

Priceless artefacts vandalised in Berlin museums

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Three of Berlin's most prestigious museums were the targets of major vandalism October 3—the date of the annual Day of German Unity. A person or persons who remain unidentified sprayed a colourless, oily liquid on dozens of antiquities of enormous cultural significance in the various institutions.

The attacks on the artefacts, some of which are thousands of years old, took place in the Pergamon Museum, Alte Nationalgalerie and Neues Museum, which are all situated on Berlin's world-famous Museum Island. The collection of museums has been recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site and is visited by 2.5 million art lovers every year.

Christina Haak, the deputy director of Berlin's state museums, expressed shock at the vandalism, which affected a total of 63 works, including Egyptian sarcophagi. She noted that it was not the first time the museums had been targeted. During the summer, a number of acts of vandalism occurred outside the museums involving the ripping up of posters and the spraying of graffiti.

German police have declared they were investigating “in all directions,” but have been unable to identify the assailant(s), despite video camera footage allegedly featuring the person(s) behind the attacks.

While the police investigate “in all directions,” there is considerable evidence to indicate the involvement of far-right forces in the attacks. In particular, the Pergamon Museum has become a key target for conspiracy theorists and the far-right QAnon Internet community in recent months.

Just days before the attacks on the artworks were revealed by a journalist working for the newspaper *Die Zeit*, a QAnon channel posted the following text on Telegram: “The Satanists are now completely exterminated and their legacies like the Pergamon Altar

and the countless obelisks worldwide will be destroyed for all time.”

One of the most prominent Germans connected to the QAnon movement is the television celebrity cook Attila Hildmann. He has been at the centre of a campaign against the museums for some time and is also a leading figure in protests against the anti-coronavirus lockdown measures in Germany. Hildmann has repeatedly posted vile and absurd Internet tweets describing the Pergamon Museum as the “throne of Satan and a site for child sacrifice.”

On August 27, Hildmann recorded a video at night on Museum Island, declaring that the “international Satanist scene meets in Berlin” and calling upon his followers to storm the Pergamon museum.

The cookbook author also held rallies on the steps of Altes Museum. The museum reacted promptly with a large banner proclaiming “For cosmopolitanism and democratic values. Against racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism and agitation.”

Hildmann's bizarre tweets have been shared and posted by the singer Xavier Naidoo who travels in the same far-right circles. Naidoo showed up at the Pergamon Museum on August 29—the date of the second so-called Querdenker (“lateral thinker”) demonstration, held to protest anti-pandemic safety measures.

Both Hildmann and Naidoo have made no secret of their support for the far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD—the largest opposition party in the German parliament) and have marched alongside leading AfD members on a series of Querdenker demonstrations.

Local AfD associations, for example, in Leipzig and Stuttgart, have shared tweets from QAnon sources regurgitating conspiratorial theories accusing former

US president Barack Obama of criminal practices (“Obamagate”) and making Bill Gates responsible for the coronavirus pandemic.

For its part, the AfD has made no secret of its hostility to all forms of art and culture that fail to conform to the party’s advocacy of a thoroughly nationalist “German leading culture.”

In the state of Saxony-Anhalt, the AfD released a platform calling for “museums, orchestras and theatres” to “promote a positive relationship to their own homeland,” and in 2019 the AfD proposed that theatres and opera houses in Germany should provide lists of all foreign artists performing at their venues.

In the last federal election, the AfD hung up large-format election posters with the slogan “Prevent Europe from becoming Eurabia!” The racist term “Eurabia” was used by the right-wing extremist Anders Breivik to justify his mass murder in Norway. The Christchurch, New Zealand, terrorist Brenton Tarrant used similar language to warn against the alleged impending takeover of “white” states by Muslims.

Leading AfD ideologue and parliamentary deputy Marc Jongen has posted on his website that “it would be an honour and a pleasure” to “tackle the removal of filth from the culture industry.” In the Bundestag Committee for Culture and the Media, Jongen argued that, with regard to cultural affairs, a one-sided concentration on the crimes of the Nazis was “false and harmful for a number of reasons.”

The AfD, with vigorous support from a broad swathe of the German media, has also been in the forefront of the anti-Semitic campaign to vilify the outstanding German pianist Igor Levit.

The AfD has been able to go onto the offensive on cultural issues because it relies on broad official support, not only from the ruling grand coalition, but also from the Left Party. The governing coalition has in large part adopted the positions and policies of the AfD and helped create the climate where far-right fanatical forces such as QAnon can gain support.

Berlin’s Museum Island is just a stone’s throw away from Humboldt University where the right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski (“Hitler was not vicious”) continues to teach with the backing of the university’s Social Democratic president and the grand coalition government.

Across the street from Humboldt University’s main

building is the square where the Nazis carried out one of their most egregious crimes against culture—the public burning of books.

The exact identity and/or mental state of the author of the assault on the Berlin museum artefacts remains unknown, but those responsible for the growing lurch to the right and authoritarianism in Germany are situated in the German parliament and ruling circles. Such attacks cannot be taken lightly. Workers and youth must rally to the defence of international culture and artists.



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