

RESEARCH REPORTS

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ENTANGLEMENTS

IN BERLIN - MITTE

BETWEEN THE BANKING DISTRICT
AND THE BRANDENBURG GATE



One focus of the Mitte Museum’s research in 2025 was colonial entanglements, namely an exploration of how different stakeholders living in what is today the Berlin-Mitte district participated in the colonial expansion of the German Empire (1871-1918). The findings of this research have now been published in German and English. They present locations in the district that played a role in colonial history and have so far been known to only a few.

A longterm exploration of the colonial heritage in the district museum and its predecessor institutions led the Mitte Museum to commission both the research and publication of the findings, within the framework of the Department of Remembrance Culture and History in its Department of Art, Culture and History. The project involves, on the one hand, critically challenging the museum’s own collection, and on the other, the presentation of critical perspectives on colonialism.

When challenging the collection, a particular focus is on so-called reception objects, i.e., objects that do not originate from colonial contexts themselves, but reflect colonial mindsets thinking. These include, among other things, school wall charts from the late 19th century up until the 1960s, which were used in everyday school life in the district. In 2022, they were catalogued, researched and digitised with project funding from the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion (digiS).^{1 2} Other objects from the collection refer to military units stationed in today’s Mitte district before World War I. Critical examination of the material with a view to colonial connections led to the question of potential entanglements between these units and the colonial project of the German Empire.

An early impulse in the district to research and present topics with a critical approach to colonialism came from the 1998 exhibition “Kommen, gehen, bleiben. Die afrikanische Diaspora in Berlin 1887-1967” (Coming, Leaving, Staying. The African Diaspora in Berlin 1887-1967), which took place at the Heimatmuseum Wedding, the local history museum of what was then the BerlinWedding district. It was curated in collaboration with the Berlin historian Paulette ReedAnderson, who had also initiated the exhibition.

The Department of Art, Culture and History was also very actively involved in the process of renaming four streets in Berlin’s African Quarter between 2022 and 2024, as well as in renaming Nettelbeckplatz as Martha-Ndumbe-Platz in 2025.

In 2022, the Mitte Museum published Decolonial Voices in Berlin. Views, Fates and New Realities as part of the “Berliner Reihe” series. The book examines selected figures in the district’s local history and their connections to German colonial history.

Currently, the district mayor of BerlinMitte is working on a policy paper regarding the future of work on remembrance culture in the district. Its aim is to determine the continued focus on examining and presenting the colonial history of the district, particularly in terms of its economic and military dimensions. On this basis, and with the support of the District Culture Fund, the Mitte Museum commissioned two Berlin historians to research such issues: Dr Dörte Lerp³ and Stefan Zollhauser⁴. With their respective research projects, they uncovered places in the district linked to colonial history that have so far remained absent from our collective memory. Starting from the Brandenburg Gate and the banking district around Behrenstraße, they reconstruct connections between different actors and the German colonies.

Dr Dörte Lerp examines how Berlin banks were involved in colonial enterprises and explores the concrete impact their investments had on the colonies. Stefan Zollhauser traces a largely forgotten event: the return of German soldiers from the Boxer War in China in December 1900 and the concurrent staging of colonial violence between the Brandenburg Gate and the Zeughaus (armoury), which aimed to attract maximum public attention.

A presentation of initial research findings, followed by a discussion with the audience, took place at the Mitte Museum on 11 December 2025 under the title “Research Insights. Colonial Entanglements in Berlin Mitte”. The wellattended event demonstrated strong interest in the subject as well as the need for further research and education.

The papers are now published here for the first time. They also present starting points for future research. The focus is on those actors who perpetrated and supported colonial violence. The perspectives of colonised societies affected by this violence inevitably remain marginal.

In 2026, these perspectives are going to be more central to the work of the Mitte Museum on further colonial entanglements in the Mitte district, starting with the Invalidenfriedhof (Invalids’ Cemetery). As Stefan Zollhauser noted when presenting his research findings in 2025, the cemetery’s colonial history may serve as a focus of future research. Individuals who played a decisive role in the colonial expansion and violence of the German Empire are buried in this cemetery. The history of the site is to be explored from multiple perspectives, in collaboration with artists whose biography connects them to the regions that were affected by this violence.

The projects in 2025 were devised and supervised by the historian Henriette Giersberg in the framework of her CAMPI Fellowship 2025/2026 at the Mitte Museum.

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- 1 Research and Competence Center Digitalisation Berlin (digiS).
- 2 Available online on [museum-digital](#).
- 3 Dr Dörte Lerp researches, teaches and publishes on German and European colonial history, global tourism history and postcolonial cultures of remembrance. In 2014, she earned her Ph.D. in history from the University of Rostock. In her thesis, she examined colonial population policies in the territories of present-day Namibia and Poland between 1884 and 1914. From 2020 to 2024, she led a research project at Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin) on the history of tourism development in East Africa, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). She works as a [freelance historian](#) in Berlin.
- 4 Stefan Zollhauser is a historian and curator, based in Berlin. He focuses on the urban history of Berlin, with a particular interest in topics from everyday life. In his ongoing project [“Berliner Spurensuche”](#) he traces history in today’s Berlin. In collaboration with Berlin district museums, he develops guided tours, workshops and exhibition projects.

Dörte Lerp

FOLLOW THE MONEY - INSIGHTS INTO THE COLONIAL HISTORY OF BERLIN'S BANKING DISTRICT

After the German Empire was founded in 1871, Berlin emerged not only as the imperial capital, but also as an international financial centre.¹ Traditional private banks such as S. Bleichröder or Mendelssohn & Co. and the Empire's most significant joint-stock bank, the Disconto-Gesellschaft, expanded their international business. The newly established Deutsche Bank, a joint-stock bank focussing on international business, opened in Berlin straight away. Other banks, among them Commerz- und Disconto-Bank from Hamburg as well as Dresdner Bank, first opened branches in Berlin and ultimately moved their head offices to the city.² Most of them were located in the area of today's BerlinMitte district, in the northern part of Friedrichstadt around Behrenstraße, Jägerstraße, and the square Hausvogteiplatz; around 1914 there were more than 170 banks.³

This is how – in the immediate vicinity of the political centre along Wilhelmstraße – the new financial centre of the German Empire evolved: Berlin's banking district.

The banking district with its imposing buildings was not just a hub of business activity, but also a symbol of the growing importance of Berlin as a banking centre, and of Berlin's bankers in the city's social and political life. Many of them moved with their families into mansions in the Tiergarten district, now also part of BerlinMitte, or had such residences built or remodelled there, among them Paul von Schwabach of the banking house S. Bleichröder (Tiergartenstraße 1), the director of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, Adolph von Hansemann (Tiergartenstraße 30–31), the Deutsche Bank director Georg von Siemens (Tiergartenstraße 37) and the private banker Karl von der Heydt (VonderHeydt Straße 18) [Fig. 1].⁴ Together with their wives, they supported art, culture, architecture and the sciences in the German capital, hosted parties and dinners, and nurtured close personal and business contacts with entrepreneurs and industrialists, politicians and ministerial officials.⁵



Figure 1

Villa von der Heydt, now the administrative headquarters of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and its president. Source: private; photographer: Dörte Lerp.

Some bankers moved from banking into politics and vice versa. This was also true of colonial politics: Bernhard Dernburg, for example, was a bank trainee at the Berliner Handelsgesellschaft – also a joint-stock bank – and had a successful career as a banker for several years before he became head of the Colonial Department (Reichskolonialamt) at the German Foreign Office in 1906. Meanwhile Karl Helfferich, who worked as an economic adviser in the Colonial Department from 1901, was appointed to the board of directors of Deutsche Bank after his departure from politics. These men operated particularly at the intersection of banking and politics.⁶ Yet there were also others, like Adolph von Hansemann and Karl von der Heydt, who did not just fund colonial business ventures, but also voiced their opinions on matters of colonial policy.⁷

Until now, research on banking history has either only marginally addressed the role of German bankers and banks in colonial history or assessed it as relatively insignificant.⁸ The line of reasoning is that commercial considerations kept most bankers from investing overly large sums in the German colonies, because particularly in the early stages, the risks were significantly higher than

¹ Buchheim, Christoph, "Deutsche Finanzmetropole von internationalem Rang (1870–1914)", in: Pohl, Hans (ed.), *Geschichte des Finanzplatzes Berlin*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002, pp. 103–156.

