

INTRODUCTION¹

Für die englischsprachige Bearbeitung der Findbucheinleitung danke ich Frau Anna Real und Herrn Dr. Klaus Oldenhage.

1 The structure of the central colonial administration up to the establishment of the Reich Colonial Office

Otto von Bismarck had often stated that as long as he was Reich Chancellor Germany would never go into colonial politics. However, on 19th April 1884 in contradiction to all former statements he promised the Bremen tobacco importer Adolf von Lüderitz the protection of the German Reich for the trading post planned in the bay of Angra Pequena on the south-west African coast. With this decision, confirmed by Kaiser Wilhelm I on 21st April 1884 and communicated to the German ambassador in London and to the German consul in Cape Town on the 24th April, Bismarck completely changed the direction of the Reich's policy in colonial affairs. From 1884 to 1886, the Reich took over protectorates in South-West Africa, in West Africa (Togo and Cameroon), on New Guinea, in the Bismarck Archipelago, in East Africa, and on the Marshall Islands. This policy of acquisition was stopped as abruptly as it was begun just two years before. The only later additions were Qingdao in northern China, acquired on lease in 1898, and some groups of islands in the Pacific (Carolinas, Marianas, Palau and some islands of Samoa), purchased in 1899.

At the beginning Bismarck had not planned to put the protectorates under the direct rule and administration of the German Reich. His original intention was rather to grant the protection of the Reich to German trading companies for their settlements in those areas of Africa, Asia or the Pacific that did not belong to an internationally recognized state or could not legally be claimed by any other European power. Following the British or Dutch model, the Reich Chancellor wanted these areas to be administered by the trading companies concerned, thereby limiting the role of the German Reich to that of a protector with official international recognition. To quote a dictum of the time—the flag should follow trade.

It soon became apparent that this form of indirect colonial rule was unrealistic; the trading houses and companies were neither prepared nor really able to play the role of the British East India Company or the Dutch Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie and to administer the colonized territories efficiently by themselves. Therefore, after only a short time Bismarck found himself obliged to put the protectorates under the direct rule and administration of the Reich, thereby making them crown colonies. This happened at the latest when indigenous uprisings made the intervention of armed police units necessary and only the Reich had these at their disposal.

The development of the German colonial administration at the central level corresponds to this genesis of German colonial rule in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. As

¹ For the footnotes and for information on more holdings of the Federal Archives, publications quoted, organisation charts on the personnel of the Reich Colonial Office, see German version.

long as colonial policy was primarily regarded as a part of foreign trade policy, it seemed sufficient to entrust the chief of section responsible for "Trade Relations to Asia, Africa and Australia" in the Foreign Office's Trade Policy Division, the "colonial enthusiast" Heinrich von Kusserow, with the competence for colonial affairs. Von Kusserow was also in charge of preparations for the Berlin Congo Conference from 15th November 1884 to 26th February 1885, which included matters of international free trade in the Congo basin on its agenda.

The introduction of direct rule and administration led to a change in colonial policy which was already evident in the course of the Berlin Conference. This led on 19th February 1885 to the transfer of competence for colonial affairs from the Trade Policy Division to the Political Division (I A) of the Foreign Office, where a new "Section for Colonial Affairs and the Dispatch of Warships to Safeguard German Interests" was established. Apart from the chief himself the staff of this section consisted of a permanent assistant to the chief and several executive officers. When Dr Friedrich Richard Krauel (1848-1918, chief of this section from 1885 to 1890) succeeded von Kusserow, this structure of the "central colonial administration" was not changed.

