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# From a museum of things ...

... to a narrative about people

“MAYBE THIS IS THE END OF THE CLASSIC 19TH CENTURY MUSEUM AND THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING ELSE”



(BENEDICTE SAVOY)

Conservative memory organization  
“Museum”

Challenges

Persons not objects

Conclusions



# CONSERVATIVE MEMORY ORGANIZATION “MUSEUM”



Memory organization “Museum”: past & present

Wikidata: Potential for cultural heritage

Salvation paradigm, collecting hype and overload

Overload: Green Museum?



# Conservative memory organization “Museum”

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## Past

- 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - Collecting in the era of European expansion
- 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - Humanist scholars → Passion for collecting
- Around 1900
  - “Collecting hype”

## Present

- Museum websites
  - presented like exhibitions
- Objects online
  - like printed catalogs
  - limited interconnections (concepts, authority records, etc.)
  - hardly any inter-collection references
- “Old-fashioned concept of experts”  
*(Mohr, Niemann, Knapp, 2019)*
  - only limited “open content”
- Digital transformation
  - low level



# Wikidata: Potential for cultural heritage

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- Linked Open Data (LOD)?
  - ↔ “Lack of museum nodes”
- Wikidata
  - Item, statement, property, and relationship
  - ↳ Highly flexible information system
  - ↳ Linking distributed data sources
  - ↳ Cross-comparisons can be made
  - ↳ Open knowledge platform for the creation and distribution of LOD



# Salvation paradigm, collecting hype, and overload



- Salvation paradigm and the idea of preservation
  - *“The last moment has come, the twelfth hour has arrived! Documents of immeasurable, irreplaceable value for human history are perishing. Save! save! before it is too late.”*  
(“Memorial speech for Adolf Bastian”, Karl von den Steinen, 1905)
  - Collecting as a bourgeois mass phenomenon
  - Material objects as the exclusive source
    - “Imperialist nostalgia”
    - “Crisis of the European modernity”
    - Demonstration of national superiority in the great national museums



# An overload for the museum

## ■ Smithsonian Institution 2013

*(Congress Hearing)*

- Insufficient inventory controls and inadequate preservation practices
- Incomplete and inaccurate inventory records

## ■ Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation 2020

*(Academic Council)*

- Lack of staff capacity for
  - Preservation of collections
  - Collection documentation
- Insufficient:
  - Information technology
  - Digital transformation

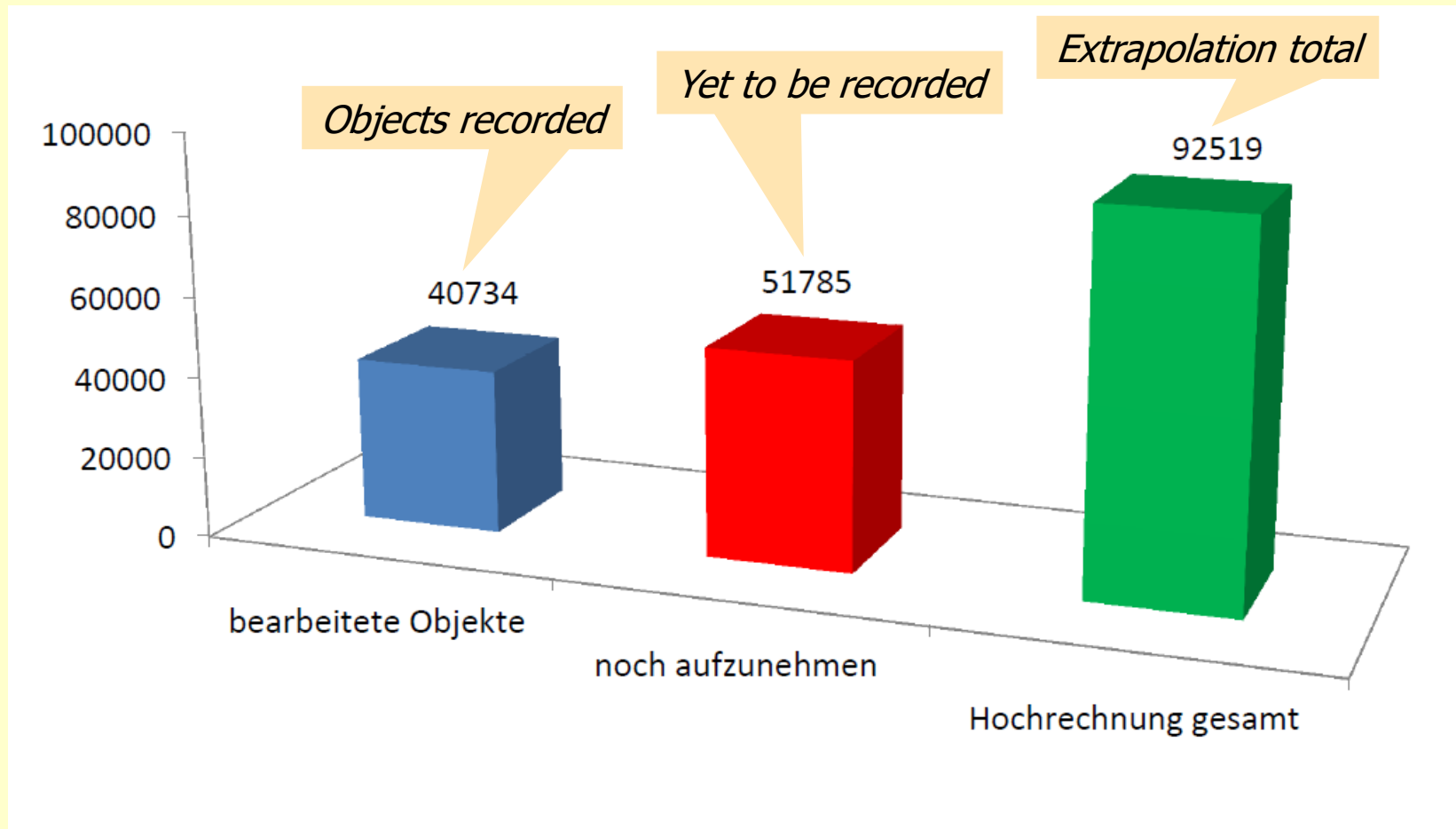
## ■ British Museum 2023

*(ARTnews, NYT, The Art Newspaper)*

- Important questions about security, record keeping, and funding priorities
- Dysfunctional institutional culture