² The Commerz- und Disconto-Bank was founded in Hamburg in 1870 by Hanseatic merchants, among them Carl Woermann (1813–1880). In 1905, it took over Berliner Bank and moved the focus of its business activity to Berlin. Dresdner Bank was founded in 1871 and opened a branch in Berlin as early as 1881, increasingly relocating its business transactions to the capital as a result. Krause, Detlef, *Die Commerz- und Discontobank 1870–1920/23. Bankgeschichte als Systemgeschichte*, Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 60–62, 229–232; Wixforth, Harald, "Die Geschichte der Dresdner Bank. Das Unternehmen von 1872–1945", in: Kurk, Michael/Lege, Katrin (eds.), *In bester Lage. Geschichte eines Quartiers an der Berliner Behrenstraße*, Dresden 2011, pp. 117–140.

³ For a list of banks based in the banking district in 1914, see Buchheim, "Finanzmetropole", pp. 154–156.

⁴ For a comprehensive list of all bankers who lived in the Tiergarten district, see Achterberg, Erich, *Berliner Hochfinanz. Kaiser, Fürsten, Millionäre um 1900*, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, pp. 44–46. A standard reference on construction history in the Tiergarten quarter: Schmidt, Hartwig, *Das Tiergartenviertel. Baugeschichte eines Berliner Villenviertels. Teil 1: 1790–1870, Berlin 1981 (Die Bauwerke und Kunstdenkmäler von Berlin)*. On the (socio-)cultural history of this district, see the project "The Art Histories and Stories of the Tiergarten Quarter" at the Kunstbibliothek Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

⁵ Buchheim, "Finanzmetropole", pp. 146–149.

⁶ On Dernburg and Helfferich, see Achterberg, *Berliner Hochfinanz*, pp. 186–211.

⁷ Bundesarchiv Berlin (German Federal Archive, BAArch), R1001/2927, Adolf von Hansemann, *Denkschrift über die Kolonialbestrebungen in der Südsee*, 09.09.1880, pp. 9–34; Anonymous [Von der Heydt, Karl], "Auf der Schwelle des Weltkrieges", in: *Deutsches Wochenblatt* 4 (08.10.1891) 41, pp. 481–483 and (15.10.1891) 42, pp. 494–497; Anonymous [Von der Heydt, Karl], "Kolonialpolitik und Sozialismus", in: *Kolonial-Politische Correspondenz. Organ der Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation und der Deutsch-Ostafrikanischen Gesellschaft* 2 (09.01.1886) 2, p. 6, (16.01.1886) 3, pp. 9–10 and (23.01.1886) 4, pp. 13–14.

⁸ Werner Plumpe, for example, portrays Deutsche Bank as a global actor participating in the imperial penetration of China, the Ottoman Empire, Central and South America as well as Morocco and South Africa, yet only dedicates a few paragraphs to the bank's business activities in the colonial regions. Plumpe, Werner/ Nützel, Alexander/ Schenk, Catherine R., *Deutsche Bank. Die globale Hausbank 1870–2020*, Berlin 2020, pp. 86–87 and 90–91. In his comprehensive study, Boris Barth in turn reaches the conclusion "that the 'leading German financial circles' in their entirety had a reserved attitude towards colonialism". Barth, Boris, *Die deutsche Hochfinanz und die Imperialismen. Banken und Außenpolitik vor 1914*, Stuttgart 1995, p. 43.

the expected profits. They only contributed “negligible amounts” to “have a foot in the door”⁹ or “to demonstrate their political loyalty”.¹⁰ Staunch colonialists like Hanseemann and von der Heydt, however, were not guided by economic, but rather by political motives, thus being “in a small minority”.¹¹ From the point of view of colonial history, however, this is an unsatisfying narrative – because, regardless of whether Berlin bankers acted out of purely political or economic considerations or simply opportunism, their investments had a tangible impact on the ground in the colonies.

Even if their private capital may seem insignificant in the overall balance sheet of the major banks, the military conquest and economic exploitation of the colonies would not have been possible in the same way without it.

This research report aims to highlight the banks’ significance for German colonialism by using Berlin’s banking district as an example.

The banks based in Berlin’s banking district were involved in the colonial project in different ways. They participated in chartered companies that pushed colonial expansion in the 1880s and continued to operate as businesses in the colonies. They supported the establishment of colonial banks intended to facilitate business transactions between Germany and the colonies, as well as the collection of taxes. And they invested in railway and mining companies whose aim it was to gain military control over the colonies and to exploit their natural resources for economic gain. The following sections address these individual aspects of the colonial banking history and use selected examples to trace the financial entanglements between BerlinMitte and the colonies.¹²

PARTICIPATION IN CHARTERED COMPANIES

Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was reluctant to commit the German Empire to excessive financial and political expenditure on colonies. He therefore insisted that the imperial government would place territories “under protection”¹³ only in cases where German companies had already bought land and were conducting business. Modelled on the British chartered companies, these companies or consortia were supposed to take over the administration of the “protectorates” or at least to bear their costs. In order to fulfil this far-reaching mandate, the chartered companies required sufficient capital, which meant they depended on the support of banks.

The German chartered companies include the New Guinea Company, the German East Africa Company and the Jaluit Company. Additionally, the German Colonial Company for SouthWest Africa was planned as a chartered company, but it was never granted administration of the area it claimed. With the exception of the Jaluit Company, banks based in BerlinMitte participated in all these companies. The New Guinea Company and the German East Africa Company were so closely tied to Berlin banks that they temporarily had their headquarters on the premises of the respective banks in Berlin’s banking district. The fact that the chartered companies showed little interest in administering the colonial territories and therefore – as in the case of the German Colonial Company for SouthWest Africa – either did not take up the administration or ceded it back to the German Empire after a few years did not diminish their impact, particularly during the early stages of colonisation.¹⁴

This is particularly evident when looking at the example of the New Guinea Company (NGC) that was founded in 1870. When the Hamburg trading company Godeffroy went bankrupt and British lenders threatened to take over its trading posts and plantations in Samoa, Adolph von Hanseemann’s urgent intervention spurred bankers from Berlin rather than from Hamburg to rally and save the company.¹⁵ Together with Otto von Bismarck’s principal banker, Gerson von Bleichröder, and Hermann Wallich of Deutsche Bank, Adolph von Hanseemann, the director of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, founded a jointstock company to take over the Godeffroy’s ailing German Trading and Plantation Company of the South Sea Islands (DHPG). In doing so, they relied on the German government to provide guarantees for such an enterprise to safeguard German commercial interests. Yet the German Reichstag rejected the so-called Samoa Bill on 27 April 1880. Nevertheless, Bismarck’s support of the proposal is seen as the turning point in his stance on colonial policy.¹⁶

Following the failed Samoa Bill, Hanseemann demanded that the German Empire should establish colonies in Samoa and New Guinea, stating that after bailing out the DHPG the DiscontoGesellschaft now had economic interests there.¹⁷ In May 1884, he founded the NGC to take over the trading company’s holdings and acquire additional land to establish a colony. Shortly afterwards, the consortium sent out to Oceania an expedition masked as a research trip, which took possession of the north-eastern part of New Guinea – the archipelago off its coast that was named after Bismarck in 1885 – as well as the North Solomon Islands, by concluding “protectorate treaties” with local rulers. The following year, the imperial government issued the “letter of protection” to the NGC, thus entrusting it with the administration of the colonial territories.¹⁸

9 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, S. 44.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68. See also Fritz Stern’s in-depth analysis of Gerson Bleichröder’s attitude to colonial policy. Stern, Fritz, *Gold und Eisen. Bismarck und sein Bankier Bleichröder*, Frankfurt a.M. 1978, pp. 482–530.

