

## Report on Provenance Research: the Frundsberg/Emerich Billitzer Collection

The project produced a final report focusing on the acquisition contexts of the ethnographic objects (inv. nos 21.889–21.954 b) collected by Emerich Billitzer (1848–1938) during the voyage of the "Frundsberg" in East Africa in 1884/85. Collectors like Billitzer operated from within imperial institutions, in this case the k. k. Kriegsmarine (imperial royal navy), while their individual capacities may also be considered.

When Maximilian I (1832–1867) took command of the k. k. Kriegsmarine, he tried to lead it out of its subordinate role within the Habsburg monarchy. Firstly, Pula (Croatia) was made the main war port, and secondly, he found new, more ambitious areas of responsibility for the warships during peacetime: in addition to protecting Austrian merchant ships, the navy started to conduct scientific expeditions (e. g. Novara Expedition 1857–59). Due to the upcoming Suez Canal project, Maximilian believed the monarchy's location on the Mediterranean Sea could give it an essential role in trade with India, South Asia, and even the Far East. Therefore, he saw the necessity to have colonial bases along the route. Due to estimated costs, divergent interests within the monarchy, and foreign policy, such projects failed.

His successor in office, Wilhelm von Tegetthoff (1827–1871), continued the modernization of the navy and established annual transoceanic training missions. However, the rising costs for such ventures during peacetime lead to criticism. As a result of precarious state finances during the 1860s, the upswing of the k. k. Kriegsmarine, accompanied by colonialist dreams, experienced a period of stagnation under Friedrich von Pöck (1825–1884) in the 1870s.

After Maximilian Daublebsky von Sterneck (1829–1897) was appointed commander of the k. k. Kriegsmarine in 1883, he tried to emphasize his institution's importance, especially during peacetimes. Sterneck wanted to use the annual training missions for commercial and scientific activities as he was a supporter of colonial interests. In summer 1884, he sent four warships, among them the "Frundsberg", on so-called transoceanic voyages for training purposes, hoping that they would gather information to support colonial plans. Sterneck established a network around these training missions as he worked together with the Foreign Ministry and Trade Ministries in both parts of the monarchy as well as with commercial circles in Trieste. Additionally, he offered the k. k. naturhistorisches Hof-Museum (Natural History Museum Vienna) to collect objects desired by the museum during the training missions.

The primary task of the "Frundsberg" voyage was not to collect objects, but for the officers, aside from training new navy cadets, to collect information regarding trade relations and commercial possibilities. Therefore, crew members were not only pursuing scientific interests on their journeys, but also worked towards political and economic goals of the monarchy or various interest groups within. Even though the scientific role of the Kriegsmarine was repeatedly stressed, colonial-political interests of the Naval High Command show that research tasks often served as a pretext as well. With their descriptions of economic conditions and assessments of potential for commerce in East Africa, crew members were acting, consciously or not, as agents of the monarchy and its business interests.

Ethnographica and human/ancestral remains were collected as specified by Franz Heger (1853–1931), at that point the head of the Anthropological-Ethnographical Department of the Hof-Museum. Sterneck entrusted the medical doctors of the navy with the acquisition of collections for the navy museum in Pula as well as the Viennese Hof-Museum given their natural-scientific education. From the perspective of custodians like Heger, no expertise was needed to collect for the museum if provided sufficient instructions. The physicians served as laymen in the sense of museum specialists and assisted by collecting and recording their observations.

For the most part, Emerich Billitzer, as the medical doctor on the "Fruntsberg", acquired the ethnographic objects not at their place of origin or use. During the short stays in ports, he could only buy what was offered at markets. As described in the instructions by Heger and Billitzer's own report, he bought most of the objects from intermediaries such as Mijikenda traders. The only exception would be an iron bracelet (inv. no. 21.954 a) and glass beads on a string (inv. no. 21.954 b), which were attached to *human remains* taken by Billitzer near Bagamoyo (Tanzania) and are therefore considered burial objects. Additionally, the objects acquired in the port Mahajanga (Madagascar) are likely to be spoils of war, since the port town was an active war zone in the Franco-Merina War (1883–85) when the "Fruntsberg" arrived there. Although no crew members were involved in fights, attacks by Merina troops and other minor skirmishes happened regularly. It is most likely, that objects, especially weapons, were taken from fallen Merina soldiers and sold at the market in Mahajanga, where Billitzer in turn bought them.

Today, the natural history objects and *human remains* from the Fruntsberg Collection are located in the Natural History Museum Vienna, while the ethnographic objects are kept in the storage of Weltmuseum Wien. Objects were also collected for the Marine-Museum (navy museum) and the Marine Schule (navy school), both located in Pula and the Schönbrunn Zoo. For the last two destinations it is unknown how many and which objects were collected – so are their whereabouts today.

In addition, the adjunct Ruggiero Gayer produced 20 watercolour paintings, 18 now at Weltmuseum Wien, and eight more depicting harbour scenes kept at the Austrian State Archives.

During the nineteenth century especially, European museums benefited from colonial aspirations and the expansion of colonial structures facilitating collections of *human remains*, objects, samples, herbaria, or photographs. In turn, colonial or racist theories and world views were not only adopted but further reinforced through exhibitions and research paradigms. Weltmuseum Wien and the Natural History Museum Vienna are no exception in this regard. Both museums house, among many others, collections from the k. k. Kriegsmarine acquired during European colonial expansion. Further international, interdisciplinary, and inter-institutional research on this matter will provide a better understanding of these collections and their possible futures.