# Objects in the museum documentation system (Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, 2018)







# Overload: Green Museum?



- Collection size → Ecological footprint
  - Buildings
  - Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
  - Conservation
- *“Who knows whether there will be a society that can or wants to visit our museums in a hundred years’ time?”*  
(Stefan Simon)



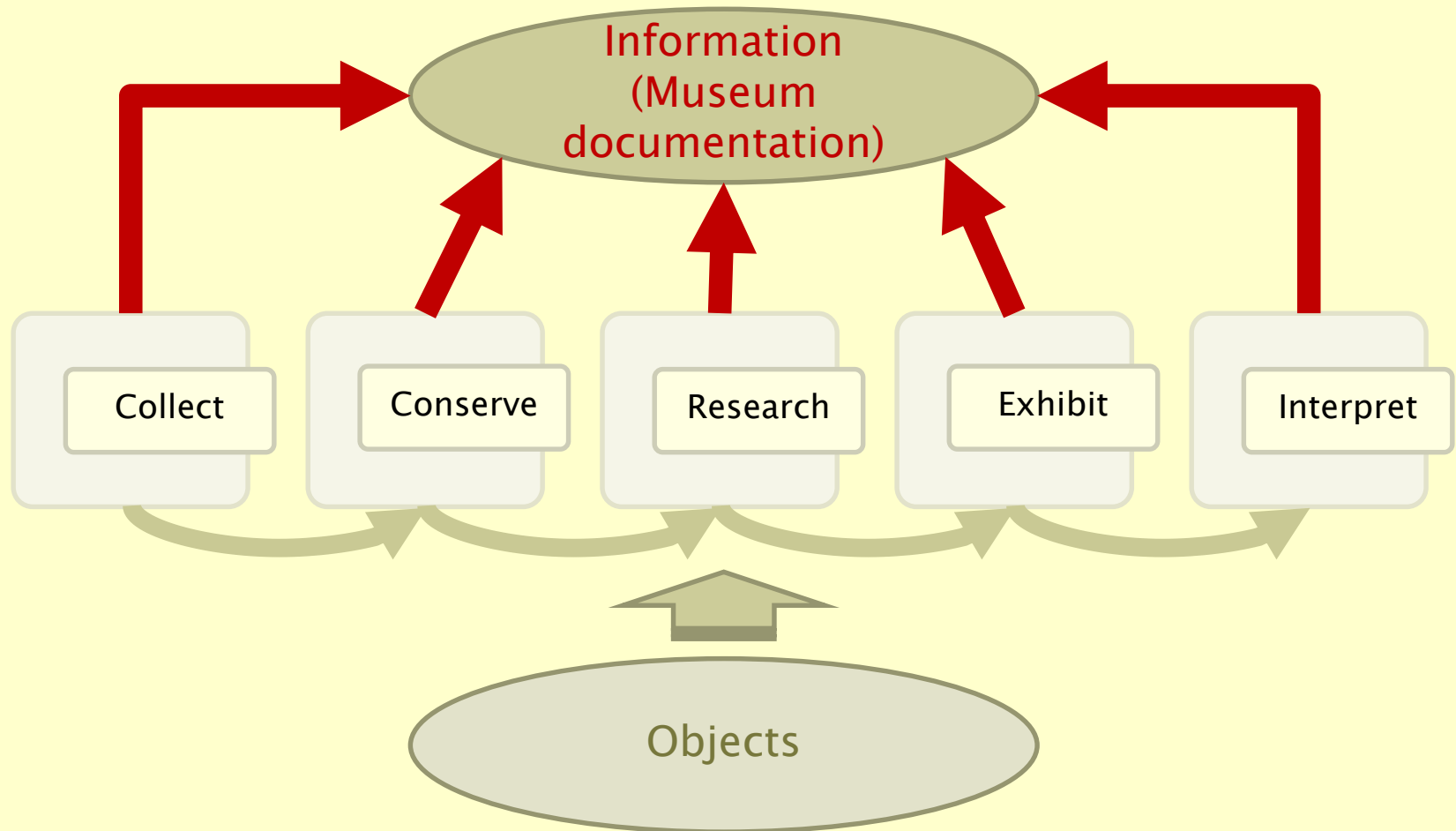
# CHALLENGES

Re-auratization or contextualization?

