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KHM Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

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Participants

External Review Panel

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FWF Team

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Introduction

This evaluation concentrates solely on the scientific performance of the Kunsthistorische Museum (KHM) covering the time span from 2009 to 2015. It takes into account the fact that, due to other obligations of the staff, preconditions differ from those in other research environments. These terms were taken into consideration by inviting a panel of experts who mostly work in museums themselves, who are, therefore, well aware of institutional restrictions.

On the other hand any scientific work, regardless of the institution where it is undertaken, has to meet the same criteria, whether for third-party funding or publications in high-level journals.

This evaluation therefore aims to assess the current state of research at the KHM and to create a basis for planning future research activities at the museum. The first phase consisted of a self-evaluation report submitted by the KHM and written statements by the panel, based mainly on this report.

The hearing was arranged at the premises of the KHM on 21/22 June 2017, focusing on presentations and site visits on the first day, leaving the second day for discussions with the director-general, heads of collections, cooperation partners and the concluding closed session. Due to time limitations, separate collections such as Ambras Castle and the Imperial Carriage Museum were not visited.

This report concentrates on the review panel's comments and provides recommendations for the museum as a whole, based on the outcomes of the closed session. It does not go into details about individual collections.

Overall Impressions

Based on the Self-Evaluation Report, the presentations, and the site visits, the panel members discussed their overall impressions of the KHM with regard to its **strengths and weaknesses**.

The panel agreed that the KHM was one of the world's most important and well-known museums. Its general **international reputation** was seen as very high and it appeared as an innovative, creative and nationally and internationally well-linked institution. The visibility of the museum was considered excellent based on institutional collaborations and outreach activities. The panel members highlighted the museum's long-standing collaboration in research and teaching with universities and other research institutions, both nationally and internationally.

The members of the panel also considered the **location and the architecture** of the museum as a major asset. The building's inspiring and resonating atmosphere is reminiscent of entering a cathedral. The location of the KHM in the heart of Vienna, which contains a number of important institutions relevant for collaboration (Academy of Sciences, Academy of Fine Arts, University of Applied Arts, University of Vienna, Technical University of Vienna, as well as other museums), may further strengthen its strategic and unique position (however, see below).

The museum **collections** were highlighted as world class. Their importance was stressed not only regarding both Austrian and European history since the Middle Ages but the Eastern and Classical collections provided a character of universality too. The panel generally stressed the great potential of the rich collections for conducting scholarly work and for providing continuous inspiration for the academic staff within the museum and beyond. A key advantage identified was that so many collections were under one roof – indeed, the whole was more than the sum of all parts.

The panel generally agreed that staff were **highly motivated and dedicated**. Staff training and specialisation were one of the museum's major strengths, and in particular the experience and professional networks of the curators were considered in a very positive light.

Based on the highly qualified scientific staff and the excellent collections in the museum, the panel had the impression that the **research quality** in many of the collections was high by international standards and in some cases (Coin cabinet, Conservation Science Department, Collection of Historic Musical Instruments) even leading in terms of innovation and outcome. The reviewers were particularly impressed by the research quality in relation to the number of staff and the existing infrastructure in various departments. The number and the quality of scientific publications were also considered as being on an international level as a whole.

However, there were considerable **variations between the different departments**. Some of them were very productive scientifically, others, like the Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, the Picture Gallery, the Coin Cabinet, and the Conservation Science Department had been successful in acquiring external funds, and others are not yet exploiting their scientific potential. The panel also emphasised the well-established cooperation and synergies between some of the departments, leading to quite a number of innovative research projects. In particular, the collaboration between various curators and the conservation science department, resulting in projects with very innovative results, was stressed. Differences were also noted regarding the involvement of the departments in education and training. The panel again highlighted the Picture Gallery, the Coin Cabinet, and the Conservation Science Department, as well as the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection for the participation of the staff in teaching activities at the universities. It was also underlined that many departments provided training in conservation, restoration and applied curatorial skills that could hardly be gained elsewhere.

