



## Guiding principles for research and scientific investigation at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

*A joint resolution adopted on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014 at the Directors Conference of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*

### **Preamble**

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) is one of the largest and most important universal museums in existence, an organisation dedicated to the preservation, research and mediation of treasures of art and culture covering the full span of human history, from its beginnings to the present day. Its collections comprise upwards of 5.3 million objects from the fields of art, archaeology and ethnology. Since its foundation no other comparable institution has collected or researched as encyclopedically as the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and this commitment to the creativity of yesteryear has served as a model for the subsequent development of other large international museums. Since 1976 the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin has been a member – the only museum member to date - of the German Research Foundation. As such, it can be seen as a pioneer among Germany's non-academic, museum-based research institutions. With the induction of the entire Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) into the German Research Foundation in 2011, the Staatliche Museen's groundbreaking relationship with the German Research Foundation has been subsumed within the affiliation of its umbrella organisation.

### **Self-conception**

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin can thus be seen within the context of a long tradition of research stretching back to the beginnings of the former Königliche Museen. In 1841, at the behest of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, declared his intention "to transform the whole of the area behind the [Altes] Museum on the Spree island into a sanctuary for art and science". As far back as 1835 and 1868, the dates of the first two charters, research and science were enshrined as key areas of activity and earmarked for funding. The latest charter, drawn up in 2000, likewise listed among the tasks of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin its responsibility not only "to nurture, update and enlarge the collections in the interest of the general public, to make them accessible and to preserve them for posterity" and "to convey through the medium of exhibitions and suitable events the sensuous values and intellectual content of the collections" but more particularly "to come to scientific



means of research, documentation and publishing” and “to present its knowledge and experience in the national and international arena”.

Aside from specialist research focusing on artefacts there is also liaison between individual institutions of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin on overarching, interdisciplinary themes, with the many and varied areas and avenues of research focusing on the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin that have evolved over time. The museums see it as their responsibility to consider their research goals when defining their core work and to take account of collection structures, existing traditions and current theories, discourses and areas of interest when designing their research programmes. The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin pursue their own large-scale research projects. They are committed to extending their cutting-edge role to include research and to taking proactive measures to meet the ongoing research demands being placed on museums. Scholars working for the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin are deeply involved in the current discourses relating to their respective disciplines and, unlike many of their colleagues, are in the privileged position of being able to incorporate into their projects research work that has been and is being conducted into individual items across the unique archipelago of SMB collections. The researchers at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin are not only recognised for their contributions to the pool of scholarship and their input at specialised conferences; they are also known for the academic quality of their curated exhibitions and the associated catalogues, as they are able to bring their findings to the attention of millions of visitors every year.

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin are acknowledged as being a research institution on a par with universities and other non-university research institutions. Its remit is to depict vividly for the research community and general public the rich diversity and important findings of studies made of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

## **Positions**

Research work conducted by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin extends beyond archaeology, European and non-European ethnology and art history to embrace disciplines not specific to a particular collection, such as archaeometry, the investigation of provenance and the science of restoration and conservation, and interdisciplinary subjects such as visual culture, media studies, book studies and visual anthropology. These avenues of scholarship, along with fields of study that include museum research, archiving and digitisation, far exceed those followed by more standard museums. Through its diversity of methodology and its unique collections the Staatliche Museen zu

Berlin are able to explore new avenues of scientific and academic research and develop new fields of scholarship.



- Artefact-based research

The myriad objects reflecting 700,000 years of history form the central research focus of the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Aside from artworks dating back to all eras of human history, the collections include archaeological and ethnological artefacts and items of interest to science historians. Studying this material is a normal part of the work of the scholars and academics attached to the museums and institutes. The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin showcase their new discoveries and research findings in exhibitions, publications and talks.

- Field research

Parallel to its own projects, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin also work with other museums on national and international research projects. These traditionally include high-profile excavations in the Middle East, Asia Minor, Egypt and Sudan and ethnological fieldwork around the globe. This work enables the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin to contextualise the artefacts of its own collections and reflect the field-research findings in its museum displays.

- Conservational, archaeometric and art-technology research

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin employ specialist restorers to conserve works and artefacts executed in all manner of materials and media. Besides the core preservation and restoration work the research focus lies on new conservation and preventive strategies, transformations resulting from atmospheric conditions, materials analysis and the history of technology. A significant role here is played by the interdisciplinary collaboration, at national and international level, between art historians, archaeologists, restorers, conservers and scientists. This interaction is essential if cross-disciplinary knowledge is to be expanded.

