended to raise awareness of the inequalities inherent in the contexts of acquisition, but also to serve as a framework and starting point for a deeper analysis that examines the respective behaviours in the individual fields as well as to quantify the practices highlighted in more detail.

Stratégies de collecte coloniale (Résumé)

À partir de l'analyse de la collection camerounaise de l'Übersee-Museum de Brême, le chapitre suivant énumère neuf stratégies qui ont permis aux colonisateurs de s'approprier toutes sortes d'objets dans différentes circonstances au Cameroun. Cela montre l'étendue des possibilités pour se procurer des objets et leur utilisation. Parmi les différentes stratégies de collecte, nous pouvons citer les expéditions punitives et scientifiques, les procès et les indemnités de guerre, ainsi que les activités économiques des entreprises, les voyages récréatifs, les activités missionnaires et d'autres formes d'achat et d'échange. La mise en évidence des différents domaines et des stratégies d'appropriation des objets pendant la période coloniale n'a pas seulement pour objectif de sensibiliser sur les inégalités inhérentes aux contextes d'acquisition, elle constitue également un cadre et un point de départ pour une analyse plus approfondie qui examine les comportements respectifs dans les différents domaines, ainsi que pour quantifier plus en détails les pratiques observées.

Introduction

A strategy is a plan developed in order to achieve a goal. One of the goals of the colonisers was the acquisition of non-European cultural objects. This chapter seeks to identify the possible opportunities or circumstances that helped German colonial authorities,¹ missionaries and enterprises to collect cultural treasures, animals and other objects of interest in the colonies.

Based on my work on the Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum (*Übersee-Museum*) in Bremen from March 2017 to February 2020 as part of the cooperative project between the University of Hamburg and the museum, I have identified nine strategies that I present below and briefly substantiate with examples. The project focused on the provenance and cultural significance of the objects from the former German colonies of Cameroon, Southwest Africa and East Africa, but also on their circumstances of acquisition in the colonies, their various owners and the ways in which they were acquired by the museum. The project was based on primary sources such as archives, but also on oral sources, in particular on the culture of memory in the communities of origin.

Colonial Wars or Punitive Expeditions

Colonial wars or punitive expeditions refer to the use of military force against colonised people under the pretext of the “pacification” of their territories or combatting slavery and robbery. Sometimes the aim of these military operations was to put an end to the trading advantages of the “natives”, and in their course colonial rulers came into possession of many types of artefacts, including human remains. In March 1899 Captain Oltwig von Kamptz (1857–1921) led a so-called punitive expedition against the Lamido Mohaman Lamou of Tibati.² The booty from the sack of the Lamido palace included everything that the treasure and armoury of a Muslim ruler would be expected to hold, such as weapons, elephant tusks, animal skins, household items, clothes, symbols of power and so on (Figure 1).³

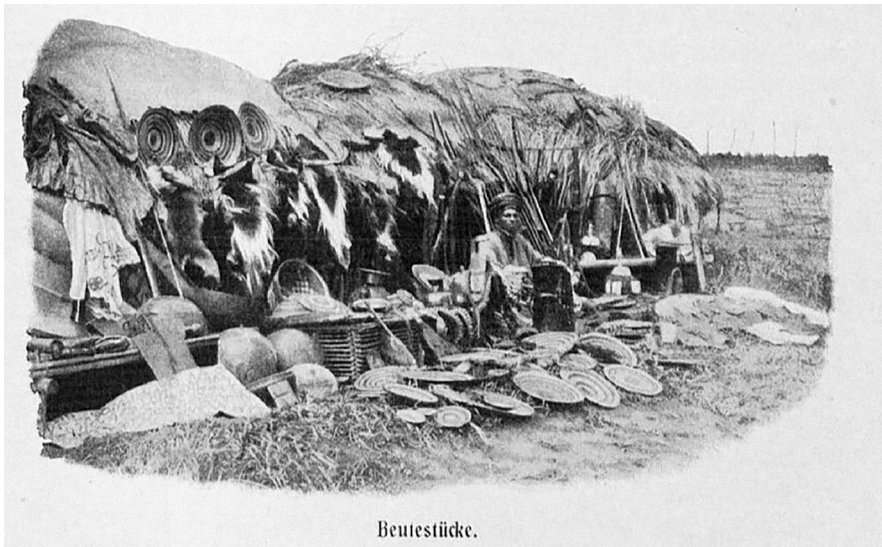


Figure 1 | Booty from the looting of the palace of the Lamido of Tibati, March 1899 (Source: Dominik, Hans (1901): *Kamerun, sechs Kriegs- und Friedensjahre in deutschen Tropen*, Berlin, p. 277)

Three months earlier, the town of Ngilla in the south of Tibati was captured and plundered: Shields, spears, swords, quivers, arrows, tusks and drums can easily be identified in the picture (Figure 2).