Whereas this "Colonial Section" was more or less able to manage the responsibilities relating to the establishment of German administrative authorities in the protectorates, the bureaucratic, economic and military challenges of fulfilling the tasks of protecting, organising and exploring the protectorates proved too much for it. While Bismarck was still in power, the Reich Government, preparing the budget for the fiscal year 1890/91, asked Parliament ("Reichstag") for the funds necessary to establish a "Division for Colonial Affairs". The justification of this request, however, makes it quite clear that this was to be an interim arrangement: "In order to work towards an organisation more appropriate to the development of the colonial administration it will suffice for the time being to combine all responsibilities of the Foreign Office in colonial affairs in one division and then to prepare for its separation from the Foreign Office; under the present circumstances the administrative burden within the Foreign Office has become too heavy and needs to be lightened". In the long term this would give appropriate recognition to the new field of colonial policy. The complete separation and independence of the central colonial administration from the Foreign Office would also reflect the fact that with the introduction of direct rule by the Reich the administration of the protectorates was no longer primarily a matter of foreign policy. In fact, under the "Act relating to the Law in the German Protectorates" of 17th April 1886 the protectorates had become something like domestic territories with minor legal status, over which the Kaiser alone exercised the power of protection in the name of the Reich. In contrast to the situation inside the territory of the Reich itself, in the protectorates even the Reich Chancellor had no independent legal status defined by the constitution, but only executive powers personally delegated to him by the Kaiser himself.

The "Colonial Division" was established within the Foreign Office on 1st April 1890, but was soon placed in a special relationship to the Reich Chancellor himself by an executive order of the Reich Chancellor on 30th June 1890. Only insofar as the relations to foreign countries or foreign policy as such were concerned was the Colonial Division to report to the Foreign Minister as head of the Foreign Office. In all essentially colonial matters, in particular in the field of organisation, the Division's

Director was subordinated directly to the Reich Chancellor with the right of immediate reporting. The bureaucratic symbol for this special subordination was a letterhead reading "Foreign Office – Colonial Division" which the Colonial Division was entitled to use. The other divisions of the Foreign Office had no such right to their own letterhead. This decision, which was the cause of a lot of misunderstandings, was confirmed by the Kaiser's Ordinance of 12th December 1894.

As a consultative body to the Colonial Division and more or less replacing Parliament, which could influence colonial matters only by its budget decisions, a Colonial Council ("Kolonialrat") was established, consisting mainly of representatives of the companies doing business in the protectorates.

In 1890, the Colonial Division comprised six sections, four "regional sections" for West Africa, South-West Africa, East Africa, and the Pacific, each endowed with overall responsibilities as well, one section in charge of personnel and another in charge of budgets and accounting in the protectorates.

Dr. Paul Kayser (1845 – 1898) who took over the directorate of the new division on 30th June 1890 shared the workload at first with two senior officials and two permanent assistants. By 1897 this number had been doubled to four senior officials and four permanent assistants.

The High Command over the military security forces built up by Reich commissioners in Cameroon, German East Africa, and German South West Africa according to the "Act relating to the Imperial Forces in the Protectorates" of 22nd March 1891 was at the beginning entrusted to the Reich Navy Office. The constant local uprisings and the repeated need to send expeditionary forces to punish and defeat the rebels soon made it obvious that this administrative structure was not very effective. After continuous conflicts of competence with the Reich Navy Office the affairs of the military security forces were therefore transferred to the Colonial Division under the acts of 9th June and 7th July 1896. From then on the command was delegated straight to the Director of the Colonial Division by the Reich Chancellor himself, thus circumventing the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office. In actual fact the "High Command over the Imperial Forces in the Protectorates" at first comprised two military officers who formed a kind of military staff to the Colonial Director; the military units in the colonies themselves were directly subordinated to the local governors.

In the course of the years to come, the Colonial Division continued to increase. At the beginning of 1902 it consisted of the Colonial Director, six senior officials, five permanent assistants, the military chief of staff of the forces in the Protectorates, four military officers, two sanitary officers, five assistants, five executive officers, 17 accounting officers, ten members of staff in the "Privy Registry", five members of staff keeping the books of the colonial accounts, as well as of Major Hermann Wiesemann who reported directly to the Colonial Director, all in all 62 persons. In 1905 the organisation plan of the Colonial Division showed 13 sections, some of them having up to four areas of competence. Apart from the four regional sections which had fields of overall competence as well, there were now already nine sections of general competence. In addition, there were the High Command of the military forces in the protectorates and the "Military Administration" under a senior official.