Provenance, decolonization and restitution

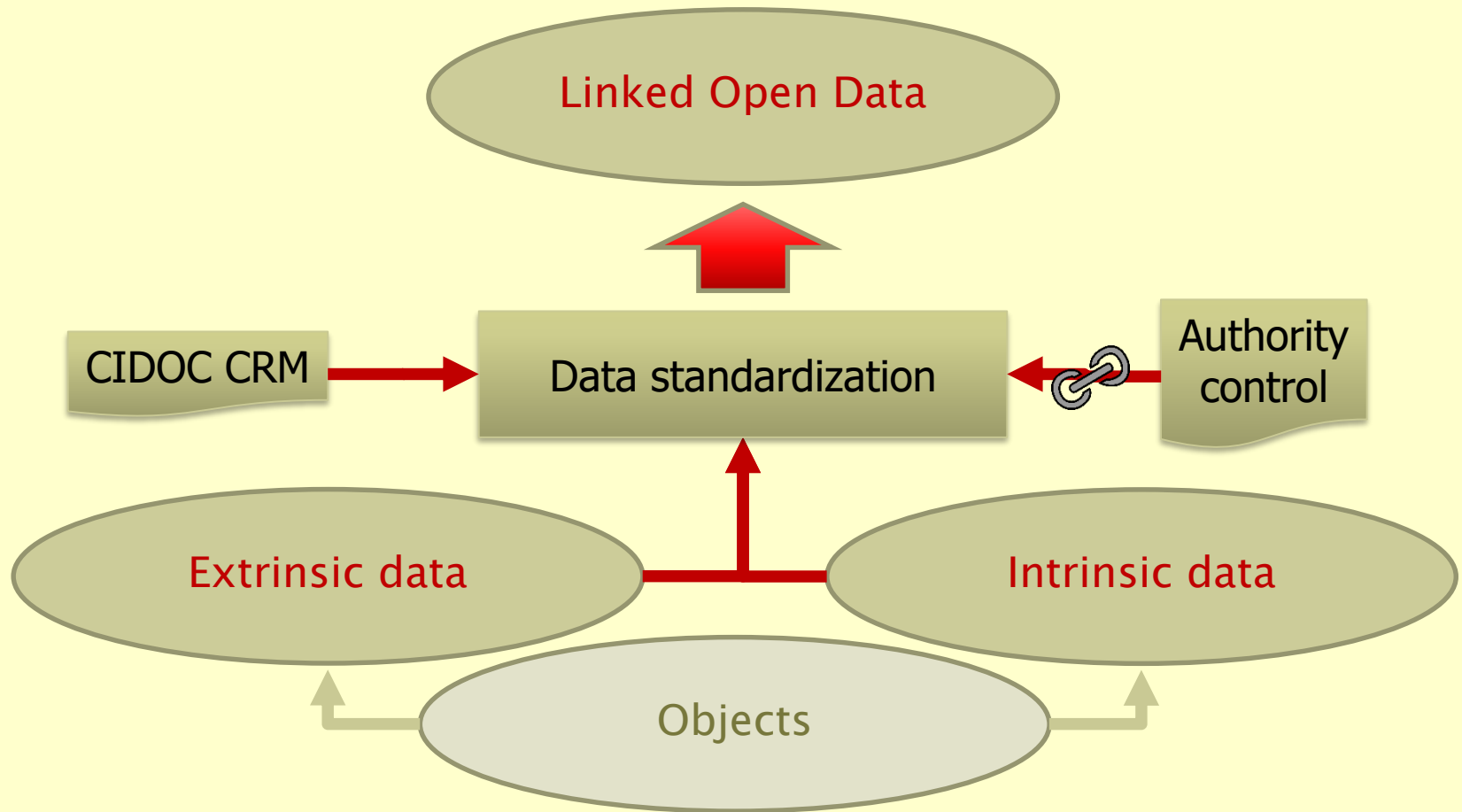


# From object space to information space





# Contextualization requires information system “Museum”





# “Aura of the original”?



## ■ Criticism

- “concept of the *Bildungsbürgertum*” (German educated bourgeoisie)
- “faked aura”
- “re-auratization”
- something staged as intended by the museum

## ■ Instead of “Aura” → more contextualization

- with support using the tools and methods of digital transformation
- replacing information that was inevitably lost when the objects were removed from their original context

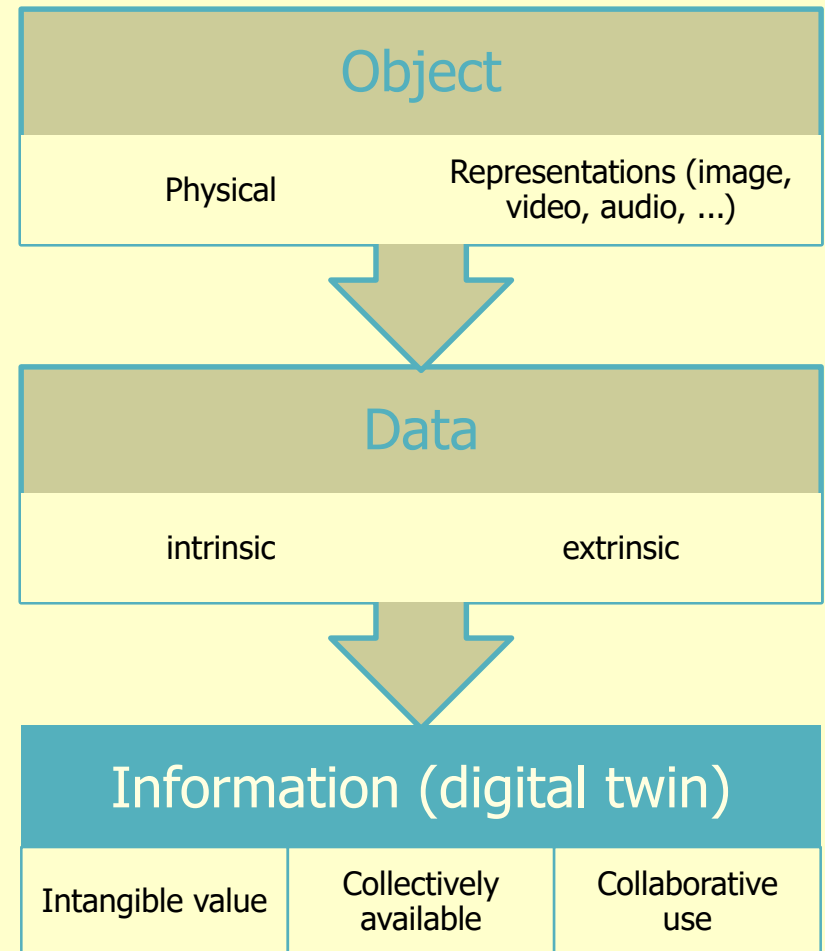


# Information space and digital twin

- Information space
  - Comprehensive
  - Standardized
  - Complex structured
- Saving the future of museums
  - Changes to the objects
  - Destruction

