

Launch of the Franco-German Research Fund on the Provenance of Cultural Objects from sub-Saharan Africa

On January 19th 2024 the official launch of the new Franco-German Research Fund on the provenance of cultural objects from sub-Saharan Africa took place at the Centre Marc Bloch.



Left to right: Esther Möller (co-direction CMB), Andreas Görgen (Amtschef BKM), Aurélien Lechevalier (MEAE), Jay Rowell (direction CMB), François Delattre (French Ambassador), Claudia Roth (StM'in BKM), Fritjof A. Maennel (BMBF), Valérie Mouroux (MC), Souleymane Bachir-Diagne (Scientific Council), Julie Sissia (project lead), Aurélie Denoyer (secretary general CMB) / Foto: CMB, Simon Brunel

In 2023, France and Germany decided to create a joint Fund dedicated to research on the provenance of cultural objects from sub-Saharan countries in their public institutions. The French Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs together with the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research have mandated the Centre Marc Bloch (CMB) to run the Fund.

Museums, cultural, scientific and academic institutions in both Germany and France hold substantial collections of cultural and artistic objects with great symbolic, artistic, historic or societal significance for the countries and societies of origin. Over the last few years, strengthening provenance research has been a major objective for Germany and France, as well as for many other European countries. France and Germany have sought to support making sub-Saharan cultural heritage more accessible again to the sub-Saharan public. They are calling for a greater circulation of artworks and have also implemented new policies regarding restitutions of cultural goods and art works. The creation of the Franco-German Fund on the provenance of cultural objects from sub-Saharan Africa is an integral part of a broader cultural policy seeking to strengthen and renew partnerships with sub-Saharan Africa.

This Fund is a three-year initiative with an annual budget of 720.000€. Based on an annual call for proposals, it will support provenance research projects carried out by consortia bringing together French, German and sub-Saharan partners. The Scientific Council is responsible for defining the Fund's program, project evaluation and selection. It is made up of nine highly recognized experts equally from France, Germany and sub-Saharan Africa: Felicity Bodenstein (Sorbonne University), Souleymane Bachir Diagne (Columbia University), Hugues Heumen Tchana (National Museum of Cameroon), Emmanuel Kasarhérou (Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac), Antoinette Maget-Dominicé (University of Geneva), Nzila Marina Mubusisi (National Museum of Namibia), Barbara Plankensteiner (Museum am Rothenbaum Hamburg), Emilie Salaberry (Musées d'Angoulême), Bénédicte Savoy (TU Berlin).

The launch event took place on January 19th at the Centre Marc. To celebrate the Fund's first call for proposals, **Souleymane Bachir Diagne**, Professor of French and of Philosophy, Director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, and newly elected president of the Fund's **Scientific Council**, gave an inaugural conference.

Press Statements:

Souleymane Bachir Diagne, President of the Scientific Council: *“Determining the origin of cultural objects from sub-Saharan Africa is a question of justice. Provenance research is essential to distinguish between artifacts that were abstracted violently and those that were acquired through legitimate transactions. While this knowledge is important for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa to explore their own heritage and to be able to showcase it to the world, for countries like France and Germany provenance research offers the possibility to reflect on their colonial past. In that way these objects and the documentation of their provenance through the Franco-German Fund can create ties between the global North and South, serve as a symbol of a renewed relation between Europe and Africa and inspire new partnerships on the academic, cultural and political level.”*

Claudia Roth, German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media:

“I am very pleased that the Franco-German Provenance Research Fund has now been launched. I worked together with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and our partners in France to set up the fund. The aim of the fund is to promote provenance research projects between German and French institutions on cultural objects from sub-Saharan Africa. With this fund, we are strengthening the Franco-German partnership and cooperation as well as the collaboration with our partners from the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The start of the programme shows that cooperations – across borders, and between science and culture – make important projects like this one possible and are much needed in challenging times like these”.

Valérie Mouroux, Deputy Director of European and International Affairs, French Ministry of Culture:

“This project is part of the French Government’s larger political strategy to renew cooperation with the African continent. Culture plays an important role within this strategy, as we have to revisit our shared past and trace new perspectives for the future. In this regard the treatment of questions of memory, the access to museum archives and the restitution of objects of African heritage in our museum constitutes an essential step towards a renewed relation and do justice to notably the young generations that have been deprived of their own heritage”

Aurélien Lechevalier Director-General of globalization, culture, education and international cooperation, French Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs:

“For the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs the launch of this project is historic for three reasons: Firstly, the project is part of a renewed policy of foreign affairs that has been oriented decisively by the president Emmanuel Macron. This approach turns to the African continent in all its diversity to construct new partnerships and a shared future for our youth. Secondly, this governmental initiative is driven by the researchers and is thus the fruit of continuous efforts of the scientific community. Finally, this call for proposals is a very tangible financial support that will provide selected projects with the much needed resources to conduct the important research of provenance.”

Fritjhof Maennel, Deputy Director-General, German Federal Ministry of Education and Research:

“The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has been funding the Centre Marc Bloch for many years and considers it an important pillar of our Franco-German cooperation. The institute is very well suited to host the Fund on provenance research. The fund will complement the scientific portfolio of the Centre Marc Bloch. We are very much looking forward to learning about the results that the projects will produce in the coming three years.”

For more information on the Franco-German Fund please contact Dr. Julie Sissia, Scientific Head of the Franco-German Research Fund on the Provenance of Cultural Objects from sub-Saharan Africa (julie.sissia@cmb.hu-berlin.de) at Centre Marc Bloch.

For any press inquiries, interview requests or visuals, journalists can contact Sébastien Vannier, Head of Scientific Communications at Centre Marc Bloch (communication@cmb.hu-berlin.de)

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