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PRESS RELEASE

Recommendation concerning Welfenschatz still pending

- Check against original text in German -

The Advisory Commission chaired by Prof. Jutta Limbach that handles issues concerning the return of cultural artifacts confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution today discussed the request for restitution for what is known as the Welfenschatz (Guelph Treasure) and heard the parties. The Commission has now informed the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) that it will submit its recommendation in the coming weeks.

Hermann Parzinger, President of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, remarks: "I was able to present our arguments and point of view in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. Naturally, we look forward to a recommendation from the Advisory Commission soon. However, considering the particularities and complexities of this case, we understand that careful deliberation and justification are required."

42 artifacts of the so-called Welfenschatz in Berlin's Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) have been the subject of a request for restitution since April 2008. The Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) has dealt intensively with the circumstances under which the Welfenschatz was purchased and has compiled numerous facts as a result of its extensive scientific research. It came to the conclusion that the conditions for restitution according to the Washington principles were not satisfied.

This opinion formed with all due sensitivity to the moral and historical considerations reflects the circumstances of a rare individual case: Even though the purchase took place after 30 January 1933 and the persons from whom the claimants derive their claim were members of a group of persons persecuted by the National Socialist regime, this sale cannot be classified as being due to Nazi persecution from the Foundation's point of view. This is verified by a number of historical facts:

- The purchase price paid was in line with normal, feasible conditions on what was an extremely strained art market at the time.
- The sellers received the agreed purchase price at their free disposal.

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- Moreover, the Welfenschatz had been situated outside Germany since 1930 and was not under the control of the German state at the time of its sale.
- Although the whereabouts of the collection have been known since 1945, a request for restitution was not made before 2008, nor were compensation or financial reparations for the sale claimed or sought.

In contrast to the roughly 50 claims for restitution that the Foundation has decided since 1999 on the basis of the Washington Principles, the “Common Declaration” and the “Guidelines”, an agreement was not reached with the applicants in this case. The Foundation then did not wish to deny the opposing party’s request to refer the matter to the Advisory Commission. Of the many restitution cases that the Foundation has handled, this is the only one to date for which it has taken this course of action.

Background Information

The “Welfenschatz”

What is today known as the “Welfenschatz”, a collection of relics from the former Collegiate Church of St. Blaise in Brunswick (today, the Brunswick Cathedral), grew into one of the most significant German treasuries of the Church through numerous donations over several centuries in the Middle Ages. In 1671, it came to be owned by the Guelph dynasty, which sold the collection, at the time consisting of 82 works, to a syndicate of art dealers in 1929. The Prussian State acquired 42 works from this syndicate, through Dresdner Bank, in June 1935 for the Schlossmuseum, today known as the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin). The collection is currently on exhibit in the Bode Museum.

The part of the Welfenschatz held by the Kunstgewerbemuseum today comprises 44 works of treasury art from the 11th to 15th centuries, making it the largest publicly owned collection of German ecclesiastical art.

The Foundation’s handling of requests for restitution

Since the 1990s, the Foundation has been actively and responsibly engaged in the search for cultural artifacts confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution. The “Washington Principles”, which have been adapted to the circumstances of the Federal Republic of Germany, its states and leading municipal organizations in a “Common Declaration” and “Guide-



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lines”, are always a steadfast guiding principle for the Foundation’s actions. They form an indispensable foundation for confronting and offering reparation for the injustices inflicted by National Socialism, including the confiscation of art and collections.

More Background Information: www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de

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