Human remains were often part of these collections. For some German colonial officers like Hans Dominik (1870–1910) for example, cutting off the head of fallen enemies was accepted military practice.⁴ The skull, which is in the Cameroon collection of the Overseas Museum Bremen, belongs to a Maka resistance fighter whose execution was ordered by Dominik during the war against the groups Omvang and Maka between 1909 and 1910.⁵



Figure 2 | Booty from the looting of the Vute town Ngilla, January 1899 (Source: Kolonial-Abteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes (1899): *Deutsches Kolonialblatt. Amtsblatt für die deutschen Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reichs*, 1899 (10): p. 847)

Inspection Tours and Meetings with Local Rulers

Visits to and meetings with local rulers were suitable occasions for the colonial authorities to collect objects. One year after the attack against the town of Marua in North Cameroon in January 1902, Hans Dominik summoned all Lamibe and Djaoroube (chiefs of the villages) of Marua and its neighbouring villages and confiscated their weapons.⁶ After his appointment as “Resident” of North Cameroon in 1904, the German colonial officer Wilhelm Langheld (1874–1915) visited the Mandara Mountains and the region between Garua and Tibati. His first tour was devoted to the inhabitants of the Mandara Mountains. He was accompanied by German officers (Strümpell, Stieber, Heßler, Schmidt), 90 soldiers, 140 carriers and about 70 servants, interpreters, scribes and other employees. There were occasional fights between his troops and the local groups. During the fights against the Giddir-Wuhum in December 1904, Langheld took away poisoned arrows and ordered the place to be looted. In January 1905 Langheld’s troops defeated the Lam. Langheld reported on the gifts received from the Arnados (chiefs of the non-Muslim ethnic groups in northern Cameroon) who came to pledge allegiance to him after both these wars. The second tour led to Ngaundere, where throne disputes between the Lamido Dalil on one side, his Sarki Yaki (Minister of War) and the son of the former Lamido Maigalli on the other side, had to be settled. On the way, Langheld received two poisoned arrows from one of his African soldiers after an incident with locals in the village of Gobi. In Gadenyato, Langheld received as a greeting from Maigalli two big elephant tusks and a large quantity of rubber. Langheld continued his tour until Tibati where he received from the locals an eagle, a raven and a colobus monkey, which he later handed over to the Berlin Zoo. On the way back to Garua, Langheld received 100 Maria Theresa thaler from Lamido Rey Buba as an overdue tribute payment.⁷

Scientific Expeditions

The concept of a “scientific expedition” refers to those expeditions whose main aim was to study the culture and history of colonised people as well as the geography, the flora and fauna of the colonies. During the “Pangwe Expedition”⁸ in southern Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea between 1907 und 1909, Günter Tessmann (1884–1969) reported on ethnographic objects he collected during attacks on villages, while attending traditional ceremonies or settling disputes. He also received many such objects as gifts.⁹ These “gifts”, however, were not freely given to him but out of fear: Tessmann was accompanied by soldiers and would not hesitate to order punishment and to use force. The term “scientific expedition” was also used to refer to border demarcation work such as the expedition in East Cameroon (*Ostgrenze-Expedition*) between 1905 and 1907 led by the German officer Freiherr von Seefried (1873–1914). Kurt Strümpell (1872–1947), the Deputy Resident in the *Residentur* Adamaua-Bornu, reported on 11 September 1907 that the localities were liable to pay tribute to the German East Cameroon Frontier Expedition.¹⁰ Although Seefried did not specify the nature of the tributes, it can be assumed that they consisted of different kinds of artefacts.

