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"The exploration of the fate and the restitution of the mortal remains of the Indigenous Australian contribute to a mutual understanding and to the reconciliation of cultures"

9. April 2019

Bavarian State Minister of the Arts Bernd Sibler signs handover certificates at The Museum Fünf Kontinente – Australian Ambassador to Germany H.E. Lynette Wood and Gudju Gudju Fourmile, elder of the Gimuy Walubara Yidindji people and leader of the community, receive the ancestral remains

MUNICH. Bavarian State Minister of the Arts Bernd Sibler returned the mortal remains of an Indigenous Australian, the Yidindji Ancestral King, to his descendants, the Yidindji people. During the repatriation ceremony, Minister Sibler signed the handover certificates with H.E. Lynette Wood, Australian Ambassador to Germany, Gudju Gudju Fourmile, elder of the Gimuy Walubara Yidindji people and leader of the community, and Dr. Uta Werlich, director of The Museum Fünf Kontinente (The Museum of Five Continents). The former director of The Museum Fünf Kontinente, formerly known as Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, the first ethnological museum in Germany, received the ancestral remains during his travels across Australia from 1888 to 1889 for the museum's collection.

"Central politico-cultural task"

"The exploration of the fate and the restitution of the mortal remains of the Indigenous Australian from Far North Queensland contribute to a mutual understanding and to the reconciliation of cultures. I am glad that we can return the Yidindji Ancestral King to his descendants and that they can bring him home to Australia with dignity," stressed Sibler, who supports the transparent handling of collections from colonial contexts.

H.E. Lynette Wood, Australian Ambassador to Germany, stated: "The return of ancestral remains to their families and traditional country is a profoundly important issue for Australian Indigenous Peoples within Australia. The Australian Government has been encouraged by the positive engagement and cooperation shown by the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich, and the Bavarian Ministry of Science and the Arts in the repatriation of Australian Indigenous ancestral remains. We will continue to pursue negotiations for further repatriations from German institutions."

Bavarian Minister of the Arts Sibler described the exploration of the provenance of collections and their restitution, where applicable, as "a central politico-cultural task". The most important objective is to find an appropriate solution for each individual case. The dialogue with members of the community of origin plays a particularly important role, according to Sibler.

Brought to Munich in 1889

The provenance of the body has been almost completely retraced. The Yidinji Ancestral King was found by an explorative expedition, in which the German businessman Leopold Sachs took part, in an area of present-day Queensland. It is presumed that the expedition members disturbed the burial ceremony of the Indigenous community, to which the Yidinji Ancestral King belonged. They took the body and brought him to Sydney, with the aim of selling the mortal remains to refinance their expedition. The efforts to sell the Yidinji Ancestral King through the intermediary Ludwig Bruck failed. In the end, Bruck gave the body to the former director of the Königlichen Ethnographischen Sammlung, the precursor of the present-day Museum Fünf Kontinente, Dr. Max Buchner during Buchner's travels across Australia from 1888 to 1889. According to an entry in the inventory register, the mortal remains were brought to Munich in 1889 and exhibited during Buchner's time as director. The last evidence of an exhibition was found in a collection guide-book from 1922. There is no evidence that the Yidinji Ancestral King was exhibited after the move of the museum to Maximilianstrasse in the year 1926. Nowadays, the museum contributes "with openness and respect to the understanding of other cultures," according to Sibler.

Photos of the handover ceremony for media use will be available for download on Tuesday, 9 April, from around 14:00 at this link: <https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/ministerium/minister-fuer-wissenschaft-und-kunst/bilder.html>

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