



Already as a young man, he had nourished the dream to travel to Africa. He believed that the ancient cultures of Africa would be doomed to decay under the onslaught of modernity. Their documentation was the main motivation for his travels



Leo Frobenius cheered by a crowd in Frankfurt (Germany) after returning from his 12th expedition to Africa in 1935



He became one of Germany's most renowned scholars and a good friend to the former German Emperor Wilhelm II

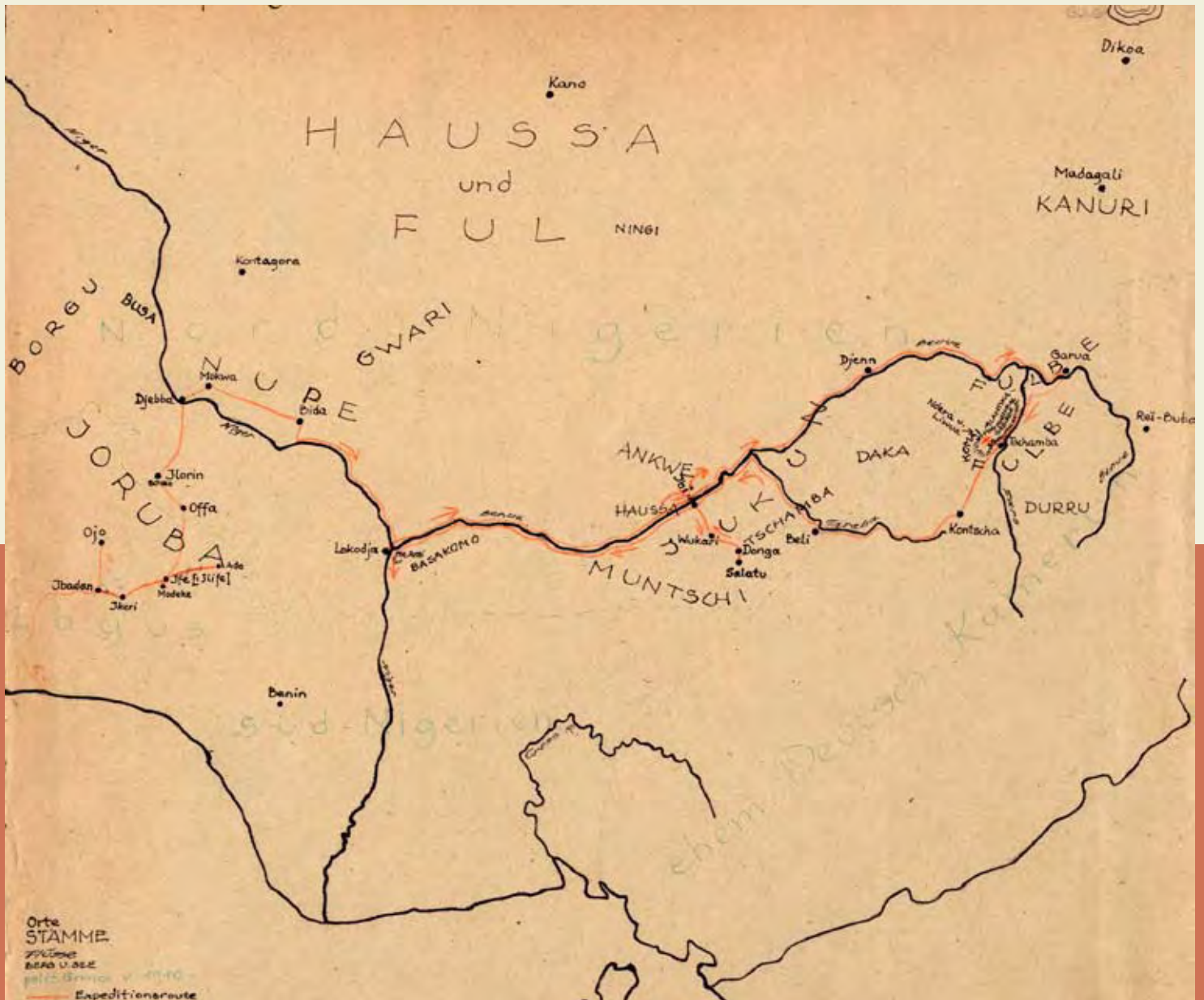
Leo Frobenius (1873-1938). The German ethnologist's vision of a "real, old, warm-blooded culture" in Africa was quite progressive in a time when Africa's significant cultural achievements were not recognized.