Economic Activities

European companies opened branches and outlets in the colonial territories, not only to sell industrial products, but also and above all to import products from the colonies to Europe. Exports to Europe included not only agricultural products or natural resources but also cultural goods. For example, Ludwig Broeckmann (born 1855), the managing director of the Bremen Tabakbau-Gesellschaft Bakossi and co-owner of the cigar factory F. W. Haase, stayed between September and December 1913 in what is known today as the region of Southwest Cameroon, where he specialised in collecting objects from the group Bakossi. A letter of 28 January 1914 from the Bremen Tabakbau-Gesellschaft Bakossi m.b.H. shows that the managing director of the company collected objects for the Übersee-Museum Bremen.¹¹ Other

German businessmen and companies such as Adolf Diehl (1870–1943) director of the Gesellschaft Nordwest-Kamerun,¹² Max Ohling, owner of the shop *Kumilla* in the district of Bangandu near Molundu in Southeast Cameroon, or companies such as the “Gesellschaft Süd-Kamerun”, were also involved in collecting objects.¹³

Non-Corporate Expeditions

Collections also originated through non-military and non-corporate expeditions. This section focuses particularly on Ernst Vollbehr (1876–1960), a traveller with the largest collection in the museum. Vollbehr went through West Cameroon and along the coast between November 1911 and January 1912, and collected different types of objects. According to his reports, most of the objects he appropriated were gifts he received from local rulers, artefacts he purchased, or abandoned items. On the way to Fumban between 12 and 14 December 1911, he received from the chief of the village Babanki-Tongo a richly carved chief’s chair and one of his porcupine-like caps, and Chief Senge of Babungo also presented him with a freshly made sword. On 15 December in Fumban the Bamun King Njoya personally presented the explorer with two dance masks used at the welcome ceremony. In addition, Vollbehr received valuable old ethnographic objects from Njoya and valuable carvings, old bronze pipes, a whole costume of a Bamun rider, a house model and other artefacts from Njoya’s mother. On 20 December he received objects used by women during a wedding as counter-gifts from the chief of the village of Bangam: long, richly decorated, beaded fly whisks, bronze horns, beautifully coloured bast bags and beaded caps. Vollbehr also received objects as gifts from rulers of other villages, including Mbo, Dschang and Bamengang, and removed abandoned objects such as the “chief’s door carvings” from the former residence of Bangola. Vollbehr also reported to have bought an old bead headdress for dancing in Bangam for the cheap price of 4.50 DM, a colourfully decorated canoe with complete equipment in Kribi, and some musical instruments from children in Longji near Kribi.¹⁴

However, Vollbehr is not the only traveller whose collection is in the museum. Other Germans, such as Emil Reiche, stayed in Cameroon in neither

a military nor a corporate capacity. According to a letter from his son, Hans Reiche, of 23 April 1931 to the administration of the Ethnological Museum (*Museum für Völkerkunde*) Bremen, Emil Reiche visited Cameroon twice (in 1896 and 1898). He had collected the object later given to the museum during one of these trips.¹⁵

Missionary Activities

The success of the missionary work was dependent on the learning of non-European languages,¹⁶ something that gave the missions access to local cultures and their symbols. The collecting strategies used by missionaries included conversion and the use of violence.¹⁷ Conversion to Christianity involved the abandonment or confiscation of those symbols of the colonised societies that the European missionaries considered incompatible with the Christian religion. Sometimes missionaries used force to take possession of these objects. René Bureau (1929–2004), a French ethno-sociologist and Africanist, reports without reference to a particular collection on missionaries who fought on the side of the colonial troops against the local groups in the coastal region of Cameroon.¹⁸ The literature emphasises the military character of the use of violence by missionaries.¹⁹

Trials

One of the aims of trials held during expeditions, exploratory journeys or research trips was to demonstrate the power of the Germans. It should be remembered that colonial officials and expedition leaders assumed different executive, judicial and legislative functions during their work.²⁰ The trials were not based on fixed rules, and the accused persons were exposed to unfair treatment. The aim of the trials was to keep the “blacks” submissive.²¹ Although there is little mention of the appropriation of objects during expeditions by means of justice in the travel reports of Europeans, some of them nevertheless used the settling of disputes or the dispense of justice to collect

cultural treasures. It was a summary justice, whose decisions were handed down by unqualified Europeans and immediately applied. Günter Tessmann (1884–1969), German ethnologist and explorer, visited Cameroon between 1904 and 1914, where he led two research or exploratory expeditions, namely the Pangwe Expedition (1907–1909) and the Sangha-Lobaye Expedition (1913–1914). He reported on a “palaver” or trial in which the “chiefs”, fearing punishment, handed over valuable gifts, including wooden masks.²²