11 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 44. Krause also stressed that the banks “did not allow themselves to simply be instrumentalised by politics, yet acted in a calculated dispassionate manner”. Krause, *Die Commerz- und Discontobank*, p. 257.

12 Within the scope of this essay, I cannot provide an all-encompassing overview of the range of activities of Berlin banks in the German colonies. I chose to not explore their participation in diamond mining and trade. For additional information on this topic, see Rudolph, Mona, “Wirtschaftliche Globalisierungsprozesse, Akteure und Sehnsüchte am Beispiel des Diamantenhandels in Berlin, 1908–1919”, in: Wendt, Samuel Eleazar et al. (eds.), *Berlins Weg in die Moderne. Koloniale Warenströme und Sehnsüchte, 1713–1918*, Bielefeld 2025, pp. 167–188.

13 Contemporary expressions such as “unter Schutz stellen” (placing under protection), “Schutzherrschaft” (protectorate rule) and “Schutzgebiet” (protectorate) obscured the violent nature of colonisation. Protection granted by the German Reich was exclusively reserved for Germans and their companies and interests, and not at all for the population of the colonial territories. These terms are therefore marked as source terms in the text.

14 The Jaluit Company was an exception, as it administered the Marshall Islands, Gilbert Islands and the Caroline Islands on behalf of the German Empire until 1906.

15 On Adolf von Hanseemann and his many colonial political activities as the director of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, see Frey, Barbara, “Financing colonial exploitation. Adolph von Hanseemann [1826–1903] and the Disconto-Gesellschaft”, in: *Dekoloniale* (2024), <https://dekoloniale.de/en/map/stories/finanzierung-kolonialer-ausbeutung-adolph-von-hanseemann-und-die-disconto-gesellschaft?view=gallery>, accessed 09.04.2026.

16 Anderhandt, Jakob, *Godeffroys in Ozeanien. Die Geschichte einer Spekulation* – vol. 2, Hamburg 2022, pp. 221–244. Wallich’s participation is only mentioned by Stern, *Gold und Eisen*, pp. 489–490.

17 BArch, R1001/2927, Brief von Adolf von Hanseemann an das Auswärtige Amt, 11.11.1880, Bl. 2–7; Adolf von Hanseemann, *Denkschrift über die Kolonialbestrebungen in der Südsee*, 09.09.1880, pp. 9–34.

18 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 52.

The NGC had its headquarters on the premises of the Disconto-Gesellschaft,¹⁹ located at the address Unter den Linden 35 until shortly before Hansemann’s death. The directorate of the bank was also based there. “In the morning hours, before attending to the actual business of the bank”, Hansemann “governed” New Guinea from there.²⁰ However, governing the colony strained the NGC too much, both financially and in terms of personnel. Therefore, it tried to transfer the sovereign rights to the German Empire as early as 1888. Following tough negotiations, with the company demanding compensation for “discovering, exploring and developing” the colony, the German Empire gradually took over the administration between 1889 and 1899, with Hansemann still wielding his influence over decisions on personnel.²¹ Over the following years, the NGC also continued its activities as a plantation and trading company. It generated large profits by trading in copra, the dried flesh of the coconut, as well as in cocoa and rubber, enabling the company to pay out dividends of up to 18 per cent to its shareholders (in 1909).²²

The connections of the Berlin banking house Von der Heydt & Co. to the German East Africa Company (DOAG) were of a similar nature. The banker Karl von der Heydt from Elberfeld and the founder of the German East Africa Company, Carl Peters (1856–1918) were close friends, and von der Heydt was an early supporter of the chartered company.²³ When it ran into financial difficulties only two years after its launch in 1885, and being commissioned with the administration of the colony, it was von der Heydt who endeavoured to save the company.²⁴ Given that in the meantime, Peters had been criticised for his unauthorised approach in East Africa even among supporters of the colonial idea, von der Heydt took over as chairman of the company. He managed to persuade Kaiser Wilhelm I to contribute 500,000 marks. Adjusted for inflation, this would be approximately 4.400,00 euros today. In addition, he contributed 400,000 marks (now: 3,520,000 euros) of his private assets, which in turn attracted additional investors. Of the banks located in BerlinMitte, Mendelssohn & Co., Delbrück, Leo & Co. and Robert Warschauer & Co. participated in the German East Africa Company, but only with amounts of up to 100,000 marks each, not taking a particularly great risk considering the size of these banking houses.²⁵

The ruthless approach of the German East Africa Company, which exerted pressure when concluding the “protectorate treaties” and ignored the Sultan of Zanzibar’s sphere of influence, met with fierce resistance in the coastal regions of the colony, which is why the company remained dependent on the financial and military support of the German Empire. Like the NGC, it therefore requested the transfer of the sovereign rights as early as 1888.²⁶ When this happened two years later and the German Empire officially took over the colonial administration in East Africa, it balanced the losses of the company, enabling the German East Africa Company to turn a profit for the first time.²⁷ Until 1903, it also retained the right to mint and circulate coins within the colony, thus securing a steady source of income derived from the margin (seigniorage) between the coins’ production costs and their nominal value.²⁸ From then on, the shares attracted interest from a wider range of stock market investors.²⁹

19 Between 1902 and 1906, it moved its headquarters to Behrenstraße 31. From 1907 to 1911, it was once again located at Unter den Linden 35, and from 1912 onwards at Dorotheenstraße 61. *Deutsches Kolonial-Handbuch*, Berlin 1896, 1902–1913.

20 At least, that is what Walther Däbritz claims, citing an unnamed “owner of a private bank”. Däbritz, Walther, David Hansemann and Adolph von Hansemann, Krefeld 1954, p. 131 in footnote.

21 Pogge von Strandmann, Hartmut, *Imperialismus vom Grünen Tisch. Deutsche Kolonialpolitik zwischen wirtschaftlicher Ausbeutung und „zivilisatorischen“ Bemühungen*, Berlin 2009, pp. 23–24; Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 55–56.

22 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 57–58.

23 On Karl von Heydt and his political activities, see Hüttemann, Christian, “Karl von der Heydt, Fritz Roeber und ihr ‘Untergang der nordischen Götterwelt’”. *Deutsche Kolonialverbrechen in historischem Gewand*, in: *Art-Dok* (2023), DOI: 10.11588/artdok.00008096, accessed 01.04.2026. See also the article by Peter von der Heydt, who, however, strongly relativises Karl von der Heydt’s political activities. Von der Heydt, Peter, “Karl von der Heydt und die Literatur”, in: Fehlemann, Sabine/ Stamm, Rainer (eds.): *Die Von der Heydts. Bankiers, Christen und Mäzene*, Wuppertal 2001, pp. 128–137.

24 Pogge von Strandmann, *Imperialismus vom Grünen Tisch*, p. 23.

25 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 59–62.

26 Pesek, Michael, *Koloniale Herrschaft in Deutsch-Ostafrika. Expeditionen, Militär und Verwaltung seit 1880*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, pp. 179–185.

27 Pogge von Strandmann, *Imperialismus vom Grünen Tisch*, S. 55; Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 63.

28 Suter, Mischa: *Geld an der Grenze. Souveränität und Wertmaßstäbe im Zeitalter des Imperialismus. 1871–1923*, Berlin 2024, pp. 129 und 143–144.

29 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 62.



Figure 2
Behrenstraße 14–16, now Palais
Theising. Source: private; photographer:
Dörte Lerp.