The uprisings against German colonial power in German East Africa and German South West Africa finally led to a rapid increase of both the workload as well of staff in the Colonial Division. In 1907, immediately before the Division became independent, there were 11 senior officials, 8 permanent assistants, the military chief of staff for the forces in the protectorates, 17 army officers, three sanitary officers, one legal advisor, 20 staff members for military administration, 7 assistants, 23 executive officers, 25 accounting officers, 24 members of staff in the "Privy Registry", 21 members of staff in the "Privy Secretariat" and 10 for keeping the books of the colonial accounts.

2 The Establishment of the Reich Colonial Office in 1907

For functional reasons the Colonial Division was given a special position within the Foreign Office from the very beginning. Subsequent to an ordinance issued by the Reich Chancellor on 30th June 1890, the Colonial Director for the larger part of his competence reported directly to the Reich Chancellor. It was questionable as to whether this situation was constitutional, since according to the Deputy Act of 17th March 1878 the Reich Chancellor as minister with sole responsibility for the Reich could delegate his functions to heads of higher government agencies only and the Colonial Director could therefore not be his lawful deputy. However, because of the special character of colonial affairs it did not seem appropriate that the Secretary of the Foreign Office function as deputy of the Reich Chancellor in this field. The de facto deputy function of the Colonial Director therefore led to a dilemma between what was constitutionally possible and what was expedient from the administrative point of view.

The first step towards independence for the Colonial Office was made by the Reich Government in 1905. After the outbreak of the war against the rebellious indigenous people in German South West Africa ("Hereros" and "Hottentotten") in January and October 1904 respectively, open public criticism culminated in fierce controversies in Parliament ("Reichstag"), in the course of which the Catholic Centre Party and the Social Democrats, prominently represented by Mathias Erzberger and August Bebel, sharply attacked the Reich Government because of the so-called "colonial scandals", which had received wide press coverage. They demanded in particular a reform of the local administration in the protectorates. On 5th December 1904 Reich Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow (1849 – 1929) had already admitted to mistakes in the colonial administration and within the framework of a Five-Years-Programme announced an initiative to upgrade the Colonial Division within the Foreign Office to the status of a higher Reich agency. With regard to the unresolved deputy problem von Bülow argued: "In quieter times it is possible to live with such an unclarified situation, but after these serious developments I believe it to be no longer tenable".

In the supplementary budget for the fiscal year of 1906, the Reich Government introduced a bill asking the Reichstag to establish a Reich Colonial Office and justified this proposal in a detailed memorandum attached to the bill. Bülow explicitly argued against the alternative solution of an amendment to the Deputy Act of 1878

which would allow the Colonial Director, despite his subordinate status, to act as deputy to the Reich Chancellor.

However, the Budget Commission of the Reichstag voted in favour of this alternative and the Reichstag majority of Centre Party and Social Democrats insisted on this position, too, even when the Reich Chancellor emphasized the size and the responsibilities of the Colonial Division, underlining that these were larger than most other Reich agencies, and even exceeded those of the Reich Treasury and the Reich Justice Office, for example. After the bill had finally been dismissed in the third reading, Ernst von Hohenlohe-Langenburg (1863-1950), who had been appointed in November 1905 and was foreseen as Secretary in a Reich Colonial Office, stepped down. His successor Bernhard Dernburg (1865-1937) failed, too, at first. However, on 13th December 1906 when the Reichstag in the second reading again disapproved the draft supplementary budget for South West Africa and consequently also disapproved the establishment of a Reich Colonial Office, von Bülow immediately dissolved the Reichstag after the result of the vote was announced.

