

PRESS RELEASE

Magdeburg, October 28, 2021

German Lost Art Foundation awards funds for research on Benin bronzes and also grants approximately 912,000 euros for long-term research projects on colonial contexts

The so-called “Benin bronzes” are at the heart of the debate on the return of cultural goods to formerly colonized countries. With the support of the German Lost Art Foundation, the provenance of around 90 Benin bronzes is to be investigated. The aim is to clarify whether they also belong to those objects that were looted from the Royal Palace of Benin in 1897. The Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim, the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich and the Übersee-Museum in Bremen are to receive funding for research projects applied for at short notice. From 2022, the first Benin bronzes held in German museums and institutions are to be returned to Nigeria.

The Minister of State for Culture and Media, Monika Grütters: “The handling of the Benin bronzes in German museums and collections is an important sign of the seriousness that solidifies German efforts in coming to terms with its colonial era. I am grateful to the German Lost Art Foundation for the fact that, in addition to other research projects on colonialism, it is now funding research into the provenances of around 90 Benin bronzes in German museums. This is another important step towards establishing a shared understanding with our Nigerian counterparts, and for forging an increasingly close form of cooperation in this cultural field between the two countries in the future. We continue to adhere to the goal set out in the Statement

on the handling of the Benin Bronzes in German museums and institutions of April 29, 2021, that there should be initial returns of Benin bronzes throughout 2022. This goal is also served by the Memorandum of Understanding signed a few days ago during a visit by a German delegation to Abuja, Nigeria.”

In addition, and on the recommendation of its Funding Committee, the German Lost Art Foundation has approved eight applications for long-term research projects in the field of colonial contexts in its second funding round of 2021. Approximately 912,000 euros in funding will be made available for this purpose; six of the projects have been newly applied for and two that are already underway will be extended (see annex). A research project at the University of Göttingen in the Institute of Zoology and Anthropology is particularly innovative: There, methods are to be developed for extracting human DNA from bones without using previously

known invasive procedures. This would allow researchers to use DNA analysis to identify individuals and provide clues to their origins – while preserving the integrity of human remains, which is important to many societies.

The German Lost Art Foundation in Magdeburg, which was founded by the federal government, the states and leading municipal associations on Jan. 1, 2015, is Germany's central point of contact on questions of unlawfully seized cultural property. The Foundation is funded at an institutional level by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, from which it also receives funding for its project grants. The Foundation's main focus is on cultural property seized under National Socialism, especially from Jewish owners. Since 2019, when the German Lost Art Foundation was expanded to include the Department for Colonial Contexts, it has also been possible to apply for funding for projects that deal with cultural property and collections emanating from colonial contexts. Since then, a total of approximately 4.4 million euros has been approved for 40 projects in this area.

Applications for longer-term projects can be submitted on January 1 and June 1 of each year; short-term projects can be applied for at any time. All institutions in Germany under public law that collect, preserve or research cultural assets from colonial contexts are eligible to apply. These include museums, universities and other research institutions. Since Jan. 1, 2021, applications can also be submitted by institutions that are recognized as non-profit and have their headquarters in Germany.

For more information on funding opportunities, please visit: www.kulturgutverluste.de

German Lost Art Foundation

Lena Grundhuber

Stiftung bürgerlichen Rechts

(Foundation under Civil Law)

Press Office

Humboldtstrasse 12 | 39112 Magdeburg

Phone +49 (0) 391 727 763 35

Fax +49 (0) 391 727 763 6

presse@kulturgutverluste.de

www.kulturgutverluste.de