Between 1896 and 1903, the registered office of the German East Africa Company was located on the premises of the banking house Von der Heydt & Co., initially at Behrenstraße 14–16 (Fig. 2), and from 1901 at Behrenstraße 7a.³⁰ This is where Heydt founded the Von der Heydt’sche Kolonialkontor in 1907, which specialised in trading colonial securities and kept investors informed about their market value and dividends via the *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*.³¹ A stock inventory from the Kolonialkontor dated 11 September 1909 [Fig. 3] gives an overview of the colonial companies listed on the stock market, their market value and dividends. It illustrates that the former chartered companies now stood alongside other “normal” business enterprises. It also shows that in specific cases, it was possible to generate speculative profits with colonial shares. Shares in the German Colonial Company for SouthWest Africa turned out to be particularly lucrative for investors. After the company had been inactive and plagued by liquidity problems for decades, the railway worker Zacharias Lewala discovered a rough diamond on its territory in 1908. With the prospect of lucrative diamond mining, the company’s stock price soared.³²

30 *Deutsches Kolonial-Handbuch 1896; Berliner Adreßbuch 1896, Adreßbuch für Berlin und seine Vororte 1897–1902; Berliner Adreßbuch 1903–1913*. 1914 zog das Bankhaus einschließlich des Kolonialkontors abermals um, in das „Kleist-Haus“ in der Mauerstraße 53. *Berliner Adreßbuch 1914*.

31 From 1890 to 1921, the *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* was the official newsletter regarding the German “protectorates” in Africa and the South Seas.

32 Drechsler, Horst: *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft. Die großen Land- und Minengesellschaften (1885–1914)*, Stuttgart 1996, p. 280.

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Kurze deutscher Kolonialwerte.

Mitgeteilt durch von der Heydt'sches Kolonialkontor G. m. b. H., Berlin W. 64.
Telephon: Amt I 9229 und 9224. Telegramm-Adresse: „Heydtkontor“.

11. September 1909.

Gründungs-jahr	Kapital M	Geschäfts-jahr	vor- legte Divi- dende	letzte Divi- dende		Nachfrage %	Angebot %
1907	1 850 000	1. 10.	10	0	Afritanische Kompagnie A. G.	76	82
1906	2 000 000	1. 1.	—	4	Borneo-Kautschuk-Kompagnie A. G.	45	55
1905	1 000 000	1. 4.	15	17 1/2	Bremer Kolonial-Handels-Gesellschaft vorm. F. Doff & Co., A. G.	172	176
1905	1 200 000	1. 4.	0	0	Centralafrikanische Bergwerks-Gesellschaft	65	75
1905	600 000	1. 1.	5	5	Centralafrikanische Seengeellschaft	—	80
1890	1 500 000	1. 1.	22	50	China-Export-, Import- u. Bank-Kompagnie	250	—
1891	2 600 000	1. 10.	7	7	Chocola-Plantagen-Gesellschaft	103	107
1905	220 000	1. 1.	20	20	Debundsch-Plantzung	115	125
1900	800 000	1. 1.	7	7	Deutsche Agaven-Gesellschaft	—	65
1878	2 750 000	1. 1.	20	16	Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft der Südpazifischen Inseln	300	310
1885	2 000 000	1. 4.	20	20	Deutsche Colonial-Gesellsch. für Südwest-Afrika	1750	1800
1907	2 500 000	1. 1.	—	0	Deutsche Kautschuk-Aktiengesellschaft	—	55
1902	1 000 000	1. 1.	0	0	Deutsche Samoa-Gesellschaft	—	55
1908	4 500 000	1. 5.	—	—	Deutsche Südpazifische Phosphat-Akt.-Ges.	228	232
1902	1 000 000	1. 5.	2	3	Deutsche Togo-Gesellschaft	55	65
1885	11 721 000	1. 1.	5	5	Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft Anteile	119	122
1886	400 000	1. 1.	0	0	Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Plantagen-Gesellschaft	—	M 80,—
					do do Vorz.-Aktien	—	M 225,—
1903	11 495 000	1. 1.	3 1/2	3 1/2	Deutsch-Ostafrikanische 3 1/2 % Schuldverschrei- bungen (vom Reich sichergestellt)	96	97
1897	2 250 000	1. 1.	4	7	Deutsch-Westafrikanische Handels-Gesellschaft	97	100
1899	4 000 000	1. 1.	0	0	Gesellschaft Nordwestamerica Lit. A.	—	M 20
	360 000		0	0	do do Lit. B.	M 15	M 25
1898	1 000 000	1. 1.	10	0	Gesellschaft Südamerica Lit. A.	—	99
	1 000 000		10	0	do do Lit. B.	—	88
1889	2 000 000	1. 10.	0	0	Guatemala-Plantagen-Gesellschaft	—	19
1897	1 153 000	1. 1.	0	0	Hanseatische Kolonisations-Gesellschaft	—	40
1889	3 000 000	1. 10.	0	0	Hanseatische Plantagen-Gesellschaft	—	30
1887	1 200 000	1. 1.	15	20	Salut-Gesellschaft, geteilte Aktien	245	255
					do Genußscheine	M 2400,—	M 2500,—
1904	1 000 000	1. 1.	—	0	Kamerun-Bergwerks-Aktiengesellschaft	—	40
1906	3 000 000	1. 1.	—	4	Kamerun-Kautschuk-Kompagnie	—	55
1895	10 000 000	1. 1.	0	0	Kaoko Land- und Minen-Ges. Anteile	96	98
1903	1 000 000	1. 1.	—	0	Kautschuk-Plantzung Meanja A. G.	—	70
1899	2 000 000	1. 7.	0	5	Motlwe-Plantzungs-Gesellschaft	85	88
1885	6 000 000	1. 4.	0	0	Neu Guinea Kompagnie Vorzugs-Anteile	99	102
					do Stamm-Anteile	40	46
1906	1 200 000	1. 1.	—	—	Ostafrika-Kompagnie	68	72
1904	21 000 000	1. 1.	3	3	Ostafrikanische Eisenbahngesellschaft Anteile (vom Deutschen Reich mit 3 % Zins und 120 % Rückzahlung garantiert)	102	103
1900	20 000 000	1. 4.	0	9	Otavi-Minen- und Eisenbahngesellschaft	234	236
	200 000		0	M 4	Otavi-Minen- u. Eisenb.-Gesellsch. Genußscheine	M 133,—	M 135,—
1902	£ 125 000	1. 1.	30	50	Pacific Phosphate Co.	7 £	7 1/4 £
1897	2 000 000	1. 10.	5	6	Plantagen-Gesellschaft Concepcion	—	82
1895	1 500 000	1. 1.	0	0	Rheinische Handels-Plantagen-Gesellschaft	—	40
1903	800 000	1. 1.	0	0	Safata-Samoa-Gesellschaft	—	45
1905	2 000 000	1. 1.	4	4	Samoa-Kautschuk-Kompagnie	—	40
1897	500 000	1. 1.	0	0	Sigi-Plantzungs-Gesellschaft	75	82
1900	£ 500 000	1. 7.	0	0	South African Territories	22 sh 6 d	23 sh 6 d
1892	£ 2 000 000	1. 7.	0	5	South West Africa Co.	39 sh 6 d	39 sh 9 d
1893	869 100	1. 4.	0	0	Nambara Staßeebaugesellschaft Stamm-Anteile	25 3/8 fr.	35 3/8 fr.
	142 200		0	0	do Vorzugs-Anteile	55	65
1897	2 100 000	1. 1.	6	9	Westafrik. Pflanzungs-Gesellsch. Vibundi Anteile	102	106
1897	4 500 000	1. 1.	0	—	Westafrikanische Pflanzungs-Gesellschaft Victoria zusammengelegte Stamm-Aktien	—	50
				8	do Vorz.-Aktien	96	102
1895	1 800 000	1. 1.	0	0	Westdeutsche Hand- u. Plantagen-Ges. Düsseldorf	—	70

Zu jeder Art von Auskunft ist obenstehendes Verzeichnis stets gern bereit.

