

## **The Bleek-Lloyd Collection and the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register**

*The Bleek-Lloyd Collection and beyond.* That is the short-title of our meeting today. I would like to start with 'beyond' and then circle down to the Bleek-Lloyd Collection.

Everywhere in the world cultural heritage is in serious danger. Some people say: 'Now more than ever'. I don't know. The situation has never been favourable for the softer parts of life: for the expressions of culture, of knowledge, of creativity. Over centuries natural disasters, natural decay but also man-made neglect and man-made destruction have ruined many great achievements from our ancestors all around the globe.

### **UNESCO**

You all know that the United Nations have created UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO was established in 1945, very shortly after the incredibly devastating World War II. One of UNESCO's main objectives is protecting the world's heritage – in all its diversity. Since 1972 the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (better known as 'World Heritage Convention') recognizes that certain places on Earth are of "outstanding universal value" and should form part of the common heritage of humankind. In 2003 UNESCO launched the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Intangible cultural heritage, also known as 'living heritage', refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills transmitted by communities from generation to generation.

There are more UNESCO cultural conventions (for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and for Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions), but I leave them aside, moving to the Memory of the World Programme. Although not a Convention, it has many similarities with the World Heritage Convention. The difference is that the Memory of the World Programme aims particularly at documentary heritage. By the way, at its next General Conference in November, the UNESCO member states may promote the Memory of the World Programme to the status of Recommendation – still not an Convention, but a higher step than a Programme, and it will certainly gain more political strength.

So, for the sake of simplicity: the Memory of the World Programme may be regarded as a World Heritage Convention for documentary heritage.

UNESCO established the Memory of the World Programme in 1992. Impetus came originally from a growing awareness of the perilous state of preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage in various parts of the world, caused by war and social upheaval, as well as by severe lack of resources. Worldwide, significant collections of documents had suffered – and are still suffering - a variety of fates. Looting and dispersal, illegal trading, destruction, inadequate housing and funding have all played a part. Much had vanished forever; much was - and is – in danger. Moreover it was felt that documentary heritage – because of preservation and because of access – differs from the general heritage within the World Heritage Convention.

### **Vision and Mission**

The vision of the Memory of the World Programme is that the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance.

That's why the mission of the Memory of the World Programme is:

- To facilitate preservation, by the most appropriate techniques, of the world's documentary heritage. This may be done by direct practical assistance, by the dissemination of advice and information and the encouragement of training, or by linking sponsors with timely and appropriate projects.
- To assist universal access to documentary heritage. This will include encouragement to make digitized copies and catalogues available on the Internet, as well as the publication and distribution of books, CDs, DVDs, and other products, as widely and equitably as possible.
- To increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of documentary heritage. One of the means to do so is, besides the use of the media and all sorts of promotional and information publications, developing the Memory of the World registers.

Before continuing about the Memory of the World Registers, a few words on the terms *documents* and *documentary heritage*.

Every document has two components: the information content and the carrier on which it resides. Both may be of great variety and both can be equally important as parts of the significance of the documents. Documents are for example:

- Textual items such as manuscripts, books, newspapers, posters, etc. The textual content may be recorded in ink, pencil, paint or other medium. The carrier may be of paper, plastic, papyrus, parchment, palm leaves, some textile fabric, stone or many other mediums.
- Similarly, non-textual items such as drawings, prints, maps, music scores, plans, diagrams or graphics.
- Audiovisual items such as films, sound discs, tapes and photographs - whether recorded in analogue or digital formats. The physical carrier may be paper, various forms of plastic or celluloid, metal or other material.
- Virtual documents such as websites and other digital publications. The carrier may be a hard disc or tape, the content is electronic data.

All these kinds of items are documents within the definition of the Memory of the World Programme. An item of documentary heritage can be a single document of any of these kinds. Or it can be a group of documents, such as a collection, a holding or an archival fonds. So, for the Memory of the World Registers an item can be a single document – or a small or even very large group of documents. Items on the Registers vary from even a single sheet to huge archives, held in different parts of the world, which together form one item. (E.g. the archives of the Dutch East India Company, which are held in the Netherlands, in India, in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka and here, in South Africa. All together they are one item on the International Register.)