The following Reichstag elections on 25th January 1907 and the final ballot on 5th February 1907 were substantially influenced by the debate on colonial affairs. The so-called “Hottentotten” elections resulted in a Reichstag majority favourable to the colonial policy of the Reich Chancellor. After the budgetary prerequisites had been made, the Reich Colonial Office was established as a higher Reich agency on 17th May 1907 by Ordinance of the Kaiser.

Bernhard Dernburg became the Secretary, and the position of an Under Secretary to act as his deputy was created by the Kaiser’s Ordinance of 23rd June 1907. Up to 9th June 1910 this position was held by Dr Friedrich von Lindequist (1862-1945), who then succeeded to the top position of the Reich Colonial Office on 10th June 1910 when Dernburg resigned. The new office consisted of three divisions. Division A was in charge of political affairs and of general administrative and legal matters in the protectorates. Till 1911 its directorate was taken over by the Under Secretary himself, from 1910 onwards by a director. Division B was responsible for all financial, transport and other technical matters, while Division C took care of all personnel and disciplinary matters as well as of all questions of internal organisation including house management. The divisions B and C were in the charge of officials of a rank just below a director.

In 1908 the so-called civil divisions A-C consisted of 107 members of staff in the Central Bureau, the Privy Secretariat, the Privy Accounting Office, the Privy Registry, the Colonial Cashier’s Main Office, and the Privy Chancery.

The division M (Military Administration) continued to function as the Colonial Secretary’s military command for the armed forces in the protectorates. In his capacity as commander of these forces the division’s director had the military rank of a lieutenant colonel or colonel; in 1911 Georg von Glasenapp was personally promoted to the rank of major-general.

3 The Reich Colonial Ministry (1918 – 1920) and the development of the central competence for colonial affairs up to 1945

When the German Reich signed the Treaty of Versailles on 28th June 1919, it formally renounced all its colonies. The League of Nations took over the sovereignty in all previously German colonies, the administration of which was mandated to Australia (German New Guinea), France (parts of Togo and Cameroon), the United Kingdom (German East Africa, parts of Togo and Cameroon), Japan (Qingdao), New Zealand (Samoa) and South Africa (German South West Africa).

Only a few months before Johannes Bell (1868 – 1949), a politician from the Centre Party, had become member of the Scheidemann Reich Government as first and only Reich Colonial Minister and continued in this position under Reich Chancellor Bauer, too. But very soon it became obvious that the new Reich Colonial Ministry, in its function as successor to the Kaiser's Colonial Office, would no longer be needed in its traditional form. For a short time it was in charge of the completion of the colonial administration's current business and responsibilities at the central and the regional level, but this was no basis for a permanent existence of the ministry. The internal deliberations of the Reich Colonial Ministry were summarized by the director of the Political Division A, Dr Meyer-Gerhard, in a memorandum of 30th September 1919 which Bell presented to the Cabinet on 21st October 1919.

Firstly, Meyer-Gerhard defined the temporary responsibilities of winding up the former colonial administration and completing its current tasks. These comprised:

- the implementation of the Versailles Peace Treaty (transfer of responsibilities, financial, arrangements, taking care of German interests),
- the dissolution of the German colonial administration,
- the fulfilment of financial obligations and the closing of accounts,
- the return, compensation and accommodation of civil and military colonial personnel,
as well as
- the implementation of colonial compensation legislation.

Secondly, in Meyer-Gerhard's opinion, there was "quite a small number of permanent colonial tasks for the Reich which could only be put aside if the Reich considered all colonial activities finished and wished to have no further interest in colonial affairs at all. The Reich Government cannot take such a position, since it ceded the protectorates only under extreme pressure and has taken up the cause of revising the unjust peace treaty, including its regulation of the colonial question, too". He described these permanent tasks as follows:

- settling all business relating to the former colonies,

- defending the German colonial administration against all attacks and preserving a public opinion favourable to colonies (propaganda),
- working towards regaining the colonies,
- discussion of the colonial question within the League of Nations, and
- observation of overall colonial development in the world, in particular with regard to developments in the former protectorates.