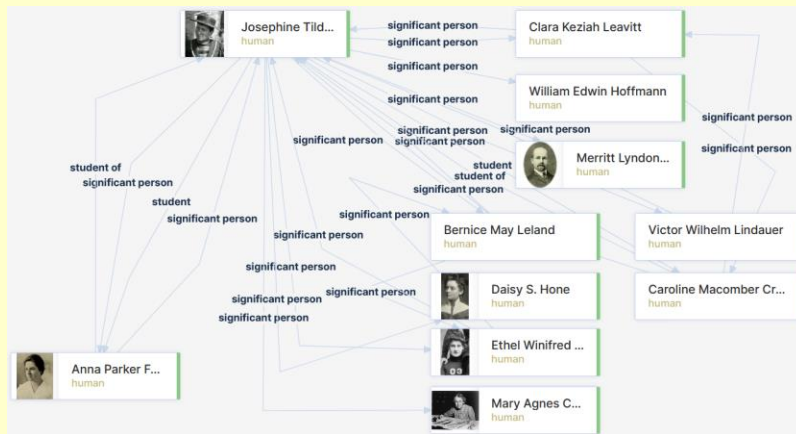


Museo Nacional  
Rio de Janeiro  
2.9.2018





# Provenance, decolonization and restitution



- Source situation in the museum
  - “Not-knowing in the collection documentation”
- “Individuals”
  - Identification and historical context
  - Anonymous collectors
  - Incomplete provenance information
  - Different roles:
    - Researcher
    - Dealer
    - “Ethnologist”
    - Trickster ...
- ↔ Persons in Wikidata (science)
  - “The Disambiguation of People Names in Biological Collections”



# PERSONS NOT OBJECTS

Demasking the museum by registering its shamans  
("somebody who knows")