War Reparations

Compensation was imposed on local rulers defeated in colonial wars. After the capture of Tibati, Captain von Kamptz sentenced the fugitive Lamido Mohaman Lamou to pay 300 tusks, 50 cows and 50 donkeys or the equivalent.²³ According to Christine Seige, most Vute rulers and the Lamido of Tibati lost a large part of their reserves of elephant tusks due to the high war reparations imposed on them.²⁴ In some regions, such as South and East Cameroon, these compensations were paid not only to the expedition or station leaders, but also to the German trading companies.²⁵ It is also possible that some rulers offered their precious items in order to compensate for a lack of elephant tusks or rubber. This kind of war compensation in favour of colonial collections was very common and gave colonial rulers access to precious or prestigious objects. Rather than putting an end to this practice, which was common among local groups before colonisation, the colonial masters increasingly drew on it in order to meet the demands of German museums. Most colonial wars ended with a tribute that the militarily defeated local chiefs had to pay to the colonial administration, especially to the expedition leaders. It is difficult to find a victorious expedition where the local chiefs were not condemned to do so.

Between Purchasing and Exchanging

Trading took place everywhere in the colony. In some regions, such as the Bamun territory in West Cameroon, Germans traded directly with rulers, craftsmen and women.²⁶ Speaking about the participation of women in the trade with objects, Marie Pauline Thorbecke (1882–1971) reported in Fumban, the Bamun capital, of hundreds of women from whom she and her husband Franz Thorbecke (1875–1945) had bought pots, baskets, jewellery and pipes.²⁷ During purchase negotiations, collectors would take advantage of their position and the ignorance of the people in order to defraud them. In 1894, for example, Captain Curt von Morgen (1858–1928) bought an elephant tusk weighing 50 pounds from the Vute at Ndumba for about 70 pfennigs. On the coast, the value of this tusk was 450 marks.²⁸ In the literature, reference is mostly made to purchase negotiations and rarely to purchase receipts, a practice that was, however, common in Europe but not used in colonial trade with ethnographic objects, as can be seen from the following examples. In a letter to Karl Graf von Linden (1838–1910), the co-founder of the Linden Museum, also known as the *Museum für Länder- und Völkerkunde* in Stuttgart, the German colonial officer Richard Hirtler (1872–1916) claims to have bought dance rattles from a local ruler in West Cameroon.²⁹ Günter Tessmann wrote about objects he bought during the Pangwe Expedition.³⁰ Vollbehrr reports on a valuable dance ornament that he bought for a mere 4.50 marks during his second stay in Cameroon between 1912 and 1913.³¹

In many cases, the groups of origin did not trade directly with the Germans. With a few exceptions, the Hausa merchants in Cameroon played the middlemen between Germans and locals. After the capture of Tibati in 1899 by the German colonial troops, for example, the Hausa trade quickly developed in the Sanaga plain. From Ngaundere, Tibati, Yoko, East Cameroon and neighbouring regions to the coast via Yaoundé, the Hausa maintained a trade with outlets in these places, selling to the European factories the items they had purchased from locals. Ivory was the primary commodity sold to Europeans after the colonial conquest. Amulets, jewellery (glass beads, rings), leather goods, wickerwork, clothes and other articles of daily use were also sold (Figure 3).³²



Figure 3 | The Market of Kumbo, today in the region of Northwest Cameroon (Source: A postcard, probably from the German colonial period, edited by the *Afrikanische Frucht-Comp. A. G., Hamburg-Kamerun*)

The objects also came into the possession of Europeans by means of exchange. This was essentially fraud on a large scale, whereby inexpensive trading goods from Europe, such as mirrors, spoons, tobacco, clothes or alcohol, were exchanged for valuable artefacts such as symbols of power, religious and other important objects.

Although reports from Cameroon do not mention such a practice, elsewhere objects were also used to pay for medical treatment. In Togo, for example, the doctor Max Martin (1878–1907) received objects as payment for medical treatment in the towns of Lome and Anecho in 1906.³³ This was clearly not a justified price for the treatment and thus a fundamentally unfair procedure. Was this way of appropriating objects in exchange for medical care an isolated case? Certainly, the methods of acquisition of certain collections by physicians and other health care workers in the colonial period cannot be elucidated without considering such a practice.