In order to meet these needs “a core of the Reich Colonial Ministry, consisting of a part of the Political Division, should be preserved” and continue its work as a division within the Foreign Office.

The proposals of this memorandum coincided to a large extent with the demands of the still very influential colonial and other conservative political associations.

The Reich Government, however, following a motion proposed by Bell, decided to merge the Reich Colonial Ministry with the newly established Reich Ministry for Reconstruction. Minister Bell was discharged from his duties as early as 7th November 1919, but the integration of the new Colonial Division into the Ministry of Reconstruction only became effective on 1st April 1920.

Under the directorate of Dr Meyer-Gerhard the Division K comprised the following sub-divisions:

- KA Administrative matters of the former protectorates (six heads of section)
- KB Financial matters of the former protectorates (five heads of section)
- KC Personnel affairs of former colonial staff (one chief and three heads of section)
- KM Dissolution of military forces in the protectorates (one chief and two heads of section)
- KS Compensation office for the central colonial administration (discontinued on April 1922, one chief and six heads of section).

This solution was regarded by many people concerned as dissatisfyingly provisional. Within the framework of general deliberations on a reform and concentration of the Reich administration, the “Commission on the Reduction of the Administration” decided in January 1924 that the Reich Ministry for Reconstruction be dissolved and the Colonial Division be transferred at the same time to the Foreign Office. An ordinance issued by the Reich President on 21st March 1924 transferred colonial affairs to the Foreign Office on the condition “that the settlement of unfinished colonial business be referred to the Reich Finance Minister and that the Reich Labour Minister take over the task of providing for former colonial personnel. Details of the distribution and transfer of competence are to be agreed between the Reich Ministers concerned”.

The line of future development was thereby defined, since only those affairs remained with the Foreign Office which Meyer-Gerhard in his 1920 memorandum had called “permanent colonial tasks”. The Foreign Office’s overall competence for “paraffin and opium affairs; German colonial matters”, which till then had been taken care of by Division III (England, America and Turkey), was transferred in April 1924 to

the new sub-division IIIa. This sub-division under Ministerialdirigent Dr Brückner consisted of three sections:

- Collection of information from the former German protectorates and the foreign West African colonies; Cameroon, Togo; Colonial Associations (Legationsrat Eltester)
- Development of the “Mandatory System”; East and South West Africa, Pacific, Qingdao; Collection of information from the East African colonies; Colonial Sciences (Vortragender Legationsrat Gunzert)
- Personnel matters of former colonial officials (Legationsrat Heilingbrunner).

Following a Cabinet decision of the Reich Government on 31st October 1925 to dissolve the central colonial administration and to continue to cut back on jobs, the sub-division was first downgraded to a section and then finally became something like a regional section for tropical Africa, South West Africa and the Pacific.

When the Nazis seized power nothing was changed in this respect. With the reorganisation of the Foreign Office in 1936 and the establishment of a Political Division, colonial matters were transferred to section “Pol X (colonial affairs, African continent excluding the South African Union, colonial policy)”. Its description was changed in 1937 to “Africa (without Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, the Italian protectorates, Egypt, the Sudan); mandate and colonial affairs” and in 1945 to “African continent” without any mention of colonial affairs at all. At that time colonial policy was anyway more of a formal global claim than an object of practical politics.

4 Registry and Records, Arrangement and Description

The records of the central colonial administration of the German Reich followed each of the various organisational changes from subsection or section in the Kaiser’s Foreign Office to Reich Colonial Office and Ministry in the Weimar Republic and then back again to section and subsection in the Foreign Office. Many files were continuously formed irrespective of these changes; on the whole, discontinuities in the management of the records are not evident. In 1919 the registry of the Reich Colonial Ministry therefore formed a well structured and after the loss of most responsibilities in the field of colonial policy , in many people’s view even a completed record group.