Now let's move to the Memory of the World Registers. The Memory of the World Programme proceeds on the assumption that some items, collections, holdings or fonds are part of the inheritance of the world, in the same way as are the sites of outstanding universal value listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Their significance is deemed to transcend the boundaries of time and culture, they should be preserved for present and future generations, and made accessible to all peoples of the world in some form. So they are excellent examples of the significance of documentary heritage and of the need to preserve it. That is why they are in the showcases of the

Programme. So, the Memory of the World Registers are the showcases of the Memory of the World Programme.

A showcase must be attractive. One of the very attractive aspects of the Registers – apart from the significance of each item – is their enormous diversity. On the Registers you'll find old maps, recent political treaties, early movies, stone inscriptions, testimonies of important changes in society, beautiful calligraphy, holy books, enormous archival fonds, scientific discoveries, illuminated manuscripts, personal papers of important authors, famous music scores, diaries of war heroes, wall paintings, records of slaves and indentured laborers, etcetera, etcetera. Some are beautiful, others are horrible, some are intriguing, others are inspiring. They show both the bright and the dark pages of the history of mankind. But they all have in common that they are of great significance, that they constitute not only to the memory of one person, the memory of one group, the memory of one country, but really to the memory of the world.

You may have noticed that I'm talking about the Registers in plural. I will focus on the International Register, but there are also two Regional Registers: for the Asia/Pacific Region (MOWCAP) and for the Latin American and Caribbean Region (MOWLAC). Moreover, several countries have national registers. But what applies for the International Register also applies in general for the Regional and National Registers.

### **International Register**

Presently there are just over 300 items on the International Register. The first inscriptions were made in 1997. At this moment the inscription procedure for the years 2014-2015 is well on its way. Probably early October the new inscriptions will be announced.

Almost half of the 305 items presently inscribed on the International Register come from Europe and North America. Only 23 come from Africa, including three countries (Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) which - in UNESCO terms – in fact belong to the Arab region.

Africa (general): Christopher Okigbo Collection

Angola: Ndembu Archives

Benin: Colonial Archives, political affairs

Egypt: Deeds of Sultans and Princes

Egypt: Memory of the Suez Canal

Egypt: Collection of Persian Illustrated and Illuminated Manuscripts

Egypt: The National Library of Egypt's Collection of Mamluk Qur'an Manuscripts

Ethiopia: Treasures from National Archives and Library Organizations

Ghana: Dutch West India Company Archives\*

Madagascar: Royal Archives

Morocco: Kitab al-ibar (Manuscript about social and political history, text written in the 14th cent.)

Mauritius: Records of the French Occupation

Namibia: Letter Journals of Hendrik Witbooi

Namibia\*\*: John Marshall Ju/'hoan Bushman Film and Video Collection (Smithsonian Inst. USA)

Senegal: Fonds of the "Afrique occidentale française" (AOF)

Tanzania: Collection of Arabic Manuscripts and Books

Tanzania: German Records of the National Archives

Tunisia: Archives of the Regency of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries

South Africa: Archives of the CODESA 1991-1992 and of the Multi-Party Negotiating Process 1993

South Africa: Archives of the Dutch East India Company\*  
South Africa: Criminal Court Case No. 253/1963 (State Versus Nelson Mandela and Others)  
South Africa: Liberation Struggle Living Archive Collection  
South Africa: The Bleek-Lloyd Collection

Twenty-three items is not a large number, but enough to show the appealing variety of items on the Registers. At the same time it is clear that, with only twenty-three items, the continent of Africa is underrepresented. It is even more underrepresented if we realise that quite a lot of these items deal with non-African materials: e.g. the colonial archives in Benin and Tanzania, the Dutch West and East India Companies archives in Ghana and South Africa. The John Marshall Film and video collection from Namibia is owned and held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC - like many more African cultural collections are held in Europe or North America. In fact this collection was not nominated by Namibia, but by the USA.

Only 23 out of 305! It is not easy to say what has caused this disproportion. Certainly, many parts of Africa had a strong oral tradition which has resulted in less written records. In colonial times many original documents got lost or were intentionally destroyed. And also due to colonialism the importance and significance of authentic African documents has not been recognized for a long time. As Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, director of the library of the University of Namibia, has put it: "Many Africans are foreigners to their own heritage." After gaining independence the "de-colonization of the mind" did not happen. Moreover, under certain circumstances attention and energy has to be spent on other things than completing Memory of the World Register nomination forms. Yet I'm sure that in every African country documents can be found that are worth to be inscribed.