- Provenance research

Research prior to the acquisition of pieces and reconstruction of the provenance of the many items in the collections is a key aspect of the work of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Investigations into the provenance of works involve close cooperation with centrally or regionally organised institutions. In respect of works stolen, confiscated or forcibly sold during the Nazi period, especially items that were in Jewish ownership, provenance research is initially concentrating on works acquired by the museums themselves during the period 1933-1945. Parallel to this, systematic research is being conducted into purchases made in the post-war period.

- Museum research

With the Institut für Museumsforschung (Institute for Museum Research) the Staatliche Museen



zu Berlin possess a research and documentation institute that is nationwide in compass and whose work focuses on cross-collection aspects of museum-related activity. The Institute's remit is to develop concepts for visitor-research, digitisation and long-term archiving of material and to monitor advances in museum management and documentation, new media and methods of teaching and conveying information. Its research involves cross-disciplinary projects with archives and libraries.

- Digitisation of material

Digitisation is essential if research findings are to be made internationally accessible, which is why, in meeting its research, display and preservation obligations, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin have shifted their focus to online media. In an age of "digital representability" they represent the wealth of heritage in the virtual dimension. They are actively involved in knowledge networks and the exchange of data. Open access to digitised material is designed to foster dialogue between scholars and the general public.

- International exchange between scientists.

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin organise grant and exchange programmes to promote employment and international research projects beyond the activities of their own specialists. Proposals are called in and used to set specific research foci.

Collaborations with prestigious German and international science institutions are being expanded and reinforced on an ongoing basis. International fellows of partner institutes or foundations spend several months each year pursuing research projects at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Besides the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, its partners include non-university research institutes such as the Kunsthistorische Institut Florenz – Max Planck Gesellschaft, the Forum Transregionale Studien, institutes of the Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft and large research foundations such as the Mellon Foundation, the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and the Volkswagen-Stiftung.

- University partnerships

It is the prerogative of all research associates at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin to take up teaching positions, give lectures or hold seminars at the university. Many SMB associates have teaching posts or honorary professorships at universities in Germany or abroad. Joint doctorate and masters programmes are a testimony to the close ties between the individual museums and university-based research projects. Within the context of excellence clusters and niche research fields the museums of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin work intensively and in a number of different ways with universities and do much to nurture the next generation of specialists.

One example is the Berliner Antike-Kolleg dedicated to classical and ancient studies. This offshoot of the Berlin-based TOPOI excellence cluster brings together, in a new and unique



way, the scholarship and skill sets of the Berlin museums on the one hand and the universities and non-academic research institutes on the other.

- Research infrastructure

Any qualified researcher or scientist can obtain access to the material held in the institutions of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, which see themselves explicitly as places of research.

### **Developments and objectives**

The unreserved research aim of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is to maximise the networking of researchers within the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, to set up partnerships - often in response to successful proposals - with institutions conducting university-based and non-university-based research, and to strengthen existing structures. This has the following consequences:

To increase the amount of time that staff are able to spend working on their research projects, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is committed to formulating job descriptions accordingly and, in the long term, to creating additional jobs. It may also be possible to release individuals on sabbatical to enable them to complete an important research project.

As a way of providing the experts as well as the general public with insights into specific research projects being pursued by one or another institute, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin continue to organise public lectures relating to all departments. Preparations are underway to create an annual Research Day, an opportunity for the various areas of research to bundle their findings and present them to the public. Moreover, in the long term the international scientists and scholars network of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is being expanded to include an alumni platform and a series of colloquia.

A further, active research project relating to provenance investigation is currently being conducted with the aim of locating and scrutinising all problematic works within the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Where appropriate, the SMB contacts the heirs of the former owner on its own initiative with the long-term intention of restoring unlawfully acquired works to their rightful owners. The goal is to work systematically through the entire stock of works.

The digitisation strategy of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin aims to produce digitised copies, in the relevant media, of all material held in the collections and to make it accessible to researchers. The rendering of data and reproductions in digital form facilitates the open exchange of information and



provides channels for bringing the museums' digitised content to the attention of the general public. It chimes with the museums' research mandate and makes it easier to access research findings.

The many and varied partnerships with museums and research institutions such as universities and foundations, together with the collaborations with international specialists, are designed to provide the best conditions for researchers to exchange ideas and knowledge as they work with the material held in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. An international research network and a high degree of transparency ensure that researchers are fully aware of the objects held at the institutions of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

The social contract of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is to use exhibitions, publications, events and projects to present to the world the research findings based on objects and works held on its premises and hence to lead to the enrichment of society as a whole. This present-day mandate is derived to no small extent from its strong tradition of research and development.

These Guiding Principles / The Guiding Principles set out above / The following Guiding Principles / The attached/enclosed Guiding Principles are to be viewed within the context of the strategic positioning of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) with respect to research. This positioning was presented to the SPK Directorate along with an internal strategy paper on 5th September 2014; the content and wording of the document are currently being finalized.