Conclusion

With regard to the above analysis, I argue that Europeans had the possibility to collect ethnographic objects in almost all fields of colonial activity. It is difficult to find a sector whose actors were not involved in colonial collecting. For German colonial rulers and officers, wars were the most efficient way to appropriate objects. This chapter has examined some collecting methods that were recorded during work on the Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum Bremen, in the hope that future research will identify further colonial collecting strategies.

A next step, which would exceed the scope of this chapter, would be to examine in which of the above-mentioned ways most of the objects were taken, to what extent local authorities were involved in these activities, and how the nature of these collecting practices and the individual exchanges can be classified further as having been legal, forced, coerced, or shaped in other ways by power imbalances. Nevertheless, according to my research at the Overseas Museum Bremen, almost 49 percent of the Cameroon collection belonged to colonial officers, of whom a good part – around a quarter of the whole collection – would certainly come from punitive expeditions. This percentage would be even higher if there were detailed reports on the circumstances of acquisition of all other collections that came to the museum via the military. It is difficult to say how many objects were legally acquired, received as gifts or purchased at fair value. The collections of traders and others represent about 25 percent. But it should be noted that the most important traders of ethnographic objects, such as the J.F.G Umlauff Company and Julius Konietzko (1886–1952) in Hamburg, were not in Cameroon. The missionary collection represents 3 percent and that of recreational travellers around 12 percent of the total Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum Bremen. The analysis in this chapter thus shows, in comparison to the Cameroon collection of the Linden Museum Stuttgart, for example, that military officers of the so-called “*Schutztruppe für Kamerun*”³⁴ played a central role in the creation of the collection.³⁵

- 1 Military officers and civilian officials, as well as expedition and district leaders.
- 2 DKB (*Deutsches Kolonialblatt – Amtsblatt für die Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee*, ed. Deutsche Kolonialzentralverwaltung im Reichsministerium für Wiederaufbau, Berlin, Vol. 10, 1899): pp. 838–849.
- 3 Dominik, Hans (1901): *Kamerun, sechs Kriegs- und Friedensjahre in deutschen Tropen*, Berlin, p. 276. This booty was acquired in 1902 by the Städtisches Museum für Natur-, Völker- und Handelskunde, known today as the *Übersee-Museum Bremen*.
- 4 Dominik, 1901, *Kamerun*, p. 94; Dominik, Hans (1908): *Vom Atlantik zum Tschadsee, Kriegs- und Forschungsfahrten in Kamerun*, Berlin, p. 132, 264.
- 5 Übersee-Museum Bremen, Konietzko file.
- 6 Dominik, 1908, *Vom Atlantik zum Tschadsee*, p. 204.
- 7 Langheld, Wilhelm (1909): *Zwanzig Jahre in deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin, p. 383–402.
- 8 The expedition was led on behalf of the Lübeck Ethnographic Collection (*Museum für Völkerkunde der Hansestadt Lübeck*) in cooperation with the Royal Zoological Museum (*Königliches Zoologisches Museum*) in Berlin, see Tessmann, Günther (1913): *Die Pangwe. Völkerkundliche Monographie eines [...] Ergebnisses der Lübecker Pangwe-Expedition 1907–1909 und früherer Forschungen 1904–1907*, Vol. 1, Berlin.
- 9 Templin, Brigitte (2015) (Ed.): *Günther Tessmann. Mein Leben – Tagebuch in 12 Bänden* (Teil 2), Part III: Lübeck, p. 123, 133.
- 10 Federal Archives (BArch) Berlin, File R 1001/3714, Vermessung der deutsch-französischen Grenze im Osten von Kamerun (Ostkamerun-Grenzexpedition Adolf von Seefried 1905 ff.), Vol. 2, Mai 1906 – Nov. 1911, fol. 103.
- 11 Übersee-Museum Bremen, File "Erhaltene Korrespondenz vom 1. November 1913 bis 31. Mai 1914", filed under "T", Letter of 28 January 1914.
- 12 Geary, Christraud M. (1996): "Political Dress: German-Style Military Attire and Colonial Politics in Bamum", in: Ian Fowler, David Zeitlyn (Eds): *African Crossroads: Intersections between History and Anthropology in Cameroon*, Oxford, pp. 165–192.
- 13 Übersee-Museum Bremen, Inventory Book 1907.
- 14 Vollbeh, Ernst (1912): *Mit Pinsel und Palette durch Kamerun*, Leipzig.
- 15 Übersee-Museum Bremen, File "Erhaltene Korrespondenz vom 1. Mai 1932 bis 30. Sept. 1933", Vol. 3: Emil Reiche stayed twice in Cameroon, in 1896 and 1898.
- 16 Habermas, Rebekka (2013): "Intermediaries, Kaufleute, Missionare, Forscher und Diakonissen. Akteure und Akteurinnen im Wissenstransfer: Einführung", in: Rebekka Habermas, Alexandra Przyrembel (Eds): *Von Käfern, Märkten und Menschen. Kolonialismus und Wissen in der Moderne*, Göttingen, pp. 27–60.
- 17 van Beurden, Jos (2017): *Treasures in Trusted Hands. Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*, Leiden, p. 86.
- 18 Bureau, René (1996): *Le peuple du fleuve. Sociologie de la conversion chez les Douala*, Éditions Karthala, Paris, p. 23.
- 19 Franz Michael Zahn, cited by Briskorn, Bettina von (2000): *Zur Sammlungsgeschichte afrikanischer Ethnographica im Übersee-Museum Bremen 1841–1945*, Bremen, p. 132; Jakob Keller cited by Gardi, Bernard (1994): *Kunst in Kamerun, Museum für Völkerkunde und Schweizerisches Museum für Volkskunde*, Basel, p. 22.
- 20 Ulrike Schaper (2012): *Koloniale Verhandlungen. Gerichtsbarkeit, Verwaltung und Herrschaft in Kamerun 1884–1916*, Frankfurt an Main, p. 157.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 22 Templin, 2015, *Günther Tessmann*, pp. 120–122.
- 23 DKB 10 (1899): p. 846.