The museum's research efforts were considered as **highly relevant** on various levels. On the basic level, the collections' procured and published data were seen by the panel members as very valuable in the context of preserving cultural heritage. In addition, this kind of scientifically compiled basic knowledge could be exploited in innumerable ways in the future. On a second level, the panel identified a great number of research projects seeking to provide answers or relevant perspectives on certain aspects of life today.

However, the panel members identified a number of key deficits:

One of the fundamental deficits is the **absence of a distinct research strategy and related policy** and a lack of analysis about it.

Furthermore, all panel members considered the **lack of collaboration among several departments a major weakness** and therefore a missed opportunity. They recommended coordinating and strengthening the relations between the departments to increase the importance of each collection, of the collections combined, and the synergies that can be exploited by cross-cutting coordination.

In relation to the lack of a coherent research strategy, the **lack of online access to the objects** of the KHM was emphasised by all panel members as a key shortcoming. It was considered highly regrettable that so many world-class and important objects of the collections remained unknown to the public and to scholars, and therefore inaccessible for research and collaboration.

The panel also mentioned the **lack of permanent scholarly staff** as a weakness. It was also surprised by the amount of time set aside for research: in the Self-Evaluation Report some employees stated that only 3 or 5% of their time is allocated to research. For the panel this meant that too much time was being spent on non-research activities like administrative work. It was regarded as highly inefficient that scholarly staff had to make up for these shortages.

The panel members were surprised to learn how it was possible for some departments to produce long lists of publications with such a small percentage of time assigned to research. This implies that the researchers in question were doing research in their private time at weekends and during holidays. While academics are often very dedicated to their work and will indeed work outside normal office hours, the panel stated that a proper research strategy must include time for the most important tasks such as research and not explicitly base itself on the goodwill of individuals.

Recommendations

Collaboration and Communication between Departments

The panel strongly recommended closer collaboration and more communication between the departments. The museum would benefit greatly from an internal research seminar every month, if desired also with the active participation of other partner institutions from outside the KHM. Although there was a jour fixe, the panel criticised the fact that this took place without an agenda or a well-defined aim. New projects and developments could be presented within this suggested research seminar. The advantage would be to focus on what the departments are doing, to make research interests more explicit and to inspire and support colleagues across the museum. At the same time it should be borne in mind that it would be another time-consuming activity.

As part of this seminar, joint exhibitions could be discussed and planned. One might consider several potential topics to curate exhibitions including **all** departments in the KHM. The panel also underlined the importance of the archive participating in these projects.

Both ideas – regular research seminars and joint exhibitions – would have the advantage that the departments would get to know each other better, therefore fostering more collaboration. The panel was aware that some of the larger departments may not like these ideas because of fear of losing space and autonomy. But to plan joint exhibitions like these in the long term and for the right reasons should minimise the risks.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, the panel suggested using intranet and a shared calendar to support the communication within the museum.

Research Strategy and Process of Digitisation

The panel stressed the pivotal need to develop an overall research strategy for the KHM. There should be clear criteria to decide which projects should be carried out and which not. One reviewer suggested starting with a focus on the catalogues – partly already on the agenda – to lay a foundation for further projects. Another panel member drafted the concept of a hierarchy of strategies: there should be strategies for research, business, education, IT, etc. on the same level, and above all there should be a general strategy for the museum as a whole. Just below this, s/he located the financial strategy. The panel was aware of not having the mandate for developing such restructuring plans but highly recommended at least a roadmap for the coming years.

In view of communication problems in the KHM the panel pointed out that it was extremely important how such plans were presented. The departments should be convinced that the management was pursuing positive visions. One panel member suggested focusing on the problems that all departments were facing. One suggestion would be to start with solutions for IT problems: The museum staff could be trained in the form of (interdepartmental) seminars and workshops. With small steps, fears of change could be overcome. An additional effect would be to bring people from the various departments closer together. Some panel members highlighted the need for at least one full-time digital humanities scholar. This person would be considered a first albeit important step toward a solution to the general

problem that (i) IT departments do not do research and (ii) researchers do usually not have the required IT competences. A digital humanities position would be a bridging position who has knowledge about both: research and technical issues.