The small number of African items on the International Register may also have to do with the ignorance of the Memory of the World programme. That's why in recent years a number of workshops have been given to make potential nominators from Africa familiar with the International Register and its procedures. I'm glad to say that in the present round the number of African nominations is larger than ever before - although it would be better if it were still five times larger. This is the list:

Côte d'Ivoire: Louis Normand's photography collection  
Côte d'Ivoire: Series EE from the colonial collection of the historical archives  
Egypt: Coins' collection of the National Library & Archives  
Ethiopia: "Bahire Hassab" (Sea of Computus = Ethiopian Calendar)  
Ethiopia: "Degua" (Antiphonary, 6th century hymns' book)  
Mauritius: Indentured Labourers documents  
Niger: Collection of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts from Abdou Moumouni de Niamey University  
Senegal: William Ponty School Collection of Papers  
Senegal: Collection of old postcards from French West Africa  
Uganda: A collection of eyewitness accounts and records on the martyrdom of the Uganda Martyrs  
Zimbabwe: Nehanda and Kaguvi mediums' judgement dockets (April 1897)

In October we will know which of these nominations will really be inscribed.

### **Nomination procedure**

Nominations for the Registers may be submitted by any person or organization, including governments and NGOs. Any person, also private persons. And you don't have to be the owner or custodian to submit a nomination. However, if necessary, priority will be given to nominations made by or through the relevant national Memory of the World committee or relevant UNESCO National Commission.

For the International Memory of the World Register there is a limit of two nominations per country in each two-year cycle. This limit does not apply to joint nominations involving a partnership between institutions in two or more countries; they are not counted as part of the quota of each participating country.

Nominations have to be submitted before the last day of March of every even year. So the next deadline is 31 March 2016.

After a formal check the nominations are sent to the members of the Register Subcommittee. The Register Subcommittee consists of nine persons from very different regions of the world. IFLA and the International Council of Archives (ICA) and the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA) are represented. Of course the members have broad expertise in the field of documentary heritage. They also have a network of other experts who they might consult. I represent IFLA and I also have the honor and pleasure to be the present chair of this Subcommittee.

The RSC members assess the nominations. They must indicate if the nomination meets the selection criteria and they also should identify any technical, legal or management issues in need of further clarification. Having done so they come to a preliminary recommendation. The assessment and recommendation are sent to the nominator, who gets the opportunity to make comments or to adjust the nomination. These reactions are taken into consideration by the Register Subcommittee before formulating its final recommendation. This final recommendation is then submitted to the IAC, the International Advisory Council. The IAC, which is also a group of independent senior experts, meets to debate the recommendations. Their decisions are submitted to UNESCO's Director-General for final approval.

### **Selection criteria and the Bleek-Lloyd Collection**

You heard me say that the Register Subcommittee has the task to see if the nomination meets the selection criteria. In fact this is the most vital element of the nomination procedure and also the most important part for any nominator. Does the item that they are nominating meet the criteria for the International Register? Does it transcend the boundaries of time and culture? In other words: is this documentary heritage of world significance? Of course every nomination should also contain a description of the heritage and of its physical state, the names of the nominator and other data, a fine summary and – if possible – some visual documentation, but the most important question is: does the nominated item satisfy the Memory of the World Register criteria.

So let us have a look at the criteria. I will present them in relation to the Bleek-Lloyd collection. As I said, today we talk about 'The Bleek-Lloyd Collection and beyond'. Now I'm done with the beyond and I have finally reached the Bleek-Lloyd Collection. I limit myself to a very short introduction, which I have taken from the nomination form.

The Bleek-Lloyd Collection consists of papers of Dr W.H.I. Bleek (1827-1875), his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (1834-1914), his daughter Dorothea Bleek (1873-1948) and G.W. Stow (1822-1882). All

documents relate to their researches into the San (Bushman) language, folklore and rock art. Several albums of photographs and drawings also belong to the collection.

The largest and most important part of the collection consists of the notebooks in which Bleek and Lloyd recorded the language and mythology of the |Xam, a now extinct hunter-gatherer society that lived in the Cape Interior area. These notebooks comprise over 12,000 pages. The notebooks mainly contain written |Xam words or narrative, with the English translation.

