

Press release

8 June 2018



Raphael Gross, Monika Grütters, and Andreas Guibeb yesterday opened the symposium on 'The Stone Cross from Cape Cross – Colonial Objects and Historical Justice'

The start of a new event series, 'Historical Judgement', at the Deutsches Historisches Museum

Friday 8 June 2018: The interdisciplinary symposium on '**The Stone Cross from Cape Cross – Colonial Objects and Historical Justice**' was yesterday opened jointly by Professor Raphael Gross (President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum), Professor Monika Grütters (Minister of State for Culture and Media), and H.E. Andreas Guibeb (Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia to Germany).

An audience of more than 350 national and international guests from the worlds of culture, academia, and politics came to hear ethnologists, legal scholars, historians, philosophers, and museum specialists from Africa and Europe discuss the eventful history of the Stone Cross of Cape Cross, which was used to address complex issues concerning the display of colonial objects in European museums.

In her address, Monika Grütters said: 'Today's symposium is a right and necessary step on our path towards bringing light to the darkness of our colonial history. I am grateful to the experts from Africa who have travelled specially to this meeting in Berlin to be able to talk with us. For it is dialogue with both African and Asian voices, it is taking a collective look at the painful past, that are indispensable in helping us Germans – us Europeans – gain insight and understanding as we endeavour to find the right way of dealing with the legacy of this period.'

In the recent coalition agreement, the German Federal Government has once again acknowledged the need to deal with our colonial history. In this respect, we in Germany are helped by the fact that we have had to learn in past decades to bear responsibility for historical pain and injustice. Building on this wealth of experience, we are also facing up to our colonial past and seeking to work alongside the countries and societies of origin to look for, and find, constructive paths. This is part of Germany's historical responsibility towards the former colonies – and a necessary precondition for reconciliation and understanding with the people living there'.

Raphael Gross made the following comments in his welcoming address: 'In my view, an open discussion about this object can have a number of positive effects. In Germany, the discussion will raise consciousness of the connection between this country's history of unjust colonial rule (including the genocide committed against the Nama and Herero peoples) and the act of appropriating this Portuguese

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symbol of power. It can be understood in Namibia as a signal that the country's history is also being looked at in a new way in Germany. In turn, the question of historical justice can be the foundation for approaching controversies surrounding provenance research and restitution. It can provide a missing link by asking the question: what is historically just? This question can stimulate and guide discussions regarding the restitution of colonial objects'.

Ambassador Guibeb concluded proceedings by writing the following words in the Deutsches Historisches Museum's book of honour: 'The Deutsches Historisches Museum's Symposium on 'The Stone Cross from Cape Cross: Colonial Objects and Historical Justice' provides us a fitting opportunity to exchange views on how to reckon with the common colonial history between Germany and Namibia with the view to do justice in the present and the future'.

The Stone Cross from Cape Cross

The Stone Cross of Cape Cross has been part of the Deutsches Historisches Museum's permanent exhibition since 2006. It bears the Portuguese coat of arms, crowned by a cross. It records in Latin and Portuguese King John II of Portugal's claim to power over the territory – a claim for which the Stone Cross was to serve as a visible symbol. In the late-15th century, the navigator Diogo Cão was sent by the Portuguese king to explore the length of the West African coastline in search of a sea route to India. In 1486, he erected the Stone Cross on the coast of present-day Namibia. The object came into German ownership in the late-19th century, after the region became part of the colony known as 'German South West Africa'. In 1893, the Stone Cross was transported to the Kaiser's Germany. In 1895, Kaiser Wilhelm II had a reproduction of the original cross erected as a symbol of his own power. It featured an additional German inscription and the coat of arms of the German Reich. In 1986, a faithful replica of the original Stone Cross was unveiled in Namibia. In 2017, Namibia announced its intention of pursuing a restitution claim for the original Stone Cross.

The new event series, 'Historical Judgement'

To whom does the Stone Cross belong? Where does it belong? What claims and issues of moral responsibility are associated with it? What questions relating to the colonial past and historical justice can be linked to the Stone Cross of Cape Cross? What is its actual location – Germany, Portugal, or Namibia?

The interdisciplinary symposium marks the beginning of a new event series organized by the Deutsches Historisches Museum, entitled '**Historical Judgement**'. The series will be an opportunity once a year to explore current social and museum-related themes. The aim is for the symposium to make an important contribution to current debates emerging from the reappraisal of colonialism.

These include historical, curatorial, and moral aspects, which have been illuminated by the issues raised by the example of this exhibit. Central to the whole project is the question of historical justice.

Speakers at the symposium included ethnologists, legal scholars, historians, philosophers, politicians, and museum specialists from Africa and Europe: Professor Francisco Bethencourt (King's College, London), Professor Sebastian Conrad (Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin), Dr. Dag Henrichsen (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Basel), Winani Kgwatalala (Botswana National Museum, Gaborone), Dr. Lukas H. Meyer (University of Graz), Ellen Ndeshi Namhila (UNAM University of Namibia, Windhoek), Ruprecht Polenz (Special Envoy of the German Government to German-Namibian talks on the colonial past), Professor Sophie Schönberger (University of Konstanz), and Dr. Jeremy Silvester (Museums Association of Namibia, Windhoek).

You can find detailed information about the programme via this link:

<http://www.dhm.de/sammlung-forschung/symposien-workshops/die-saeule-von-cape-cross.html>