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Figure 3
List of stocks, Von der Heydt'sches
Kolonialkontor, dated 11.09.1909.
Source: Deutsches Kolonialblatt,
Berlin 1909.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FOREIGN
AND COLONIAL BANKS

The banks based in BerlinMitte not only participated in chartered companies, but also in socalled foreign and colonial banks. The former were supposed to strengthen Germany’s foreign trade and enable German trading companies abroad to conduct their business via German banks. In addition, they granted loans to foreign governments and established companies abroad themselves, particularly for the construction of railway and telegraph lines and for the exploration and extraction of mineral resources. The initiative to found foreign banks came primarily from the German banks, yet it was motivated not only by economic but also by political considerations and was closely linked to the imperial ambitions of the German Empire in regions such as Central and South America, East Asia and the Ottoman Empire.³³

33 Buchheim, Finanzmetropole, p. 117.

In the German colonies in Africa, however, it was the colonial administration that pushed for the establishment of colonial banks, but it had to rely on the capital of German banks – above all, those in Berlin.

Like the foreign banks, the colonial banks were also supposed to strengthen trade between Germany and the colonies, successively ousting older trading networks. At the same time, they were expected to back colonial hierarchies and intensify the exploitation of the colonial regions. Mischa Suter aptly calls this strategy “monetary ‘Weltpolitik’”.³⁴

Well into the twentieth century, merchants in the German colonies conducted their business transactions primarily via British or French banks. In addition, chartered companies like the German East Africa Company or other colonial companies assumed banking tasks on a smaller scale.³⁵ In 1904, a consortium of Deutsche Bank, the Disconto-Gesellschaft and the German East Africa Company founded the German East Africa Bank.³⁶ In the same year, Dresdner Bank and the German West African Company participated in opening the German West African Bank for Togo and Cameroon with registered offices in the Dresdner Bank building at Behrenstraße 35–39.³⁷ One year later, the German Africa Bank started operating in colonial Namibia, again with the participation of the Disconto-Gesellschaft and also the Hamburg company C. Woermann, which was involved in many colonial projects.³⁸

Hence, Berlin banking houses were involved in all colonial banks.

The administration in the colonies – the so-called Gouvernements – supported the establishment of these banks by depositing a share of their budget with them, interest-free. In return, they expected the banks to promote trade between Germany and the colonies, oust intermediaries from the business and support the administration in introducing taxes, intended to force Africans into wage labour.

Yet in practice, “monetary Weltpolitik” turned out to be much more complicated. It was more attractive for the colonial banks to invest their money in Germany than in the colonies, which repeatedly led to liquidity problems for the Gouvernements.³⁹ The banks also showed little interest in granting loans to settlers, or demanded excessive securities for such loans.⁴⁰ In East Africa, after massive protests by German planters, another bank was founded in 1911 – the Handelsbank für Ostafrika. Yet it was managed by the same consortium as the German East Africa Bank.⁴¹

The colonial banks depended not only on the acceptance of the German settlers and the colonial government, but also of the rest of the population. When the German West African Bank opened a savings bank in Lomé in 1910, those in charge noticed that only a few people were willing to entrust them with their savings. The bank ascribed this to ignorance, yet admitted that the cash taxation that had recently been introduced to replace forced tax labour discouraged potential investors.⁴² Again in the following year, the bank complained that Africans feared that by opening an account, they would give Europeans too many insights into their financial situation.⁴³ This lack of trust in banks is hardly surprising, given they were rightly perceived as a part of the colonial regime, even if they did not always pursue the same agenda as the colonial administration.

Like the colonial banks themselves, their currency was not accepted everywhere, either. The example of the German East Africa Bank illustrates this. It was the only colonial bank in Africa that also acted as a bank of issue and had been authorised by the government of the German Empire to issue bank notes in rupees. Yet although the rupee was established as a currency in East Africa and had a fixed exchange rate against the German mark, the district authorities, customs posts and military paying offices in the interior of the country had little use for paper money.⁴⁴ African soldiers and workers preferred the familiar copper and silver coins that had been in circulation for a long time and that were also used to make jewellery. The practice of punching a hole in the coins was in fact so widespread that the colonial administration had to adjust the strict European regulations about “counterfeiting” and “coin forgery” to local realities.⁴⁵

Hence the colonial state could not enforce its monetary economy without meeting resistance.

In the colony administered by the German Navy on the south coast of the Chinese province of Shandong – which the Chinese state had leased to the German Empire for ninety-nine years – the DeutschAsiatische Bank operated as a colonial bank. A consortium of all major German banks and several renowned private banking houses founded it as early as 1889 on the initiative of Deutsche Bank and the DiscontoGesellschaft.⁴⁶ The DeutschAsiatische Bank was primarily a foreign bank that wanted to promote German trade with East Asia and overcome the dominance of English banks in this part of the world. It operated throughout China and beyond, in East Asia. The bank’s headquarters were in Shanghai, where the bank generated most of its profits through trade financing.⁴⁷ It also regularly participated in issuing Chinese government bonds. It operated branches in China, India, Japan and Singapore, and was also represented with a branch in Berlin’s banking district.⁴⁸

The Deutsch-Asiatische Bank exemplifies that the differentiation between foreign and colonial banks that is generally applied in research on banking history does not always match what happened in practice. The bank also operated as a bank of issue within the “Kiautschou Bay Leased Territory” and the surrounding province Shāndōng; and it funded local railway and mining com-

34 Suter, *Geld an der Grenze*, p. 149.

35 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 316.

36 Riesser, J[akob]: *The German Great Banks and Their Concentration in Connection with the Economic Development of Germany*, Washington DC 1911, p. 457.

37 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 317; Riesser, *German Great Banks*, pp. 457–458. *The German West African Company left the consortium again in 1907 when it became clear that other business enterprises shied away from processing their transactions via a bank that the competition had a stake in.* Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 319–329.

38 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 322; Riesser, *German Great Banks*, pp. 443 and 457–458.

39 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 318 and 320–322.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 324.

41 Suter, *Geld an der Grenze*, p. 151.

42 Barch, R1001/6444, *Auszug aus dem VI. Geschäftsbericht der Deutsch-Westafrikanischen Bank für das Jahr 1910*, p. 130.

43 Barch, R1001/6444, *Kaiserliche Gouvernement von Togo an das Reichskolonialamt, Bericht der Deutsch-Westafrikanischen Bank*, 24.06.1911, p. 131.

44 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 321.

45 Suter, *Geld an der Grenze*, p. 185.

46 Moazzin, Ghassan, *Foreign Banks and Global Finance in Modern China. Banking on the Chinese Frontier, 1870–1919*, Cambridge 2022, pp. 46–52. *The following Berlin banks were consortium members: Bank für Handel und Industrie (Darmstädter Bank), Berliner Handelsgesellschaft, Seehandlungsgesellschaft, S. Bleichröder, Robert Warschauer & Co. and Mendelssohn & Co. Dresdner Bank, the A. Schaaffhausen'sche Bankverein and the Nationalbank für Deutschland joined at a later stage. The idea behind the consortium was to prevent major German banks from competing against one another in the Chinese market, as was the case in South America or in the Ottoman Empire.* Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 40–42.

47 *Between 1898 and 1908, the bank paid a dividend of, on average, 6.7 per cent to the shareholders.* Riesser, *German Great Banks*, pp. 455–456.

48 Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 40–42, 96; Riesser, *German Great Banks*, p. 455. *Initially, this was located with the directorate of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, Unter den Linden 35, then from 1900 to 1910 at Behrenstraße 14–16, at the former address of the banking house Von der Heydt and the German East African Company (DOAG).* Berliner Adreßbuch 1896, *Adreßbuch für Berlin und seine Vororte 1897–1902; Berliner Adreßbuch 1903–1910.*

panies. From 1907, it primarily issued bank notes in the locally accepted currency units, dollar and tael.⁴⁹ Moreover, the consortium of the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank founded a mining company to explore and extract coal deposits in the region around the leased territory, and to fund the building of a railway line from Qingdao to the interior of the country to transport precisely those mineral resources, and also participated in additional railway construction projects in China.