Bleek developed a phonetic script for transcribing the characteristic clicks and sounds of the |Xam language which is used by linguists to this day. Although some of the material was published by Lucy Lloyd and Dorothea Bleek, a great deal remained unpublished.

The criteria. The first criterion is *authenticity*. Is the authenticity of the materials established? Is it what it claims to be: the real thing, no later copy, no forgery. In this case there is enough evidence to leave no doubt: all the notebooks were really written by hand by Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd and the others. And all the pictures are contemporary.

Questions regarding the second criterion are: Is *world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability* established? Has the documentary heritage had an impact beyond a nation or region? Is it the only example of its kind – either the only one created, or a last survivor? Would its loss be irreplaceable? So in the case of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection the question is: Are there similar collections by others? Or is another part of this legacy held somewhere else? No, that is not the case. Wilhelm Bleek was the first to describe the language and mythology of the |Xam. There are no other linguists or anthropologists who have done the same. Without Bleek and Lloyd our knowledge of this people would have been almost zero. Even worldwide they belong to the pioneers in recording an endangered – and indeed today even extinct – language. The documents are consulted by scholars from all over the world. So the loss of this collection would really be irreplaceable. The collection is divided over several South African institutions, which joined forces in this nomination. There is no significant Bleek-material outside these institutions.

The nomination form also asks for some additional criteria: 'Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied? Nominators are invited to provide an explanation against each of these criteria but not all the criteria have to apply. For the answers to these criteria in the case of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection I just quote from the very convincing nomination form:

*Time:* "The documentation about the |Xam language, life and mythology was gathered at the crucial moment of disintegration of this culture in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Studies of other hunter-gatherer societies done elsewhere were undertaken later, when those societies were already drastically transformed by colonial expansion. The collection of this data was done fairly early, so it represents a unique, authentic early glimpse into the consciousness of hunter-gatherer societies."

*Place:* "The Collections document a people of an under-researched area of South Africa, the arid Cape interior. This is one of the richest sources of information on this region that we have. However, it transcends this local significance in that it sheds light on all hunter-gatherer societies, not only in South Africa, but in the rest of the world."

*People:* "The San peoples were responsible for some of the world's finest rock art, but otherwise had a very simple material culture. The culture collapsed owing to the intrusion of the new inhabitants who brought with them diseases, and undertook active measures to eradicate them."

*Subject and theme:* “Themes which emerge from this Collection are: the system of consciousness of hunter-gatherer societies, which is a unique heritage of a distinct culture; the interaction of this culture with European colonialism and expansion; and the interaction between hunter-gatherers and other societies, including indigenous pastoralist societies.”

*Form and style:* Not special: ordinary notebooks with tales and translations, grammars, correspondence, pictures.

*Social, spiritual and community significance:* “These collections shed light on a unique religious system, a unique consciousness, a unique system of representation, all of which are now extinct, and this is almost the sole resource for knowledge of these systems of thought. It also sheds light on other hunter-gatherer societies and the way in which pre-capitalist hunter-gatherers interpreted their universe. These collections provide the only means of hearing one of the most fascinating of the 'lost voices' of humanity.”

It is a beautiful final sentence: “These collections provide the only means of hearing one of the most fascinating of the 'lost voices' of humanity.” This is exactly what the Memory of the World Programme is about and what its International Register tries to show: the preservation of the all the fascinating voices and writings of humanity.

Jan Bos

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### **Reference and further reading**

Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, *The African Perspective: Memory of the World*. Paper presented at the Third International Memory of the World Conference. Canberra, 2008.

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/mow\\_3rd\\_international\\_conference\\_ellen\\_ndeshi\\_namhila\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/mow_3rd_international_conference_ellen_ndeshi_namhila_en.pdf).

On the Bleek-Lloyd Collection: <http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/>

Website of the Memory of the World Programme: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/homepage/> and subpages.

*Memory of the World General Guidelines:* [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf)

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*Memory of the world. Lost memory: libraries and archives destroyed in the twentieth century.* Prepared for UNESCO on behalf of IFLA by Hans van der Hoeven and on behalf of ICA by Joan van Albada. Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

