



A short history of the Weltmuseum Wien

The origins of the Weltmuseum Wien date back to the sixteenth century. It comprises different collections assembled over the centuries and now housed under a single roof. Here is a short summary of its history:

16th century: Archduke Ferdinand II amassed the "Ambras Collection", which is repeatedly moved during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1806, Emperor Francis I (1768-1835) ordered this part of his inheritance removed to Vienna.

1806: Emperor Francis I also bought natural objects and over two hundred ethnographic objects at an auction in London; originating in Oceania and North America, they were assembled by Captain James Cook (1728-1779) during his exploratory voyages. This acquisition enlarged the Hof-Naturalien-Cabinette (imperial cabinets of natural objects) by adding an ethnographic collection.

1817: To celebrate the upcoming marriage of his daughter Leopoldina to Dom Pedro, the Crown Prince of Portugal and Brazil, Emperor Francis I financed a scientific expedition to Brazil (until 1836). The objects that were collected were later incorporated into the imperial ethnographic collection.

1821: Emperor Francis I moved parts of the imperial ethnographic collection and the Cook Collection, stored in the Imperial Library since 1806, to Lower Belvedere Palace, where they were installed next to the Ambras Collection and opened to the public. In the same year he also rented Harrach Palace in Vienna's Johannesgasse, where the "Brazilian Museum" was installed. It welcomed visitors until 1836.

1859: objects collected during the world circumnavigation of the Austrian frigate Novara (from 1857) were incorporated into the collection.

1876: The newly-founded k.k. Naturhistorisches Hofmuseum (Imperial Museum of Natural History) replaces the earlier imperial collections. Its five departments include the Anthropological-Ethnographic Collection, the predecessor of the Museum of Ethnology. The museum is formally opened to the public in 1889. By the time Franz Heger, the collection's first director, retires he has increased its size by over sixty per cent. Private and public patrons donate countless objects to the museum, among the highlights is the collection assembled by the Brazilian Baroness Manada Loret.

1912: The "Este Collection" assembled by Archduke Franz Ferdinand during his 1892/93 trip around the world is installed in the newly-erected Corps de Logis, a wing of the Neue Burg originally designed to house imperial apartments – and now the home of the Weltmuseum Wien. Following the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the collection is incorporated into the holdings of the Ethnographic Department of the Natural History Museum.

1926: The Ethnographic Department, which had become an independent collection two years before, moves into the Neue Burg.



May 25, 1928: The Museum of Ethnology is opened to the public. By 1935 it comprises departments for Africa, the Middle East, South- and Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and North- and Central America. Formally it remains part of the Natural History Museum.

After WWII: Following the end of the war in 1945, the museum first serves as a military hospital and then as an orthopaedic hospital. Between 1966 and 1989 it organises summer exhibitions at Matzen Palace, between 1971 and 1982 also at the Charterhouse at Gaming in Lower Austria, and sometimes also at Scharnstein Palace in Upper Austria (1975-1982)

2001: In the course of the privatisation of federal museums, the Museum of Ethnology is incorporated into the Museumsverband des Kunsthistorischen Museums.

2004: After several attempts at renovation the permanent galleries are emptied and closed. The converted roof now houses offices, new restoration workshops, the library, and depots.

May 9, 2007: The museum reopens with the exhibition "Benin – Kings and Rituals". In 2008 one of the permanent galleries is installed and reopened to the public. The museum subsequently hosts a number of temporary exhibitions.

May 1, 2012: Sabine Haag, Director-General and Paul Frey, C.F.O. of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna respectively, present Steven Engelsman as the new director of the museum. He develops a new concept for the museum and obtains a commitment for federal funding.

April 17, 2013: The museum announces its new name: Weltmuseum Wien. The renovation work is scheduled to be completed in late 2016 at a cost of 27,5 million Euros. It proves impossible to amalgamate the museum with the Volkskundemuseum, which had been proposed by experts. The new installation envisages twenty-nine galleries covering a total of 4.500 square metres; nineteen galleries are reserved for the permanent collection, comprising both a "Korridor des Staunens" (a corridor of wonders) and a "Perlenkette von Geschichten" (a string of pearls of histories). The architects are Ralph Appelbaum Associates and Gareth Hoskins Architects.

November 2014: Shortly after the museum is closed for renovation, Josef Ostermayer (SPÖ), at the time the Austrian Minister of Culture, announces new plans for a "re-sizing" of the project, presenting new projects such as a "Haus der Geschichte" (House of History) and new storage facilities for the Imperial Library. A few months later the minister specifies his plans: The Weltmuseum Wien is to be reduced to 3.900 square metres of display space (instead of the initially projected 4.500 square metres), the "Haus der Geschichte" is to have 3.000 square metres. The costs of the re-sized project are 21,8 million euros (instead of 27,5 million euros).

March 19, 2015: The Weltmuseum Wien presents its new re-sized plans: A conceptual room "Kunstgeschichten" (art histories), the ZOOM Kindermuseum im Weltmuseum (ZOOM Children's Museum in the Weltmuseum), the Museum restaurant, and the "Korridor des Staunens" envisaged in the design presented in autumn 2014 could not be realized. The latter is subsequently reintroduced and will be



opened to the public in February 2018; however, it has been moved from the Ground Floor to the First Floor.

October 25, 2017: The Weltmuseum Wien celebrates its opening with a rich programme of events.

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