According to the former privy registries of the Reich Colonial Office the records were organised as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Privy Registry KA I | East Africa |
| Privy Registry KA II | South West Africa |
| Privy Registry KA III | Pacific |
| Privy Registry KA IV | Cameroon and Togo |
| Privy Registry KA V | Legal matters |
| Privy Registry KA VI | Sciences, medicine and health |

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Privy Registry KA VII | General matters |
| Privy Registry KA VIII | Agriculture |
| Privy Registry KA I-VII | Foreign countries and estates |
| Privy Registry KB I | Budget and accounting |
| Privy Registry KB II | Technical matters |
| Privy Registry KB III | Railways |

During the session of the Reich Cabinet on 1st September 1919 the Reich Minister of the Interior, Matthias Erzberger, had already called attention to the problem of the records of the then still existent Colonial Ministry and suggested that “the records of the Reich Colonial Office and the Reich Navy Office be united with the corresponding sections of the Great General Staff and that an independent Reich Archive, directly subordinate to the Ministry of the Reich (Cabinet), be established in a city still to be determined”. Ministerialdirigent Meyer-Gerhard contradicted this proposal in his memorandum of 30th September 1919 and argued in favour of a transfer of both the archives and the comprehensive library of the Reich Colonial Ministry to the Foreign Office, where he would also like to install those organisational units of the Reich Colonial Ministry that were to be retained permanently. Only those records no longer needed by the Foreign Office should either be disposed of or transferred to the Reich Archive.

In actual fact, the records were first transferred to the Reich Ministry for Reconstruction and appraised in 1924, when the Colonial Division was integrated into the Foreign Office. An inventory shows which records were transferred directly to Reich Archive, which records were taken over by the Foreign Office and which were immediately disposed of . Only few files were disposed of and the bulk was transferred to the Reich Archive. Apart from a few records of fundamental importance the Foreign Office on the whole claimed only those files needed for current business, even when they were part of a long series and agreed to the transfer of the older files from these series to the Reich Archive. But as the competence of the Colonial Division or Section continued to be reduced, even those records that had been taken over by the Foreign Office were to a large extent transferred to the Reich Archive. What remained of these records was transferred by the Foreign Office to the Federal Archives in February 2000.

In 1945, the Reich Archive very probably had an almost complete record group of the central colonial administration of the German Reich in its keeping. The organic nature of this record group prohibited any division and therefore all of the records remained together in the record group “Reich Colonial Office”. When the building of the Reich Archive was destroyed on 14th April 1945, the records of the Reich colonial administration suffered severe damage. About 30% of the files were burnt, including the entire registries KB I (Budget and accounting), II (Technical matters) and III (Railways). The records of the military forces in the protectorates and the records from the administrations in the various protectorates, insofar as they had been transferred to the Reich Archive, were completely destroyed by fire.

The Central State Archives of the GDR in Potsdam discarded the original registry system as the basis for its arrangement of record group 10.01 “Reich Colonial

Office". The original arrangement of the registry according to a mixed system combining systematic and territorial contexts was replaced wherever possible by a structure arranging files according to territory. For this present inventory the inventories produced by the Central State Archives were revised and the registry finding aids transferred to the Federal Archives in 2000 used to reconstruct as far as possible the original structure of the record group. In the opinion of the archivist in charge the coherences of content resulting from the contexts of the original registry system provide researchers with better information on the structure of the colonial administration and a better overview of the record group as a whole than any "regionalism" that blurs the systematic aspects.

The former record group R101 "Reich Colonial Administration", which was kept at the Coblenz office of the Federal Archives, consisted mostly of copies of records of the Reich Colonial Office made by the colonial writer Georg Thielmann-Groeg mainly in the Reich Archive. The piece by piece description of this collection has been added to this inventory as an appendix, since it assembles - with a special focus on South West Africa - key documents of German colonial history in a condensed form.