⁴⁹ Barth, *Hochfinanz*, p. 96.



Figure 4

Branch of the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank in Qingdao. Source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 137-005516; photographer: not specified.

RAILWAY AND MINING COMPANIES

Berlin banks participated in many railway construction and mining projects in the colonies. Railway lines facilitated the development and extraction of raw materials. In some cases, they were the gateway to the economic exploitation of the respective colonies. They also served military purposes, especially in times of war, as they enabled the rapid transport of troops and supplies. Since building railways and mining natural resources required substantial investments, the colonial administration sought the support of banks. However, they were able to invest their capital more profitably outside of the German colonies, for example in railway construction in the USA, Russia or the British Empire. Therefore, they requested state guarantees for their investments.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

The close connection between banks, railway construction and the extraction of raw materials is also reflected in the fact that many companies had office addresses in Berlin's banking district.

From 1900, the Shāndōng Mining Company and the Shāndōng Railway Company were in the same location as the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank, with the Otavi Mining and Railway Company joining in 1905.⁵¹ As early as the 1880s, the Disconto-Gesellschaft and Deutsche Bank had shown an interest in railway and mining industries in China.⁵² In 1899, together with the other consortium members of the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank, they founded the Shāndōng Railway Company and the Shāndōng Mining Company.⁵³ The former was commissioned to build a railway line from Qindao through the leased territory and Shāndōng, all the way to the provincial capital, Jinan. The latter was authorised by the Chinese government to look for and mine iron ore and coal deposits within a fifteen-kilometre-wide strip on either side of the railway line.

⁵¹ *Berliner Adreßbuch 1896, Adreßbuch für Berlin und seine Vororte 1897–1902; Berliner Adreßbuch 1903–1909. All three banks moved to a new address, Unter den Linden 31, in 1910. Berliner Adreßbuch 1909–1911; Deutsches Kolonial-Handbuch 1911.*

⁵² Moazzin, *Foreign Banks*, pp. 37–46.

⁵³ *It was a share capital of 6,000,000 marks, increased to 54,000,000 marks over time. Riesser, German Great Banks, p. 459.*

Right from the start, railway construction was met by resistance from the local population. Landowners within the catchment area of the railway line received compensation, but only small amounts. Determining ownership frequently turned out to be complicated, which is why those whose land had been expropriated received payment very late, if at all. Moreover, the construction of the railway destroyed burial groves and disrupted ecosystems by changing river courses. There were repeated incidents of sexualised violence against women from the surrounding villages.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Biener, Anette, *Das deutsche Pachtgebiet Tsingtau in Schantung, 1897–1914. Institutioneller Wandel durch Kolonialisierung*, Bonn 2001, pp. 42–43.

As early as 1899, inhabitants of the region around Gaomi put up resistance against these conditions, destroying surveying markers and chasing away workers of the railway company.

The company then asked for support from the navy, which sent marines to Gaomi [Fig. 5]. During the occupation of the city, they destroyed the local academy, killed civilians in the surrounding villages and inflicted sexualised violence.⁵⁵ This military violence in turn spurred the resistance of the Yihétu-án in Shandong – known as the Boxer Rebellion in Germany⁵⁶ – and is therefore among the causes of the colonial war in China.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–49.

⁵⁶ See the paper by Stefan Zollhauser on this website.



Figure 5

Besetzung von Gaomi durch deutsche Truppen, Juni 1899 (Occupation of Gaomi by German troops, June 1899). Source: Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive), Bild 134-B2406; photographer: not specified.

Similarly, in colonial Namibia, railway construction and militant violence were closely linked. Here, it was the Otavi Mining and Railway Company (OMEG) that built a railway line from Swakopmund to the copper deposits near Tsumeb with the participation of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, Deutsche Bank, S. Bleichröder and Von der Heydt & Co.⁵⁷ The route led through Ovaherero territory and significantly exacerbated the land conflicts there, contributing to the outbreak of war between Ovaherero and Germans. During the war, the OMEG and the colonial administration pushed railway construction for military reasons, to move troops and transport supplies. They used Ovaherero prisoners – among them women and children – as forced labourers. Following the completion of the railway line in 1906, Deutsche Bank distributed 2,648,000 marks (or 19,860,000 euros in current terms) to the firms and banks involved in the railway construction.⁵⁸ In 1910, the OMEG sold the Otavi railway for 22 million marks (or 156,200,000 euros in current terms) to the state, a price that exceeded the construction costs by five million marks. In the following years, it operated the railway as a lease-holder, generating profits in the millions with copper mining.⁵⁹

Hence the OMEG and participating banks directly benefitted from the genocide in Namibia. For this reason, representatives of the Ovaherero filed a civil lawsuit in the United States in 2001 against Deutsche Bank, which is the legal successor of the Disconto-Gesellschaft, following their merger in 1929. The indictment accused the bank of direct involvement in crimes against humanity, forced labour and genocide.⁶⁰ Although the case was dismissed by the court for “failure to state actionable claim”,⁶¹ it highlights how aware the Namibian public is of the participation of the banks in the colonial crimes to this day. Legally, the banks may never be held accountable. This makes it all the more important to investigate and publicly discuss the role of banks in colonialism.

⁵⁷ Investors from Great Britain and Belgium also participated in the OMEG and contributed approximately half of its capital of 20,000,000 marks. Drechsler, *Südwestafrika*, p. 214.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 215–217.

⁵⁹ In the financial year 1913/14, the OMEG recorded monthly profits of more than 300,000 marks (now: 1,980,000 euros). Barth, *Hochfinanz*, pp. 312–313. On the history of copper mining in Tsumeb, see Gramlich, Noam, *Zur Kolonialität von Kupfer. Eine situierte Mediengeologie der Mine in Tsumeb*, Frankfurt a.M./ New York 2024, pp. 9–15.

⁶⁰ *The Herero People's Reparations Corporation et al. v. Deutsche Bank AG, Terex Corporation a.k.a Orenstein-Koppel and Woermann Line now known as Deutsche Afrika-Linien GmbH & Co., First Amended Complaint*, 18.09.2001 [filed with the Superior Court of the District of Columbia].

⁶¹ *United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, The Herero People's Reparations Corporation, et al. v. Deutsche Bank AG and Woermann Line, d/b/a Deutsche Afrika-Linien GmbH & Co.*, 11.06.2004. The plaintiffs appealed, but the Supreme Court refused to consider the case. A new complaint filed with the District Court for the Southern District of New York was dismissed in 2006.

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Stefan Zollhauser

THE PARADE OF THE “CHINA WARRIORS”¹ – STAGING COLONIAL VIOLENCE

In early January, 1901, the satirical magazine *Ulk* published a caricature with the title “Diskretion ist Ehrensache” (Discretion is a question of honour) [Fig. 1].² It shows soldiers in colonial uniforms marching through the Brandenburg Gate, wearing their typical slouch hats. The soldiers – and horses – are also wearing face masks. On one of the flags on the right of the image, “PST!” (hush!) is written in capital letters. What was the meaning of this?

¹ At the time, the term “Chinakrieger” (China warriors) was frequently used for the German soldiers in the Boxer War. It is rooted in colonial parlance and is therefore marked as a source term throughout the text.

² The *Ulk* was the weekly supplement of the liberal newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*.



Figure 1

Caricature “Diskretion ist Ehrensache”. (Discretion is a question of honour.) Source: *Ulk*, 04.01.1901, p. 8. Artist: not specified.

Six months earlier, the so-called Boxer War had escalated in parts of the Chinese Empire,³ where the German Empire, the USA, Austria-Hungary, France, Great Britain, Russia and the emerging colonial power Japan were seeking to violently strike down anti-colonial resistance. Three weeks before publication of the caricature, on 16 December 1900, numerous German marines had marched through the Brandenburg Gate to the Zeughaus (armoury), where they were saluted by the ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm II. The following text examines this triumphal procession in the course of a colonial war, as well as debates at the time throughout the German Empire and in its capital, Berlin.

