

Berlin, September 18, 2019

PRESS INFORMATION

Selected Object Biographies



Unidentified Ovaherero girl, *Uatunua*, ca. 1875, donated by Carl Gotthilf Büttner, 1888, inventory number III D 1300, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Claudia Obrocki, 2019.

Julia Binter: This doll (named "*Uatunua*" by Cynthia Schimming) was sewn in the 1870s at a mission station by an Ovaherero girl whose name was not recorded. Carl Gotthilf Büttner, a missionary with the Rhenish Mission in Otjimbingwe from 1871-1879, probably exchanged it for livestock. He donated it to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (EM, SMB-SPK) in 1888.

Golda Ha-Eiros and Hertha Bukassa: The doll shows the ways in which missionaries not only brought the bible but a whole new concept of personhood to Namibia. This also meant changing your clothes. In needlework classes, young girls were taught how to dress differently to their customary dress. *Uatunua* therefore tells us not only about the transfer of skills but also about significant, long-lasting changes in Herero and #Nu-Khuen dress.

Cynthia Schimming: *Uatunua* means touched, and this doll has been touched in so many ways and asks so many questions: Whose hands touched her in Namibia and in Germany? Whose hands touched Herero women during German colonial aggression? *Uatunua* waited for me to bring her home.

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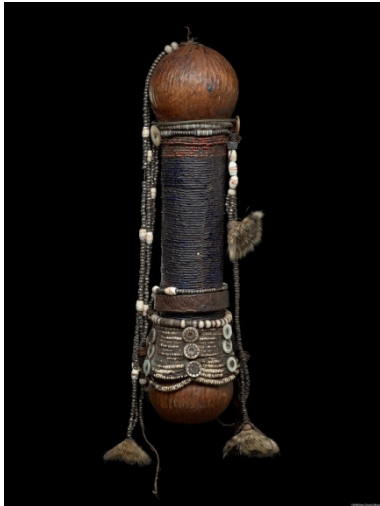
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Queen Olugondo of Ondonga, *Kandina*, ca. 1900, purchased from Hermann Tönjes, 1909, inventory number III D 3656, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Claudia Obrocki, 2019.



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Nehoa Kautondokwa and Julia Binter: This doll (*Onoona* in Oshidonga) was created by Queen Olugondo of Odonga, for Anna Rautanen, the daughter of the Finnish missionary Martti Rautanen, around 1900. Queen Olugondo used the most precious materials of the time, such as imported beads and black ox leather, to dress the doll. She gave it one of her personal nicknames, *Kandina*. She had *Kandina* regularly brought in a leopard skin baby carrier to the palace by her ladies in waiting to spend time with her. In return, she sent Anna Rautanen a calabash of beer and a black ox, an animal reserved for the royal family. In 1908, Anna Rautanen returned to Germany with her husband Hermann Tönjes, and took *Kandina* with her., Tönjes sold the doll, together with 14 other objects, to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (EM, SMB-SPK) in 1909.

Hertha Bukassa und Golda Ha-Eiros: Culturally dolls like *Kandina* served a great purpose especially when it came to marriage. She connects the past with the present, as her attire is still worn by women in the Ondonga Kingdom today. She can be seen as an archive of fashion: *Onjeva* was and is an adornment made of ostrich eggshells that young girls wear around on their hips; *oshilanda*, valued dark blue glass beads, adorn her upper body; a number of large buttons imported from Europe serve as surrogates for the precious and scarce *omba*, a jewelry made of ivory or shell. *Kandina* educates about fashion and the kind of trading and missionary relationships that existed in the past.

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#Nu-Khoen artist, whose name was not recorded,
!Uros, ca. 1875, purchased from Carl Gotthilf
 Büttner, 1881, inventory number III D 602a, b,
 Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu
 Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Martin
 Franken, 2019.



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Julia Binter: This turtle shell elaborately decorated with leather straps and the leather bag were made by a #Nu-Khoen artist, whose name was not recorded. In 1879 the Rhenish missionary Carl Gotthilf Büttner exchanged cattle for them. He subsequently sold them to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (EM, SMB-SPK) in 1881.

Golda Ha-Eiros: The tortoise shell or *!Uros* was collected from the ethnic group #Nu-Khoen, also known as the Bergdamara, a name given by early settlers who saw the #Nu-Khoen flee to the nearby mountains when they arrived. It was used to store powdered perfume made of dried roots, stems and trees. The *!Uros* was an important accessory and the perfume part of an elaborate beauty regime. Elderly ladies in Namibia still beautify themselves with it today.

Golda Ha-Eiros and Hertha Bukassa: Tortoise shells are used by most groups in Namibia, but they are embellished in different ways. Our hope is that the objects, which will travel to Namibia, will raise awareness of the histories and cultures of our various ethnic groups and that this mutual understanding will unite us.

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Odonga artist, whose name was not recorded, *Onkonda*, ca. 1900, purchased from Hermann Tönjes, 1909, inventory number: 3647a, b, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Martin Franken, 2019.



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Julia Binter: This dagger with a richly decorated brass sheath (*Onkonda*) was made by an Ondonga artist whose name was not recorded. In 1909 the Königl. Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (today Ethnologisches Museum) bought this prestigious object from the missionary Herman Tönjes. From 1898 to 1908, Tönjes was a member of the Rhenish Mission in the Uukwanyama Kingdom. He developed personal relations with the neighbouring royal house of Ondonga (see the entry on *Kandina* above). We have yet been able to determine how he acquired the dagger.