People as actors and network nodes

People and intangible cultural heritage: narrative tradition

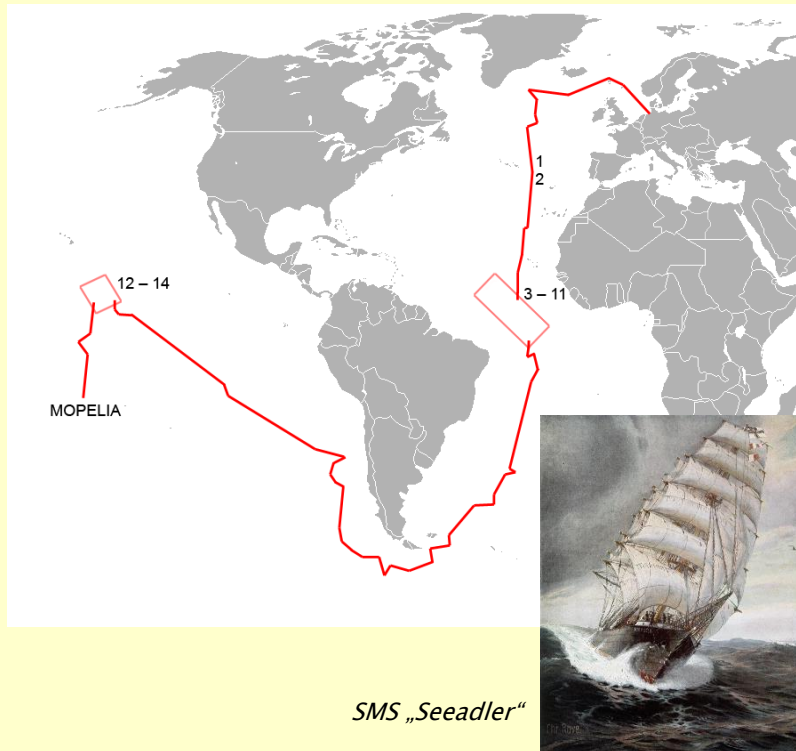
Ki'i Kihawahine

Aleppo–Room

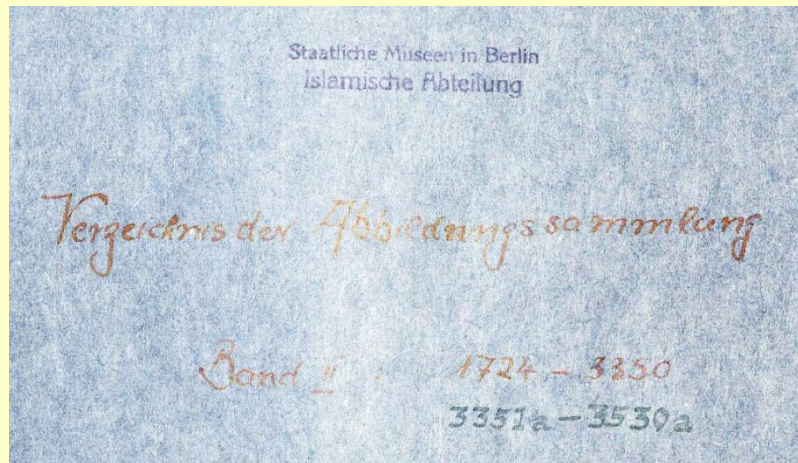




# People instead of objects: Felix Graf von Luckner (Q215804)



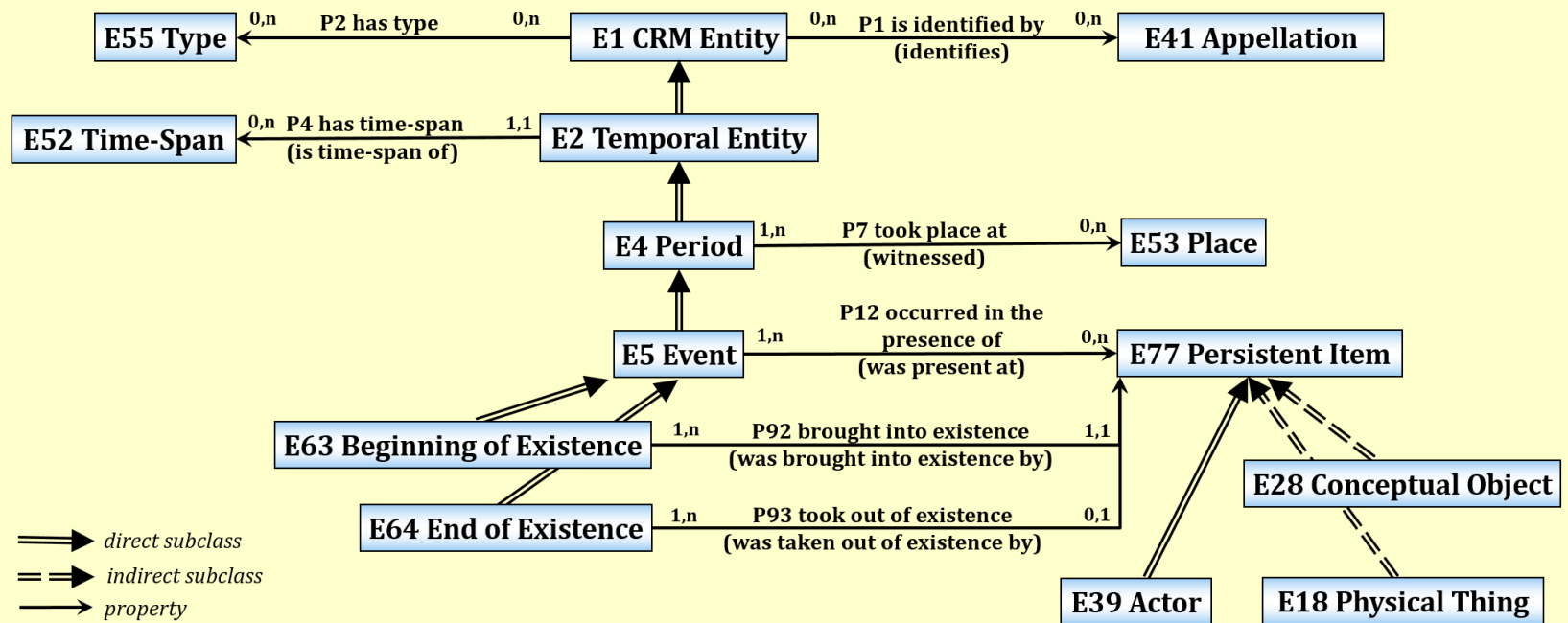
# Collection of photographs in the Museum of Islamic Art



1914	} Triquetrales des ind. Baumleppichs aus der Adobirekloster. Sg. Lene	T	1681	0491
1915				
1916	Rhotau T. Sg. H. Wulff, Kopenhagen	"		
1917	Karabagh. T.	"		
1918	Serabend T. Sg. Ouedr	"		
1919	Semel. T. Sg. Graf von Ludeker	"		
1920	Tobris.	"		
1921	"	"		
1922	Chinesischer Teppich. Sg. A. Cassier	"		
1923.	Maro-Magjale. Darstellung im Tempel Yaudis. Museo Coner	T.		
Sg. Graf von Ludeker				
1928	Nordpersischer Bleist. Sg. Conrath	"		
1929	Herat T. 19.78	"		
1930	Terahau. Sg. Graf von Ludeker	"		
1931				