*"I was the first ethnologist to go to the Interior of Africa, and up to date only a few have followed me there"* (Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, 1913)



Between 1904 and 1935 he undertook 12 extended expeditions to Africa





The route of the expedition in Nigeria and Cameroon, 1910-1912.

*“Generous hospitality and spacious circumstance are met with everywhere and always”*



*“And now the hour had also struck when we should sleep no longer under roofs of corrugated iron, but in airy verandas beneath a lofty palm-leaf thatch”*



*“It is not surprising that the natives never use a bridge if it is at all possible to ford the stream and prefer not to expose their valuable loads to the perils of these misnamed bridges”*



Frobenius' shoes after long journeys of hiking. However, railways, steam boats and especially horses were used most of the time



Building a temporary camp for the expedition in Lokoja. Here, Frobenius gathered the most renowned traditional experts and wrote down their oral traditions. He also recorded numerous folk tales





Expedition camp on the banks of river Benue.

*“When one of our sort arrives, pitches his camp, and settles down to work, comes the great real task of my vocation – namely, to make friends, excite interest, get collaborators”*



Bida, Frobenius' Nigerian friend. *“The successful realisation of the scientific expedition could hardly have been conceivable without the agency of so intelligent a native such as this man. He is chief of the black personnel, interpreter, travel organiser and principal negotiator in one person”* (Carl Arriens)



The young engineer Albrecht Martius, who was responsible for sketching the architecture and tracing the ground plans



Offloading the luggage in Lagos harbour. Part of the expedition crew has previously been hired in the German colony of Togoland



The expedition's painter and photographer Carl Arriens with his easel in a Tiv village. Frobenius laid much emphasis on visual documentation. Over 3,000 photos, sketches and paintings were produced by the expedition members in Nigeria





In Ife, Frobenius got into trouble with the colonial authorities over the alleged theft of antique objects. *“European administrators up-country are still full of sympathy for travellers whose mode of life so closely resembles their own. Where, however, an authority is firmly settled a body with the mobility of an expedition is an element of extraordinary disturbance”*



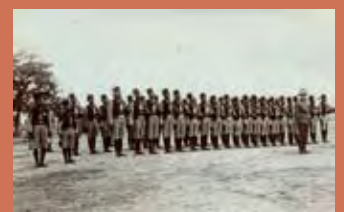
Frobenius was a child of his time and did not question the colonial system as such. Being a conservative nationalist, he even praised the German colonial regime in Togo.



Packing of ethnographic objects. To finance his first expeditions he collected numerous ethnographic objects and pieces of art in Africa and sold them to German museums. In Nigeria alone he bought or bartered over 5,000 items and shipped them out of the country