³ From a colonialist perspective, the term “Boxer Rebellion” was frequently used at the time, as well as the more euphemistic “Troubles in China”. For some decades now, German-speaking scholars have predominantly used the term “Boxer War”.

DER BOXERKRIEG

The Boxer War (1900–1901) was an anti-colonial war of liberation that primarily took place in the Chinese province Shandong.⁴ The original initiators of the resistance were the Yihétuán – the “Righteous and Harmonious Fists”, a social movement founded in the previous years in opposition to Christian missionary and other foreign activities, and which had gained growing support among the wider population. After the outbreak of the war, regular Chinese troops also joined the conflict. Western colonial powers cooperated with Russia and Japan in brutally suppressing the resistance movement. During the second half of the war, the German Empire played a pivotal role. When the German ambassador Clemens von Ketteler (1853–1900) was killed by a “Boxer”, the German Empire demanded, and was granted, the leadership of some of the allied troops. In June 1900, the war started with the bombardment and subsequent occupation of the Taku Forts on the north-eastern coast of China by the German gunboat *Itis*, which was already operating in the area.⁵ This opened the way for overland access to the capital Beijing (at the time, Peking).

The war can be roughly divided into two phases.⁶ During the first phase, up to September 1900, the navy units already deployed in the region played a central role in the rapid occupation of the Taku Forts and the advance on the capital Beijing. The international legations had been besieged

⁴ As an introduction to the causes and course of the war, see Klein, Thoralf, “Straffeldzug in Namen der Zivilisation. Der Boxerkrieg in China (1900–1901)”, in: Klein, Thoralf/Schumacher, Frank (eds.), *Kolonialkriege. Militärische Gewalt im Zeichen des Imperialismus*, Hamburg 2006, pp. 145–180.

⁵ To this day, the street names *Takustraße*, *Itisstraße* and *Lansstraße* in Berlin-Dahlem commemorate this event and the captain of the *Itis*, Wilhelm von Lans (1861–1947), although there has been debate for some time about renaming these streets.

⁶ See Leutner, Mechthild/Mühlhahn, Klaus (eds.) *Kolonialkrieg in China. Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900–1901*, Berlin 2007.

by “Boxers” for 55 days, until the colonial troops conquered and occupied Beijing in mid-August. Subsequently, the colonial powers divided the capital into various occupied zones. This was followed by the second phase, namely numerous “punitive expeditions” to villages and small towns, often carried out with the utmost violence.

7 A term frequently used at the time, concealing the asymmetric acts of violence inflicted on the civilian population by the colonial powers.

Kidnappings, executions and the razing of entire settlements led to many thousands of victims among the Chinese civilian population.

For the first time, volunteer units deployed by the German Empire and assembled from various German regiments also took part in this violence. When Kaiser Wilhelm II saw some of these troops off in Bremerhaven in 1900, he gave the “Hun speech” – notorious for its frank brutality and already criticised at the time – in which he urged the German soldiers to show no mercy towards their enemies:

*When you are confronted with the enemy, that enemy shall be defeated! No quarter shall be given! No prisoners shall be taken! Whoever falls into your hands shall be doomed! Just like the Huns who, under their king, Attila, made a name for themselves one thousand years ago, a name renowned for its might in lore and fairy tales, may you, too, corroborate the name “German” in China for one thousand years, in such a way that no Chinese person will ever dare look askance at a German again!*⁸

8 Cited in Sösemann, Bernd, “Die sog. Hunnenrede Wilhelms II. Textkritische und interpretatorische Bemerkungen zur Ansprache des Kaisers vom 27. Juli 1900 in Bremerhaven”, in: Historische Zeitschrift 222 (1976), pp. 342–358, here p. 349.

German Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee (1832-1904)⁹ became commanderinchief in this second phase of the war. The war ended in September 1901 with the signing of the so-called Boxer Protocol in Beijing. This imposed peace settlement forced China to pay high reparations to the colonial powers, and led to a special mission of the Chinese Prince Chun to the German Empire to atone for Ketteler’s murder.

9 A street near Schäfersee, a lake in BerlinReinickendorf, is named after von Waldersee to this day. However, the street was named after him while he was still alive and before his deployment to the Boxer War.

THE PARADE OF THE “CHINA WARRIORS” IN BERLIN ON 16 DECEMBER 1900

The Brandenburg Gate and the boulevard Unter den Linden were traditionally chosen as a symbolic location for military victory celebrations. Following the three German Wars of Unification – against Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866 and France in 1871 – victorious troops had marched each time through the Brandenburg Gate towards the palace. And this is what happened again in mid-December 1900, when most of the battles in China had already subsided, after the occupation of Beijing, and the marines had largely been replaced by the army. On 16 December 1900, these marines marched from Lehrter Bahnhof (today’s main railway station, Hauptbahnhof) through the Brandenburg Gate, then along Unter den Linden until they reached the Zeughaus, where the German Kaiser saluted them and delivered a speech praising their valour. The local press covered the event extensively; the Berliner Illustrierten [sic] Zeitung even published photos.¹⁰ The mass reproduction of photos had only become possible a few years earlier, and the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung was an emerging publication that frequently published exceptional and spectacular images.

10 Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, 30.12.1900, p. 820.



Figure 2
Ankunft der Chinatruppen am Lehrter Bahnhof (Arrival of the China troops at Lehrter Bahnhof). Source: Collection Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin; photographers: Zander & Labisch; reproduction: Dorin Alexandru Ionita, Berlin.



Figure 3
Der Magistrat begrüßt am Brandenburger Tor die zurückgekehrten Soldaten des Expeditionskorps, das in China den „Boxeraufstand“ niederschlug. (At the Brandenburg Gate, representatives of Berlin's municipal authorities welcome the returned soldiers of the expeditionary corps that struck down the "Boxer Rebellion" in China.) Source: Collection Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin; photographer: Hugo Rudolphy; reproduction: Dorin Alexandru Ionita, Berlin.

Just short of one thousand soldiers disembarked from the train at the cordonedoff Lehrter Bahnhof;¹¹ they were welcomed by Berlin's city commander, and some were awarded medals. The event particularly focused on honouring the seamen from the *Iltis* and those soldiers involved in defending the international legations in Beijing. From Lehrter Bahnhof [Fig. 2], the troops marched to the Brandenburg Gate, where representatives of Berlin's city government welcomed them on its western side, on the square known then as Platz vor dem Brandenburger Tor [Fig. 3]. The Mayor of Berlin, Kirschner, welcomed them with a speech, also expressing the enthusiasm for the colonial idea that large parts of the bourgeoisie felt at the time:

*Esteemed Captain!*¹² The troops led by you set forth across vast oceans to distant parts of the world, to safeguard German interests among foreign peoples far away from their homeland; to watch over and protect German property, German goods, German rights, and German citizens. [...] Forming a close combat union with the armed forces of those states fighting with the German Empire, the German troops and the rank and file under their leadership entered into the fight forced upon them, showing German allegiance, German courage and German bravery, and turned it into a blessing and a glory for our beloved fatherland.¹³

11 The magazine *Vorwärts* mentions about 980 men in four companies, see *Vorwärts*, 18.12.1900, p. 4.

12 The captain of the *Iltis* was still in the military hospital, which is why the ship's crew was led by a so-called transport commander.

13 *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17.12.1900.



Figure 4
Einzug und Empfang der Soldaten des Expeditionskorps, das in China den „Boxeraufstand“ niederschlug – durch das Brandenburger Tor (Entry and reception of the soldiers of the expeditionary corps that struck down the "Boxer Rebellion" in China – parading through the Brandenburg Gate). Source: Collection Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin; photographer: Hugo Rudolphy; reproduction: Dorin Alexandru Ionita, Berlin.