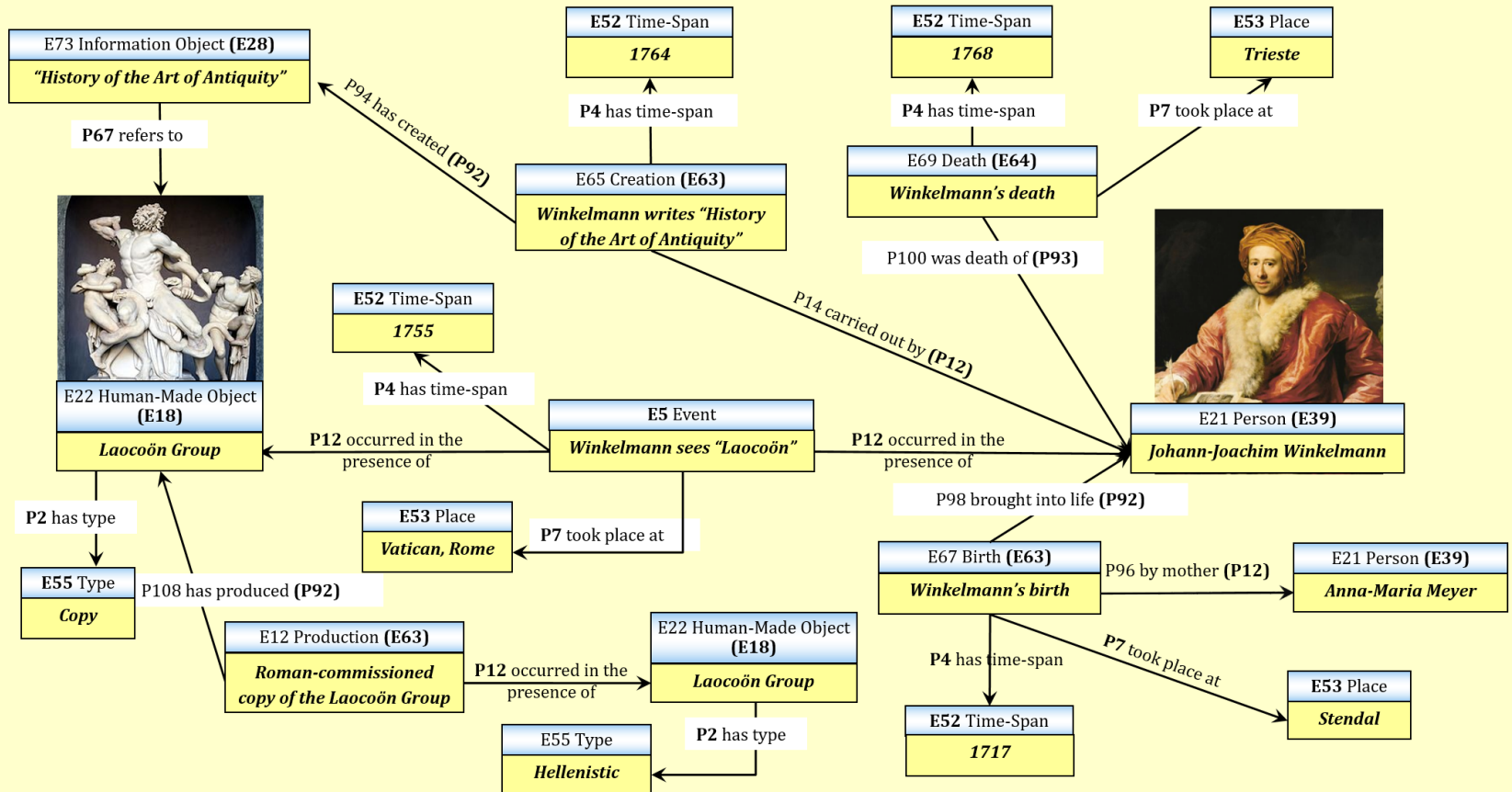
# CIDOC-CRM: Event





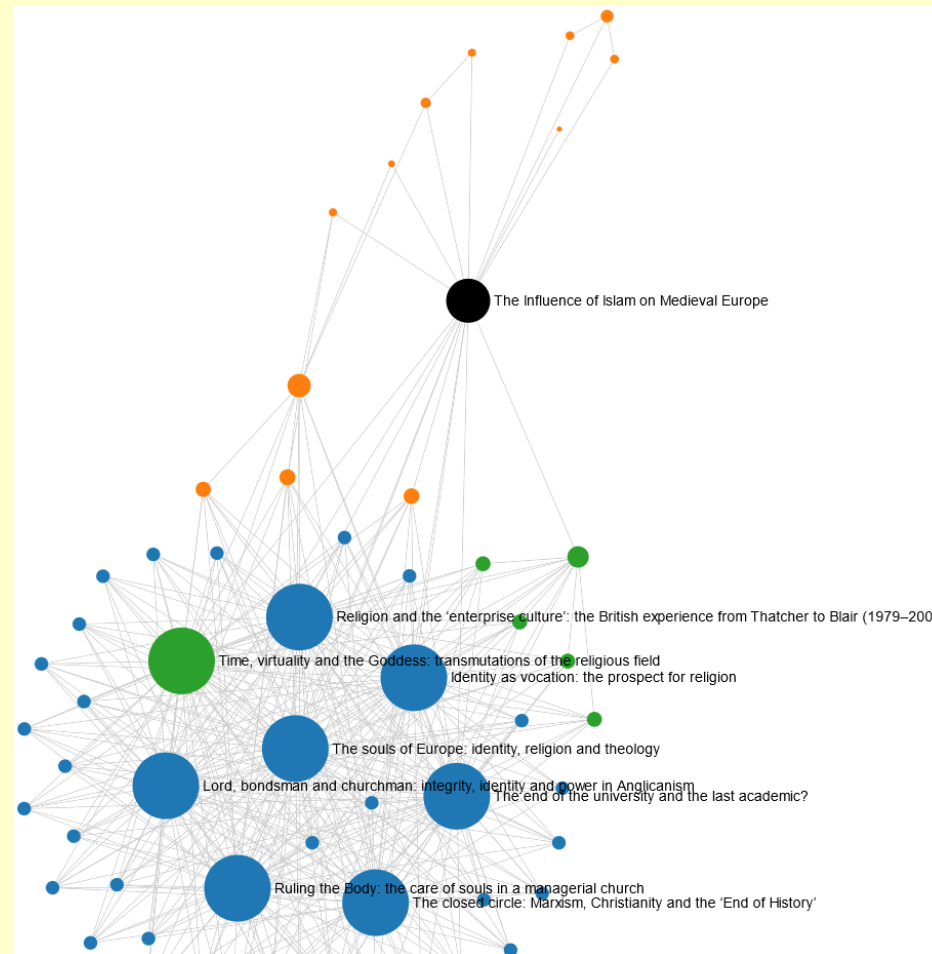
# Object description

## → Records of acting persons



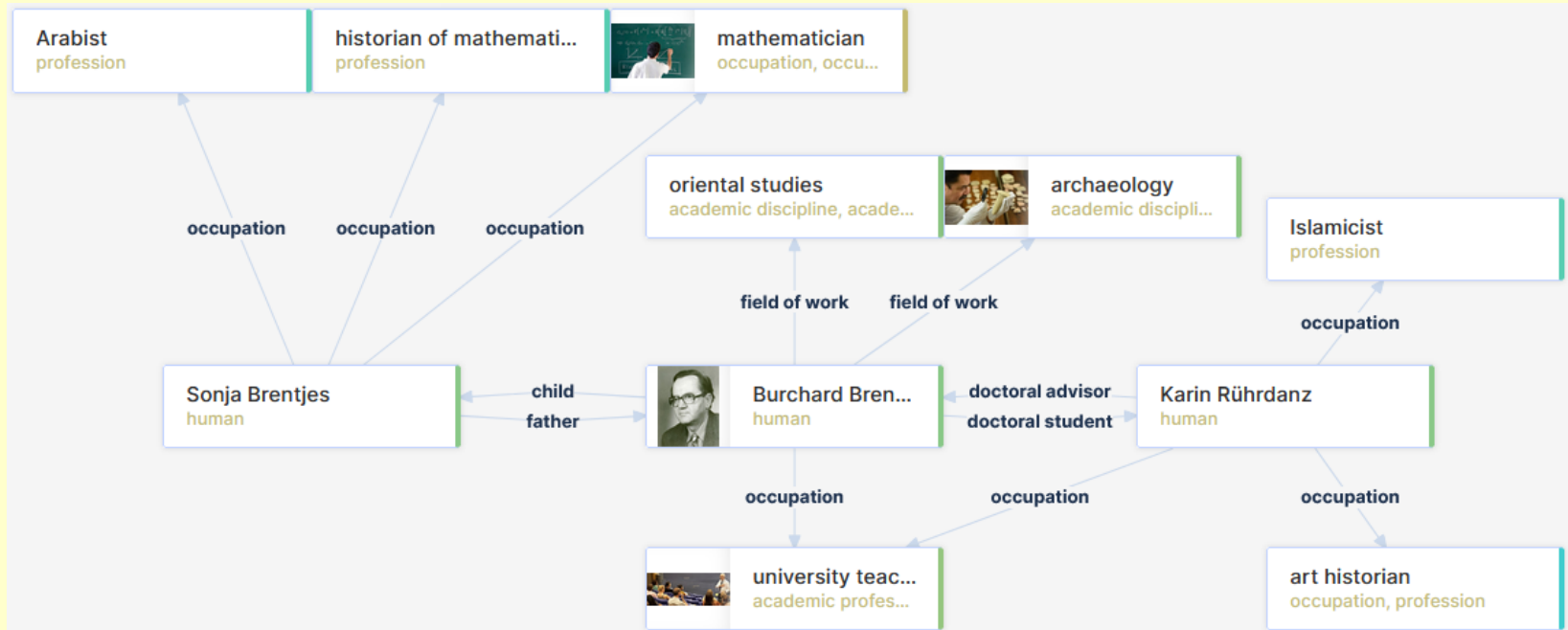


# Change of perspective 1: Citation networks





# Change of perspective 2: Sociology of research





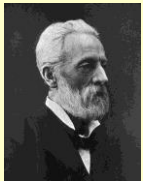
# Today = Research history of tomorrow

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- **1.0: People** publish information about themselves and others
- **2.0: Collaboration between people**
  - ↳ Alternating between “sender” and “receiver”
- **3.0: Semantic methods and tools**
  - ↳ **Machine processing**
- **Digital twins of museum objects + “digital twins of people” = Research**
  - Interaction between people
  - Activities in relation to museum objects



# People and intangible cultural heritage: narrative tradition



■ “[...] now a ‘too late’ echoes back to us on all sides, as the keepers of pristine traditions are already rapidly dying out [...]”

(Adolf Bastian, 1881)