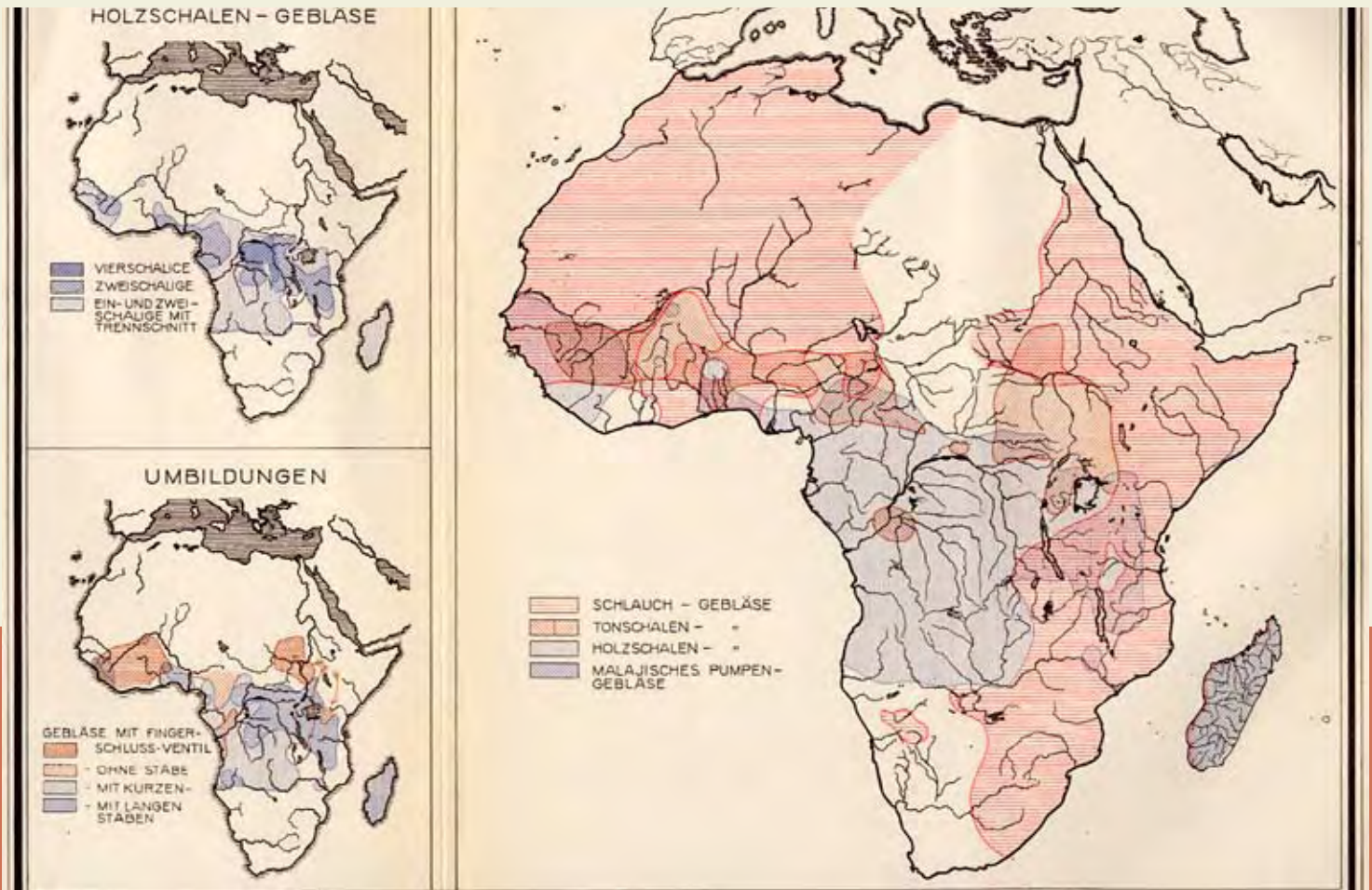


Frobenius frequently relied on the colonial authorities to provide him with translators and porters



A company of the West African Frontier Force, based in Lokoja. While Frobenius loved traditional African culture, he was a critic of the emancipation of an educated African elite from the colonial yoke





Based on the wealth of information gathered during his expeditions Frobenius delineated a worldwide history of cultures as well as a theory of culture called “cultural morphology”. He published over 50 books and educated many Europeans about the richness of African cultures



Two of the books containing history, culture and folklore published after Frobenius returned from Nigeria. *“All that I experienced and learned in these days impressed me as vividly and strongly as the grand socio-religious system of the profoundly philosophical native African peoples”* (Leo Frobenius in *The Voice of Africa*, 1913)



Léopold S. Senghor, the first President of independent Senegal visited the Frobenius Institute in 1961 and said: *“To the first pioneers of négritude, Leo Frobenius became an effective and driving force in the discovery, arousal and confirmation of the energies slumbering in the black people”*



Today the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt (Germany) still hosts about 90,000 images produced by Frobenius and his collaborators. More than 3,000 are from Nigeria



Frobenius' pictorial archive was recently digitized and can be seen through an online database at: <http://bildarchiv.frobenius-katalog.de>