

Press release

17 May 2019



The Deutsches Historisches Museum to Return the Stone Cross of Cape Cross to Namibia

At a meeting held on 16 May 2019, the Deutsches Historisches Museum's Board of Trustees agreed to return the Stone Cross of Cape Cross to the Republic of Namibia. The decision thus followed the recommendation made by the President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Professor Raphael Gross.

The Republic of Namibia had previously requested the restitution of the Stone Cross of Cape Cross from the Federal Republic of Germany in a diplomatic note dated 1 June 2017. The Stone Cross is expected to be returned to Namibia in August later this year.

Professor Monika Grütters, the German Government Minister for Culture and Media, expressed her support for the decision: "The return of the Stone Cross of Cape Cross clearly signals our recognition of the need to reappraise our colonial past and to work together with colonial objects' countries of origin so that we can seek, and find, constructive ways to engage with one another respectfully. The colonial period has for many years been something of a blind spot in Germany's culture of remembrance. The injustice of this period has been forgotten and suppressed for too long. By returning this highly symbolic Stone Cross, we acknowledge the significance that cultural heritage of this kind has for the identity of states and societies. The restitution is a contribution towards Germany's reconciliation and sense of common understanding with the people of Namibia. At the same time, we accept responsibility for Germany's colonial past. Just as importantly, this groundbreaking decision is a step towards fostering dialogue between Germany and Namibia, undertaken as equal partners in a spirit of respect and dignity. It is a demonstration of the duty felt by cultural institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany to work together in reappraising German-Namibian colonial history."

His Excellency, Andreas B.D. Guibeb, Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia to the Federal Republic of Germany, welcomed the decision: "The pillar is important for reconstructing our own history and we are grateful that the Board of Trustees granted the wish of the Namibian government and people to have it restituted. The return of the original Cross is an important step for us to reconcile with our colonial past and trail of humiliation and systematic injustices that it left behind. Only the confrontation and acceptance of that painful past will liberate us to consciously and confidently confront the future. We understand this gesture as one more step on our common journey into the future after settling resolutely and fearlessly with all issues regarding our common past. It is important that we as the generation of Namibians who suffered under that colonial past are slowly but surely passing on without witnessing the closure to that chapter. Present and

Deutsches Historisches Museum

Abteilungsdirektorin Kommunikation
Barbara Wolf
Unter den Linden 2
10117 Berlin

T +49 30 20304-110
F +49 30 20304-152
wolf@dhm.de

Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
Daniela Lange
Unter den Linden 2
10117 Berlin

T +49 30 20304-410
F +49 30 20304-412
presse@dhm.de

www.dhm.de

future generations in both our countries are understandably more concerned about future sustainable development. Namibia and Germany can together set important examples in this field.”

Professor Raphael Gross, President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, also welcomed the development: “I am delighted by this decision. The Stone Cross is one of the very few objects that document the early beginnings of the country’s conquest by European powers. It is of incalculable value for Namibians’ cultural and political self-identity. We hope that the return of the Stone Cross will serve as a reminder of the historical injustice marked by Germany’s imposition of colonial rule, and the crimes committed in its pursuit. By returning the Stone Cross, we also aim to increase awareness in Germany of this chapter in the country’s history. First and foremost, however, the restitution is a signal for the future: we believe that the return of the Stone Cross, and the discussions already held on the subject, will lay the groundwork for a trusting and long-lasting collaboration between German and Namibian museums – making it possible to work together in examining and discussing the two countries’ shared history.”

Colonial Objects and Historical Justice: Symposium and Magazine

A key event in the run-up to this decision was the interdisciplinary symposium held on 7 June 2018, “**The Stone Cross of Cape Cross – Colonial Objects and Historical Justice**”, attended by more than 350 guests from Germany and around the world. Using the Stone Cross as an example of a colonial object held by a museum, the event was an opportunity for politicians and historians, ambassadors and legal experts, curators and philosophers from Germany, Austria, Portugal, Botswana, and Namibia to engage in a public discussion while maintaining an open mind about potential outcomes. They explored questions surrounding colonial objects in museums with respect to philosophy and ethics, history, museology, and international law. In February 2019, the museum published contributions from the invited experts, as well as some of the insights and responses from other symposium participants, in its new magazine, *Historical Judgement*.

An Object’s Eventful History

Since 2006, the Stone Cross of Cape Cross has formed part of the Deutsches Historisches Museum’s permanent exhibition. 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. 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. In 1893, the limestone cross (which is 3.50 metres tall and weighs 1.1 tonnes) was transported to the Kaiser's Germany, after the region in which it had stood became part of the colony known as "German South-West Africa." In 1990, the Stone Cross eventually joined the collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum. In 1895, to assert his own claim to power over the region, Kaiser Wilhelm II had a reproduction of the Stone Cross erected on the original site. The reproduction featured an additional German inscription and the emblem of the German Empire, the *Reichsadler* (Imperial Eagle). In 1986, a faithful replica of the original Stone Cross was unveiled on the site by then known as Cape Cross in Namibia.