– “The all-leveling influence of our modern culture had [...] wiped out the traditional customs so rapidly that [...] old Hawaii could be considered to have disappeared forever.”

(Eduard Arning, 1887)

■ “The return of powerful goddess Kihawahine could have significant impact on Lāhainā Community”

(Hawaii Public Radio, 2023)



**Ki'i Kihawahine**

<https://id.smb.museum/object/996611>  
(Ethnological Museum in the Humboldt Forum, Berlin)





# Restitution

- “[...] when I was in Berlin, it was like this: the Africans in the room shuddered when they encountered the items [...].”

*You study, you perceive the outside [...]. But it's the inside that shakes us and that you can't see.”*  
(Josephine Ebiuwa Abbe, University of Benin City)

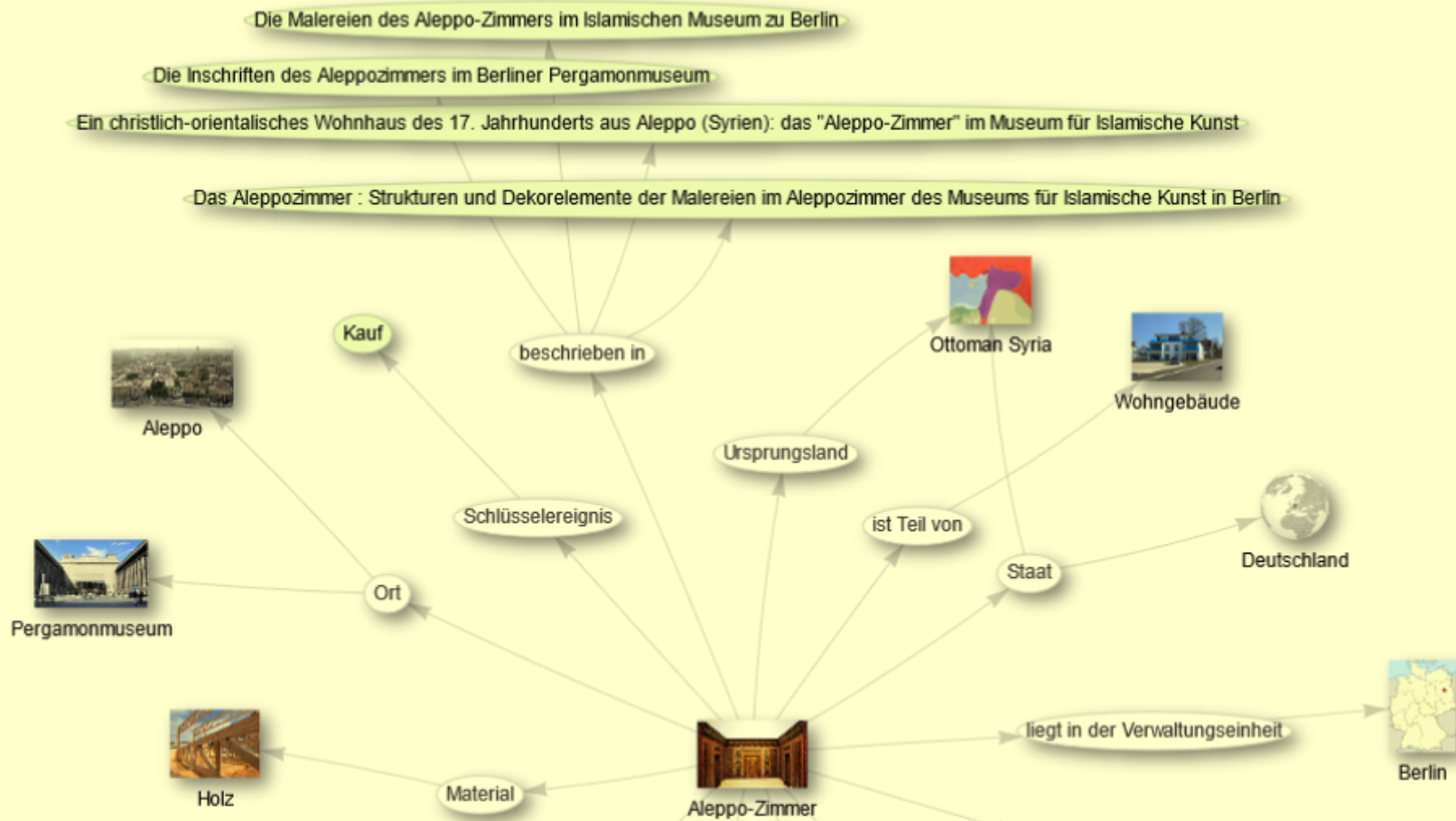


01.09.2023

- Perspectives
  - Re-spiritualization
  - “Subjects” only within the context of the cultures of origin
  - Restitution of cultural heritage and sharing of all information as “Linked Open Data”
  - Exhibition & interpretation: with “digital twins” + replicas