- 24 Seige, Christine (2002): "Von allen begehrt: Die Haussa-Händler in Zentralkamerun zwischen Fulbe-Herrschern, Vute Häuptionen und deutschen Kolonisten" in: Anke Reichenbach, Christine Seige und Bernhard Streck (Eds): *Wirtschaften, Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Wolfgang Liedtke, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Ethnologie der Universität Leipzig* (Ethnographie, Vol. 2), Gehren, p. 206–230.
- 25 BArch Berlin, R175-I/131, Verwaltung des Sanga-Ngoko-Gebiets, Vol. 3, 1900–1902, pp. 149–150; DKB 15 (1904), pp. 762–770.
- 26 Thorbecke, Marie Pauline (1914): *Auf der Savanne, Tagebuch einer Kamerun-Reise*, Berlin, p. 54; Oberhofer, Michaela (2009): "Zwischen Tradition und Innovation. Die Geschichte der Bamum-Sammlung des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin", <https://www.about-africa.de/kamerun-nigeria/108-tradition-innovation-geschichte-bamum-sammlung-berlin>, accessed 30 March 2023.
- 27 Thorbecke, 1914, *Auf der Savanne*, p. 54.
- 28 Seige, 2002, *Von allen begehrt*, pp. 206–230.
- 29 Himmelsbach, Markus (2020): Korrespondenzmappe im Linden-Museum (KML) Richard Hirtler, p. 32: Abschrift 2/4 Richard Hirtler (Konstanz) an Karl Graf von Linden, 19.10.1904.
- 30 Templin, 2015, *Günther Tessmann*, p. 127, 131.
- 31 Vollbeh, 1912, *Mit Pinsel und Palette*, pp. 165–166.
- 32 Seige, 2002, *Von allen begehrt*, pp. 206–230.
- 33 Georg August University Göttingen, Ethnographic Collection, File "Sammlungs-Eingänge 1.4.1937 bis 31.3.1938", no. 17.
- 34 German Colonial Force. The German colonial term *Schutztruppe* suggests the pretext of "protection" (*Schutz*).
- 35 Grimme, Gesa (2018): *Provenienzforschung im Projekt "Schwieriges Erbe: Zum Umgang mit kolonialzeitlichen Objekten in ethnologischen Museen" – Abschlussbericht*, Stuttgart, p. 33, 35. https://www.lindenmuseum.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/SchwierigesErbe_Provenienzforschung_Abschlussbericht.pdf, accessed 30 March 2023.