E-Publishing

The panel was discussing the possibilities of e-publishing for the KHM. It was considered as a good idea to set clear standards in respect to open-access and peer review. The recommendation would be to set aside its own resources for e-publications, probably together with other museums. The reviewers were aware of the many details that had to be clarified in advance (e.g. if the KHM would design and print in house or if this would be done externally; if there should be a paywall, at least for the latest issue) but there are some very successful examples from other museums. One of the advantages would be that online publications have a far wider readership than print and therefore a stronger impact. The panel was aware of the financial challenges and the need for additional funding but at the same time it underlined the necessity to catch up on this development.

Decision-Making

Another issue raised during the closed session was how decisions in the KHM were made. The panel stressed the necessity for the departments to know if they are successful in scientific terms as well as in financial terms. The panel generally emphasised the need for fair and solid criteria in the decision-making process to increase transparency and foster participation. For example, it seemed unclear to the panel who was ultimately deciding upon projects and exhibitions. A transparent flow of information would help the curators to know if they had the chance of pushing through their ideas.

The panel members discussed several possibilities known from their home institutions, such as meetings every two weeks to discuss ideas for exhibitions and plans for research activities: in such an example of another museum, there was only five minutes for each presentation, and discussions were conducted in a democratic manner. In the end, the director-general had to come to a decision before the end of the meeting. As a result there were often highly innovative exhibitions. Another panel member stressed the importance of a unanimous decision on which exhibitions should be staged. Transparent and democratic discussions were therefore urgently required at the KHM.

Infrastructure

The panel discussed several issues regarding the infrastructure of the KHM. They agreed that some departments were seriously understaffed and they were aware of the difficulties in obtaining more funding for additional staff. One member of the panel suggested hiring (temporary) researchers for specific projects. Another one added that starting with short-term contracts might be a strategy to keep new staff for longer terms. The panel also stated the need for a general strategy to increase the chances for additional staff.

Another question raised by the panel concerned overheads. The FWF covered overheads until 2015 but in the course of the presentations and the site visits no one from the KHM mentioned it. The panel recommended greater transparency regarding project-related overheads in order to clarify the purpose for which this money is spent in the museum. It was also suggested that overheads should be recompensed to successful departments in order to support and stimulate their activities. Otherwise, the situation in some of the collections would remain frustrating. One panel member stated that this money should exclusively be returned to research.

The panel also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of separate or centralized conservation labs. Here no consensus was reached. One panel member suggested concentrating the conservation work in one department, sorted for example by different materials. This would save resources and create synergies. Another panel member expressed reservations, naming for example of the department of historic instruments: it would not be possible to transport these to another department. Other advantages of separate conservation labs were seen in greater flexibility and in the need for each department to have its own experts. A compromise between a centralisation and decentralisation strategy would be to share more specialists over the departments, as one panel member suggested.

The panel generally recommended starting with the resolution of solvable issues such as equipment, computer software and an XTR scanner. It was also considered as feasible to provide sufficient office space in a large architectural environment like the KHM.

The last issue regarding infrastructure was the question of the distance to storage space. The panel recommended an improvement of accessibility, possibly by dedicated staff. One panel member also wished to open the storage to other researchers. Ideally, this could be done in collaboration with other museums or research institutions. Last but not least the panel stated that some disadvantages of the remote storage could be outweighed by improvements in digital accessibility.

Statement by the KHM

1. Research Mission

The Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna discharges its research mission according to the stipulations laid down in the 2002 Law on Federal Museums in Austria (Bundesmuseen-Gesetz): our overall aims are preserving, enlarging, studying, displaying and administering our holdings. The fact that our holdings are the former imperial collections, and the seminal art-historical, cultural and cultural-policy role of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna today also informs its purpose and function (Museum Ordinance 2006, §2(1)).

In future, the main focus of our research activity will be on the museum's societal relevance. The holdings will be researched and protected, and made accessible to the public.