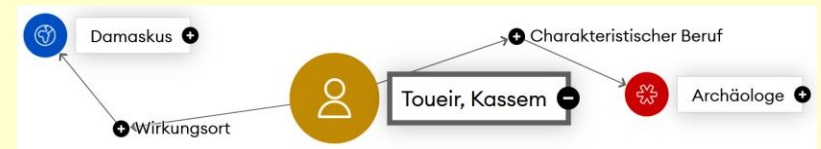
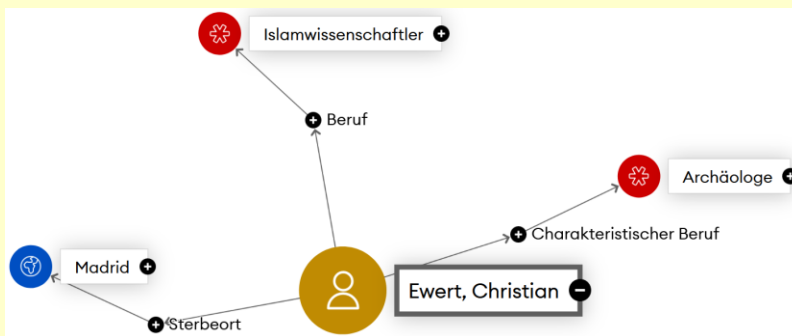
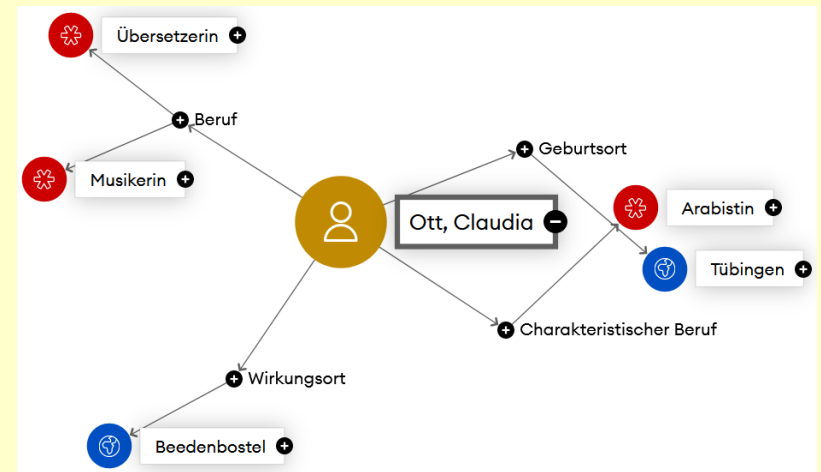
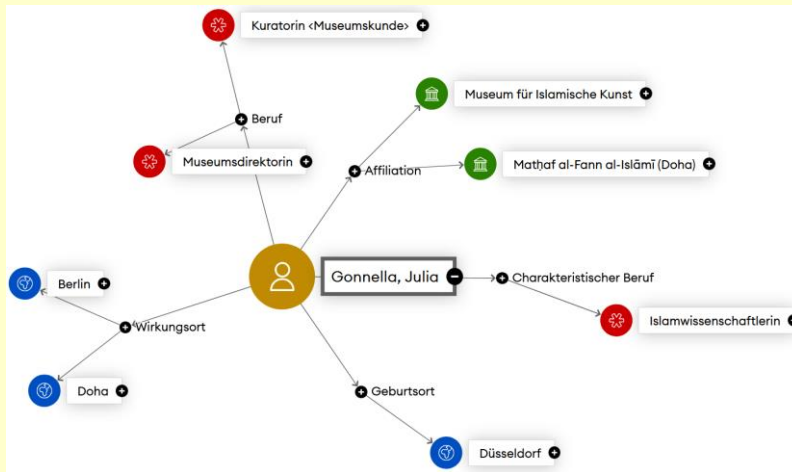


# Aleppo-Room: Authors (1)





# Aleppo-Room: Authors (2)



# CONCLUSIONS ...



... and a summary





# Conclusions

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- Museums as memory organizations
  - ≠ Originals as a means of social distinction
  - ≠ “*Cultural capital*”
  - ≠ Distancing from less privileged groups
  - ↳ New perspectives and opportunities for all museum tasks
- Releasing museum objects from existing ownership (decolonization)
  - no loss
  - (Re-)contextualization using digital transformation
    - In-house analog and digital information collections (e.g. archives, photo archives, replicas or models)
    - External sources
    - Highest digitization class in each case
    - Sharing as “Linked Open Data”
- Focus on information + integration into globally linked information structures
  - Creating staff and financial capacities
  - Putting an end to unnecessary competition between museum and university scholarship



# Summary



## Pug

Ideal-typical after Bernhard-Viktor „Vicco“ Christoph-Carl von Bülow, 1923–2011  
Zurich, 1993

In the work of the German humorist “Loriot” the pug motif first appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> episode of the “Cartoon” magazine show on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1969, in the (fictional) short report “Pugs at the Pole”.

The pseudo-zoological figure of the wild forest pug goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> episode of the same show on March 8, 1972. It later served as a model for various bronze sculptures that commemorate the humorist at the “Wild Forest Pug Center” in Brandenburg upon Havel.

The subject was dealt with in literature, including in “Pugs & People” (Zurich 1983). The sentence first recorded in 1993 (in “Very distinguished ladies and gentlemen: speeches and other such things”)

“Life without a pug is possible, but meaningless”

has become a popular quote.

A museum  
without objects  
is possible and  
makes sense.



### Selected reading

“Loriot”. In: Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Page Version ID 1184582947 (11 November 2023 09:10 UTC).

„Waldmöpse“. In: Wikipedia – Die freie Enzyklopädie. Versions-ID 228339304 (27.11.2022, 11:02 UTC).

Thank you.



Comments and collaboration  
(MuseumsWiki)

<https://0cn.de/MuseumDingeMenschen>

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"Maybe this is the end [...] and the beginning of something else." (Benedicte Savoy)

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## ■ Conclusions ...

- Conclusions
- Summary



# Figure credits

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