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Nehoa Kautondokwa and Golda Ha-Eiros: This knife was a sign of honour, given by the King of Ondonga to highly accomplished men, such as soldiers and shepherds. If a recipient died or disgraced the king, the king reclaimed the knife. An *Onkonda* was highly valued, costing a cow or an ox, and was worn with pride.

Hertha Bukassa: The *Onkonda* was and is still used as sign of manhood and status, though, today, it is manufactured in a different form. The embellishments on this *Onkonda* give testimony to impeccable craftsmanship and therefore carry valuable knowledge, which needs to be transferred to future generations.

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Ovaherero artist, whose name was not recorded, *Ekori*, before 1894, donated by Ludwig Conradt, 1894, inventory number III D 1743a, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Martin Franken, 2019.



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Julia Binter: This finely decorated women's headdress by an Ovaherero artist, whose name was not recorded, was donated to the Königlich Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (EM, SMB-SPK) by the merchant Ludwig Conradt in 1895. Conradt had been active in Namibia since 1885, first as an employee of the tobacco merchant Adolf Lüderitz. Lüderitz ratified the crucial land treaty that started the colonization of Namibia in 1884. Subsequently, Conradt was a partial representative of the German-West African Company. After several failed business ventures, he became a middleman in Rehoboth and also supplied the Witbooi and Maherero families. Samuel Maherero's warriors spared Conradt during the war of resistance against the Germans (1904-1905) because of his relationships with them. We have not yet been able to clarify exactly how Conradt acquired this *Ekori*.

Cynthia Schimming: The *Ekori* is a headdress that Ovaherero women wore before colonial contact. It was made of leather and decorated with iron beads and elaborate leather embroidery. The *Ekori* was part of a fashion ensemble consisting of a headband usually worn with a beautifully crafted cape and necklaces, arm and leg jewellery, all decorated with beads made of iron or of ostrich egg shells. Contact with missionaries in the late 19th century changed this type of fashion. They introduced Victorian style dresses and prohibited women from wearing leather on pastoral grounds. The genocide committed by the Germans against the Ovaherero and Nama between 1904 and 1908 meant that a whole generation of craftspeople and artists could no longer pass on their knowledge to the next generation. The survivors of the genocide often sought refuge near mission stations and slowly but surely created a new form of traditional clothing: the dress we as Ovaherero wear today. Instead of leather, artists

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began to use textiles to create clothing. The *Ekori* also received a new name, *Otjikaiva*, which literally means 'headgear made of fabric'.

Hertha Bukassa: The *Ekori* constitutes an inalienable part of a people's sense of self and of community, functioning as a link between the past, the present and the future. It shows that the form might change, but the meaning does not. We hope that the *Ekori* will serve as inspiration for fashion designers and artists in Namibia to link up with the past and spur the cultural industry.



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Ovaherero artist, whose name was not recorded, *Sandals*, donated by Philaletes Kuhn, 1903, inventory number: III D 2155a,b, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Claudia Obrocki, 2019.



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Julia Binter: These sandals, made by an Ovaherero artist* whose name was not documented, were offered for sale to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (EM, SMB-SPK) by the military doctor Philaletes Kuhn and Otto Eggers, a soldier of the German Schutztruppe. However, Felix von Luschan, curator of the African collections, bought only the five skeletons of San and #Nu-Khoen people which they also offered and asked for the objects to be donated to him in 1903. The human remains were already restituted to Namibia in 2018. The human remains' probable provenance of a grave robbery suggests that the sandals were also appropriated in a violent colonial context.

Golda Ha-Eiros, Hertha Bukassa and Cynthia Schimming: Sandals like this are still worn today, though not by the Ovaherero but by the Ovahimba people. Also the materials have changed. Instead of hardened leather Ovahimba artists today use tires to make the soles. The type of braiding applied on this pair of sandals can be traced to other designs in the collection of the EM, such as a beautifully embellished calabash and a stomach-acher formerly worn by Ovaherero women. It is this travelling of designs and the transformation of Ovaherero and Ovahimba dress that makes these sandals special.

Larissa Förster: Throughout the entire formal colonial period, members of the military were important donors and sellers of objects from the colonies to German museums. During the war in Namibia (1904-1908), which broke out shortly after the donation of the sandals and escalated to genocide, they played a decisive role as 'plunderers' 'collectors' of the remains of fugitives and finally also as looters of corpses - as proven by the provenance of objects in other ethnological museums in Germany. The return of human remains from Germany to Namibia in 2011, 2014 and 2018 showed that military physicians in particular had been prepared to rob bodies and body parts in order to make them available to European scientists. Philaletes Kuhn 'delivered' skeletons and objects not only to Berlin,

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but also, for example, to the University of Jena. The history of European collecting and scientific institutions is closely interwoven with the history of colonial violence.

Jonathan Fine: The collecting activity of German colonial military, such as Kuhn and Eggers, raises the question of how colonial violence begins. Although these sandals were collected before the genocide against the Ovaherero and Nama, Kuhn and Eggers were able to exploit power relations, using threats and violence because of their position as soldiers. The sandals foreshadow the cruel appropriation of objects and land and the murder of thousands of people in Namibia.



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