2. Focal Points and Operational-Research Perspective

Reflecting its established academic tradition, the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna undertakes art-historical and archaeological-cultural research, frequently and successfully supported by third-party funding. The main focus is on researching our holdings, with regard to both the history of the collection and creating visual connections for the installation of galleries and temporary exhibitions. Directly linked with this is a comprehensive dissemination driven through publications, digital media (museum website, online databanks, e-publishing etc.), symposia, guided tours, and communicating our research results.

Another focal point of research at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna is the scientific-technical analyses of individual artworks. The emphasis is both on the comprehensive analysis and documentation of our holdings, and on their preservation, restoration and technological study. In addition, the museum actively participates in international developments of museum-related areas of research such as, for example, questions regarding preventive-conservation aspects of storing and/or displaying artworks, or the introduction of new conservation methods and materials.

Among leading international research institutions the museum is positioning itself by contextualising its research in connection and coordination with Austrian and international universities, non-university-related research institutes, libraries and museums, thus helping to shape and determine relevant areas of research, creating synergies and optimising public awareness of its achievements.

Present budgetary restraints, however, make enlarging the collections difficult, but this remains an important desideratum.

3. Reasons for the Evaluation

We believe that in order to devise a comprehensive strategy for realising our research aims it is important that independent international evaluators examine and determine the current state and the focus of our research to accomplish an objective status quo. They have looked at a seven-year period (2009-2015). The results on the visibility of our research and possible

weaknesses and untapped potentials will be analysed and will result in concrete strategic measures.

Such stocktaking strengthens future research activity in a museum context, establishing it even more firmly as a vital element of museum's duties and responsibilities. We hope that a more efficient use of existing parameters in the area of research will lead to very good or even excellent results. We also plan to explore options regarding national collaborations on exhibition schedules and infrastructure.

The recently published "White Book" on the reorganisation of Austrian museums recommends the regular evaluation of scientific agendas; as one of the leading research institutions, the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna has created a precedent.

4. Results/Recommendations:

The recommendations listed in the evaluation report will be implemented – unless they are already being implemented – and will inform the next steps in the evolution of the fields of research undertaken at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna. As a first reaction to the results of the evaluation we have set up an in-house research council, i.e. a body that focuses on research. Developing a research strategy and ascertaining a research budget will form the basis of future research activities.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna is committed to viewing evaluation as a continual process. Maintaining the established timeframe of seven years, we suggest that the next evaluation of research activities (2016-2022) should commence in early 2023. This, our first external evaluation process revealed some problems with a 1:1 application of the evaluation criteria used for universities to museum research, and these experiences will be taken into consideration when conducting the next evaluation in order to increase quality.

The ultimate objective for the advancement of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna is drafting a research strategy based on the history of the artefacts and the collection and focused on dissemination. We plan to continue to develop the digitalisation of our holdings in the form of an online catalogue raisonné, which will go beyond databanks and e-publishing to offer a "digital visit" to the museum. Envisaging the museum as a virtual space, i.e. incorporating all its interconnections and providing comprehensive tagging of artefacts and connections, represents the perfect implementation of the panel's suggestions on digitisation. Communication and collaboration between our different collections and departments will be improved, by, among other things, the institutionalisation of the relevant committees and communication interfaces, much like the "research seminar" suggested by the panel.

In order to keep up with a fast-evolving international research environment in a way that reflects the standing of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna we urgently need to improve and update our infrastructure. This concerns available office space, the acquisition and use of the kind of state-of-the-art research equipment found at comparable institutions, and, most importantly, the need to increase scientific and curatorial personnel in our "seriously understaffed" research departments. In the light of our difficult budgetary situation we must develop a sustainable solution as soon as possible.

In connection with strategy development we plan to instigate a discussion on the unique characteristics/selling points of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, and to entrench the museum's awareness of research in the on-going discussion of our mission statement.

Generally speaking, the positive results of the evaluation more or less reflect our own self-evaluation, and underline the fact that the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna discharges its mandated research duties. At the same time, the report functions as a catalyst for a continuous (strategic) sharpening of research agendas at all our institutions; in 2018 we plan to analyse research activities at our other two museums, the Theatre Museum (TM) and the Weltmuseum Wien (WMW).