The soldiers then marched through the Brandenburg Gate to the Zeughaus, following the flag of the gunboat *Iltis* and a flag captured in Taku [Fig. 4]. In the Zeughaus, whose inner courtyard was decorated with trophies from several Prussian wars [Fig. 5], the German Kaiser welcomed them with the following words:

*The fatherland saw your departure with anxious foreboding. The efforts awaiting you were to be anticipated. For what you have achieved, I express my gratitude on behalf of the entire fatherland and all the German people. Most notably, you have kept your oath of allegiance, and I am firmly convinced that each of you played his part in hours of hardship. The eye did not falter and the hand did not tremble, and thus victories were won. No one among you can know the enormous joy that followed when hearing the news of your victories – the result of a joint effort of the army and the navy [...].*¹⁴

14 *Ibid.*

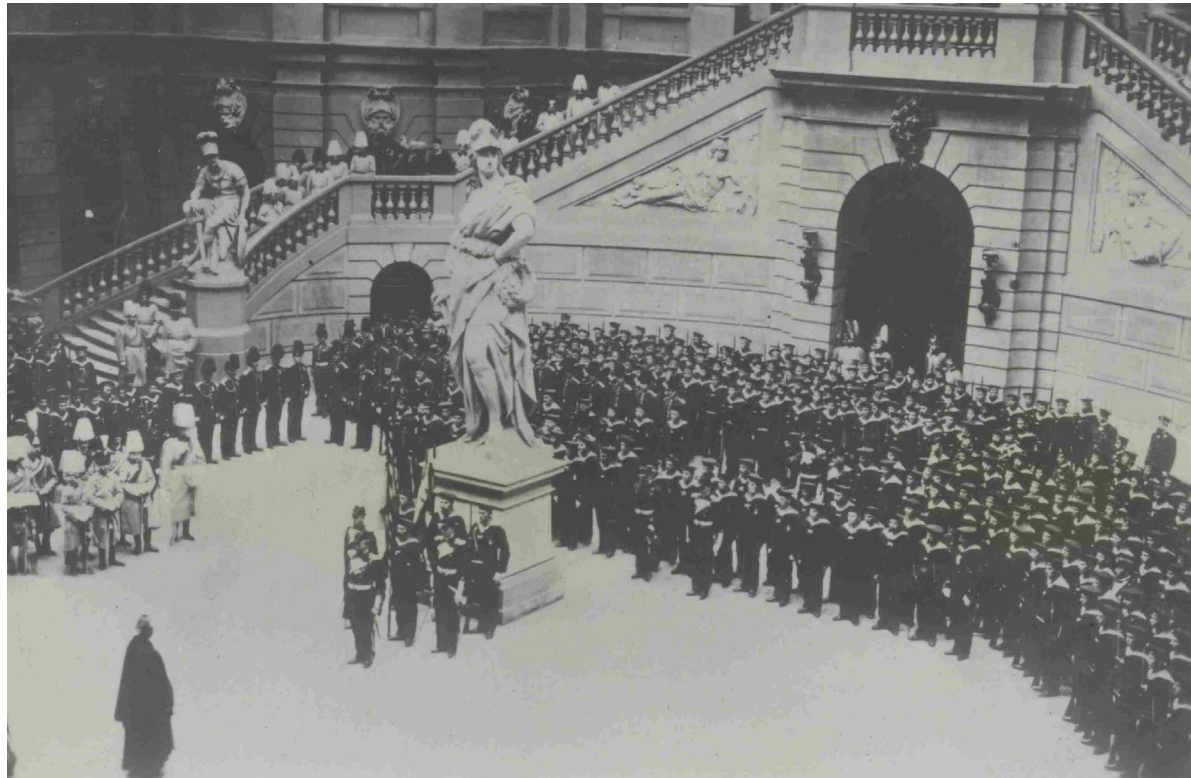


Figure 5

Ansprache von Wilhelm II. an die aus China zurückgekehrten Marine-Kompanien im Lichthof des Zeughauses (Speech by Kaiser Wilhelm II in the atrium of the Zeughaus, addressing the navy units that have returned from China). Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum; photographer not specified.

After the speech, the parade moved along Unter den Linden, past the Kaiser and the palace. At the end of the ceremony, the navy troops not based in Berlin were assigned to various military barracks in the city.

The honouring of the marines who had been deployed in China was documented by a large number of press photographers, among them representatives of prestigious photo agencies such as Zander & Labisch. Some photos show the photographers themselves at work [Fig. 2, on the left of the photo].

The photos show neither the injured mentioned in the press, nor the looted weapons. The Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* pointed out that they might be guns shipped by the industrialist Krupp.¹⁵

The euphoric mood among the spectators was emphasised by the bourgeois press:

*There was the liveliest hustle and bustle on Unter den Linden until very late in the evening. Whenever the public saw a navy uniform, it cheered as an expression of joy, and particularly heartfelt ovations were granted to the injured soldiers who were striding to their quarters aided by walking sticks and whose chests were emblazoned with decorations awarded by the Kaiser.*¹⁶

However, from the press articles consulted, nothing can be deduced regarding the composition of the spectators and their motivation, as reporters focused on depicting the troops.

¹⁵ *Vorwärts*, Zweite Beilage (second supplement), 18.12.1900, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17.12.1900.

CRITICISM OF MASS VIOLENCE

While popular mass media such as trading cards and postcards as well as numerous press articles largely concealed or downplayed colonial mass violence, some newspapers did publish critical reports, and controversial discussions took place in the German Reichstag. For example, Eugen Richter (1838–1906), an eminent Liberal in the Reichstag, gave an accusatory speech there as early as 1900:

*This is not about the excess of a single soldier, but about the orders given by the superiors to make 60, 70, 100, 150 defenceless Chinese men line up against the wall, several hours after the battle had finished, and have them shot or bayoneted.*¹⁷

¹⁷ *Minutes of the Deutscher Reichstag [German parliament]*, 20.11.1900, p. 55.

Yet it was above all the leader of the Social Democratic Party August Bebel (1840–1913) who repeatedly criticised the mass violence.

In his speech of 19 November 1900, he quoted from letters written by German soldiers to their families:

*In fortified cities such as Montou [Nantou], Tuogschai, Dangtsun [Dhanzou] and others as well as in all the villages we passed, I saw corpses everywhere. And how many sick people, women, children and old people who were unable to flee might be buried beneath the burning rubble?*¹⁸

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Deutscher Reichstag [German parliament]*, 19.11.1900, p. 33.

Four days later, he quoted from another letter and denounced the brutalisation of the German conduct of warfare, also attributing it to the Kaiser’s “Hun speech”:

„Everything that blocked our path, be it man, woman or child, everything was slaughtered. How the skirts [women] screamed then! But those are the Kaiser’s orders: no quarter shall be given! And we have sworn our oath of allegiance and obedience, and that is what we abide by.“¹⁹

19 Minutes of the Deutscher Reichstag [German parliament], 23.11.1900, p.113.

Particularly the widely circulated Social Democratic newspaper Vorwärts quoted these Reichstag speeches and other similar letters from the soldiers involved in the fighting, thus contributing to a large extent to the public criticism of mass violence.²⁰ The military administration, however, tried to prevent the dissemination of information about the murderous reality of the colonial war, yet with little success.²¹ It is in the context of these debates that the aforementioned caricature was published on 4 January 1901, reflecting the failed attempts at censorship with the face masks serving as muzzles. The Boxer War was an important and often critically examined topic in other satirical magazines and in the leftliberal magazine Simplicissimus. They caricatured the violence, the costs of the military operation, at times also Western arrogance and the dishonesty of an allegedly “civilising mission”.²²

20 Above all, see the editions dated 20.11.1900 and 24.11.1900.

21 Which specific measures it took shall remain to be explored by future research.

22 See, inter alia, Simplicissimus 5, no. 22, p.1; Simplicissimus 6, no. 54, pp.1–8.

Together with many other written sources and images, they testify to a lively and in parts critical debate about the reality of colonial mass violence in China.

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